THE OLIVET DISCOURSE
MATTHEW 24

FUTURISM AND PRETERISM

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A. Introduction. – Two Sharply Contrasting Eschatological Perspectives.

In these increasingly darkening turbulent times, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is especially dear to the Christian. It is this present glorious hope, not some fleeting earthly agenda, that encourages believers to be “fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of [the] faith” (Heb. 12:2). The Apostle John encourages us today, not just his immediate addressees, to anticipate this climactic event. “We know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is” (I John 3:1). Here is no promise of some mystical, unreported or unobserved revelation of Christ, as some preterists might suggest concerning 70 AD, but the one who John earlier described as He who was “from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands [following His resurrection], concerning the Word of Life” (I John 1:1). This is the Jesus who John observed ascending into a cloud and then received the angelic promise that this same Jesus “will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). This is indeed the glory of futurism.

Then along comes the preterist and declares that, “No, no! You have got it all wrong. Jesus really came in 70 AD, and most, if not all of the New Testament eschatological statements, focused on that past event. Even the partial preterist, in admitting to a mystical return in 70 AD, then a future return of Christ at the end of this present “millennial age” according to say I Corinthians 15 and I Thessalonians 4, nevertheless makes little complaint of an alleged real return in 70 AD and defers to, even compliments the main thrust of the full preterist so that together they continue to have very cordial relations with one another. You would think that their difference here is minor, although in truth it is not. Rather the major issue for them all is seen to be the squeezing of New Testament prophetic references into the narrow mold of the pre-70 AD era, in conjunction with a rigid understanding of Matthew 24:34 and an early date for Revelation. So much, if not all, is in the past. This is the constant realm of focus. At best, any future and post-resurrection glory is a somewhat indistinct bland hope. There are no “last” of the “last days,” there is no imminent “great tribulation,” since we are presently living in the “millennium.” Therefore the inevitable consequence here is an assault upon futurism, in all of its strands, even with mockery, a proclivity to debate and shock tactics. This being the case, and having given fresh attention to this whole controversy according to the Word of God, I present the following as, more than ever, strengthened heartfelt conviction that the fundamental case of the preterist is seriously flawed; it is the cause of detouring many Christians from the glory to come which in turn detracts from encouragement “to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age” (Tit. 2:12).
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1. Preterism

a. All of Matthew 24-25 is fulfilled up to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, as with James Stuart Russell, David Chilton (full preterists) and Gary DeMar (partial preterist). Some suggest, as with J. Marcellus Kik and Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. (partial preterists), that Matthew 24:35 and onward looks to Christ’s eschatological coming a second time in judgment at the end of this age. Here then, within preterism, is a significant cleavage concerning Christ’s *prophetic future vision* in the whole of the Olivet Discourse. As an Achilles heel, it tends to be smothered, as if of no great significance, rather than being seen for the vital distinction that it is.

As with the early date authorship of Revelation prior to 70 AD, being approximately 65 AD,1 the overall preterist view of Matthew 24:1-34 is set in concrete, particularly because of the understanding of vs. 29-31, 34, otherwise the system breaks down. Any futurism in Matthew 24:1-34 is unacceptable, however slight the crack in the dyke may be. But further, so often Matthew 24, in relation to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, may be likened to a ravenous sinkhole that consumes all around it. So when we come to the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) and its confirmation (Acts 1:8) as well as Christ’s promised return (Acts 1:11), all here are consumed by the events of 70 AD and the concluding destiny of Israel. Furthermore and generally speaking, other great prophetic passages are all consigned to the same past fulfillment (Matt. 19:28; Acts 3:20-21; I Thess. 4:13-5:11; II Tim. 3:1-13; Tit. 2:12-13; II Thess. 2:1-12; II Pet. 3:3-13). Zechariah 14 suffers the same fate.2 Thus Thomas Ice is correct when he writes:

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1 Refer to the devastating article by Mark Hitchcock, “The Stake in the Heart: The A.D. 95 Date of Revelation,” Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice, *The End Times Controversy*, pp. 123-150.

2 Kenneth Genty is an exception here since he believes that II Peter 3 is future, that is beyond 70 AD.

3 In Gary Demar’s *Last Days Madness*, Appendix 5 titled “Zechariah 14 and the Coming of Christ,” he vainly attempts to force Zechariah 14 into the preterist 70 AD vortex by means of ignoring careful exegesis of the more broad context of Zechariah 12-14. It would be hard to find a more disjointed, cherry-picking explanation that clearly is directed by a preterist preunderstanding of Scripture. In 12:1-9 where Jerusalem is besieged so that “all the nations of the earth will be gathered against it, v. 3, how is it “in that day I [the LORD] will set about to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem”? To suggest a parallel with the demise of the Roman empire some considerable time after 70 to 135-136 AD is quite futile. In 12:10-14, when has such a prolonged mourning of Israel come about because of its “piercing” of the LORD in His Son? What is the rescued, one third remnant of 13:8-9? When will the fortunes of perennially assailed Israel be reversed according to 14:1? Could there be a parallel between Jesus’ ascent from the Mount of Olives (Acts 1-9-11) and 14:4? What is the “unique day” when evening light shall come, 14:7? When will the LORD be “king over all the earth,” 14:9, and “Jerusalem will dwell in security,” 14:11, in relation to His previously revealed coming “to
If preterism is true—especially full preterism—then we are already at the end of history and don’t really know where it is headed. . . . If preterism is true, then the New Testament was written primarily to believers who lived during the 40-year period between the death of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Therefore, virtually no part of the New Testament applies to believers today, according to preterist logic. There is no canon that applies directly to believers during the current age. . . Preterism tends to start with its different interpretation of the phrase “this generation” in Matthew 24:34, but usually does not rest until one’s perspective of the entire Bible has been infected.4

As a result the partial preterist struggles to find any remnant of Scripture that declares Christ’s future, personal, bodily second coming while the full preterist looks forward to a nondescript future void of any personal, bodily revelation of Christ whatsoever.

So we repeat that there is disagreement amongst Preterists as to whether Christ’s return, alleged to be at 70 AD, was His second parousia (full preterism), or a spiritual appearing by means of the visitation of Christ’s judgment upon Israel, with a subsequent, personal third coming at the end of this age (partial preterism). Full preterists include James Russell, David Chilton, Max R. King, etc. Partial preterists include, Gary DeMar, Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., R. C. Sproul, etc.

b. With the exception of Max King who is of a Campbellite/Church of Christ background, modern preterism tends toward reconstructionism, according to Greg Bahnsen, David Chilton, Kenneth Gentry, Jr., Gary North, Gary DeMar, etc., and is thus predominantly Presbyterian, covenantal in a systematic sense, and modified in its postmillennialism that differs from the classic postmillennialism of the likes of Jonathan Edwards. Refer to this writer’s Future Israel, Appendix A. Unlike much earlier postmillennialism, it tends to be anti-Judaic with regard to a covenantal future for the Jews, the nation of Israel and the land that, since 70 AD, has been superceded by the new spiritual Israel, the Christian Church. Somewhat ostrich-like concerning the state of contemporary world affairs, preterism tends to be more optimistic with regard to the course of this present “millennial” age in which the Christianizing of the world will inevitably result in the progressive and ultimate triumph of the Church. As David Chilton puts it:

fight against those nations,” 14:3, that gather against “the apple of His eye,” 2:8? For clarity on these matters refer to David Baron’s enlightening and detailed commentary, The Visions and Prophecies of Zechariah, 554 pp.

We therefore have no Biblical warrant to expect increasing apostasy as history progresses; instead we should expect the increasing Christianization of the world.\(^5\)

In this regard, refer to Appendix B where Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones’ assessment of this increasingly decadent world appears to be much closer to reality. The frequent charge of the postmillennial preterist that both the amillennialist and premillennialist are defeatist and pessimistic regarding this present age is only partially true. However, not being ostrich-like, as if with one’s head in the sand concerning the present direction of humanity and the Christian church, the hellish direction of this planet is not downplayed. Nevertheless the futurist is supremely optimistic concerning the ultimate triumph of King Jesus, upon His second coming, when, as a result “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14). Then, “the Lord will be king over all the earth; in that day the Lord will be the only one, and His name the only one” (Zech. 14:9). Then will God’s Messiah “speak peace to the nations; and His dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth” (Zech. 9:10).

2. Futurism.

a. All of Matthew 24-25, in conjunction with the parallel Mark and Luke accounts, is fulfilled both at the destruction of Jerusalem, especially according to Luke 21:20-24, and beyond to Christ’s future return. An early or a late date for Revelation’s authorship can be accepted although the latter predominates. Futurism includes both some preterism and a firm predominant belief in future apocalyptic fulfillment. Like the prospects of preacher Noah (II Pet. 2:5), futurism is unashamedly pessimistic concerning the course of this present age, though supremely optimistic in terms of Jesus Christ’s return that will usher in the glorious Messianic/Millennial kingdom, upon earth, and the Lord Jesus’ sole earthly dominion.

b. Modern futurism is predominantly baptistic, premillennial/dispensational, nonconformist. It tends to be pro-Judaic in terms of a covenantal future for Jews and Israel. Historically, with regard to Israel, though not in all instances concerning Revelation, it would include premillennialists Henry Alford, J. C. Ryle, H. Bonar, C. H. Spurgeon, Nathaniel West, etc., as well as dispensationalists John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, Dwight Pentecost, etc.

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5 David Chilton, Paradise Restored: An Eschatology of Dominion, p. 225. Also refer to postmillennialist Lorraine Boettner’s The Millennium in which there is a chapter titled, “The World is Getting Better.” Here this author, who is so opposed to Roman Catholicism, includes statistics that incorporate the Catholic Church within his understanding of expanding Christendom.
B. The preceding eschatology of Passion Week.

At the conclusion of Jesus’ northern Galilean ministry, “He was determined to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51) in anticipation of both “the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow (I Pet. 1:10-12). What were these “glories”? They were the fulfillment of Scripture through “the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come.” Selwyn suggests that Romans 8:18-39 best describes these “glories,” that are decidedly, palpably eschatological looking well beyond 70 to 135-136 AD.⁶ Not unrelated is Hort’s description of Peter “speaking of the prophets and their several partial Messianic foreshadowings, separate prophecies of suffering being crowned with separate prophecies of glory.”⁷ Consequently the point is that Peter describes not only Christ’s imminent atonement sufferings but also His eschatological hopes that unquestionably look beyond 70 to 135-136 AD to that time when “the creation itself will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21). Likewise we also believe that Christ’s revelation in Matthew 24-25 looks not only toward imminent events but also His eschatological hopes that look way beyond 70 to 135-136 AD.

1. Jesus final journeying from Galilee to Judea.

The parable of the fruitless fig tree (Luke 13:6-9) addresses the present evil generation of Israel, as does the initial thrust of the Olivet Discourse, in detailing the imminence of the “cutting down” process, that is the judgments of 70 AD and 135-136 AD. “[After three years], if it bears fruit next year, fine; but it not, cut it down” (Luke 13:7, 9).

To evildoers and workers of unrighteousness, Jesus warns: “There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the [Messianic] kingdom of God, but yourselves being thrown out” (Luke 13:28).

2. Jesus journeying in Perea and Samaria.

Jesus is questioned about the coming of the kingdom of God. To the Pharisees, hardly indwelt by the Spirit of God, Jesus tells them: “Behold, the kingdom of God [preeminently manifest in the King of the Messianic kingdom] is in your midst [before your very eyes]” This prelude to the Olivet Discourse concerns, “the day that the Son of Man is revealed [ἀποκαλύπτω, apokaluptō]” (Luke 17:20-37).

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⁶ Edward Gordon Selwyn, The First Epistle of St. Peter, p. 137.
3. Jesus’ brief return to Bethany.

The capstone miracle of the raising of Lazarus is but a foretaste, a foreshadowing of that apocalyptic day in which believers “will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed” (1 Cor. 15:51-52). Then shall the redeemed be fitted for the Messianic kingdom.

4. Jesus’ final months in withdrawal to Ephraim, Jericho, and back to Bethany.

In Matthew 19:28; cf. 8:11, Jesus advises His disciples that, “in the regeneration/-rebirth [τῇ παλινγενεσίᾳ, tē palingenesia] when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious [Messianic] throne, you [the twelve apostles] also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.” Similarly consider Acts 3:20-21 where, upon the future return of Christ, there will be “the period of the restoration of all things [ἀποκαταστάσεως πάντων, apokatastaseós pantôn].” Surely these events transcend 70 AD and uphold the continuing future role of Israel in the Messianic kingdom.

C. The eschatology of Passion Week.

1. Friday – Jesus’ return to Bethany.

2. Saturday – The Sabbath supper and anointing by Mary.


The superficial confession, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord” (Matt. 21:9), contrasts with the promise of Tuesday/Wednesday: “Behold, your house [Temple] 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’” (Matt. 23:38-39). Gary DeMar’s explanation of this as an “indefinite possibility,” is highly improbable.8

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8 Gary DeMar, Last Days Madness, p. 61, cites R. T. France, The Gospel According to Matthew: An Introduction and commentary, p. 333. He also references three uses in Matthew of the Greek adverb, ἐως, heōs, meaning “until” (5:26; 18:30; 18:34) that do express contingency, especially because all three instances describe human parabolic situations. Hence it is alleged that Matthew 23:39 is similarly meant to declare contingency, “until you say,” though maybe you will and maybe you won’t. However ἐως, heōs is used on sixteen additional times in Matthew, and none of these allow for conditional usage, and especially several, like 23:39, that are eschatological declarations (10:23; 16:28; 17:9; 22:44; 24:34, 39; 26:36).

The cursing of the fig tree, that is the present evil generation of Israel (Matt. 21:18-19; Mark 11:12-14), and the second cleansing of the Temple (Matt. 21:18-22; Mark 11:19-26), soon to be laid desolate.

5. Tuesday/Wednesday – Days of conflict and prophecy.

Again the imminent judgment of the present evil generation of Israel is represented by the morning discovery of the withered fig tree (Matt. 21:18-22). Then Jesus’ authority is challenged by the Sanhedrin to whom He responds with three parables of judgment on Israel’s leadership, the Parable of the Two Sons, the Parable of the Householder, and the Parable of the Marriage Feast (Matt. 21:23-22:14).

Specifically Christ declares: “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it” (Matt. 21:43). This address is to the present wicked generation of Israel (23:37-38), and not an everlasting disenfranchisement (19:28), since He later reveals: “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!’” (Matthew 23:39). Then follows the Olivet Discourse: Matthew 24:1-25:46; cf. Mark 13:1-37; Luke 21:5-36.

6. Thursday – Day of Farewell and church instruction.

7. Friday – Day of Suffering.

8. Saturday – Day of gloom and desperation.


D. Significant interpretive principles.

1. Prophetic progression from the historic now to the eschatological future,

Prophetic Scripture often transports us from the present to the future, from a human to a divine revelation, from now to not yet. So Matthew 24 takes us from the perspective of pre 70 to 135-136 AD to post 70 to 135-136 AD and beyond into the future and apocalyptic return of Christ. As the following examples indicate,

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9 See the previous footnote. This is an unconditional eschatological prophecy, which is the majority understanding of the likes of Henry Alford, John A. Broadus, William Hendriksen, and C. H. Spurgeon.
sometimes there is the overlap or abutment of revealed truth, yet nevertheless progression.

a. The example of Psalm 2. Is it about David alone, or Christ alone, or David and Christ. In the light of Acts 4:25-26, initial reference to David is lost sight of in the light of Christ revealed as sovereign King over all the nations. Spurgeon comments:

If we read over the Psalm, first with an eye to the literal David, the meaning is obvious, and put beyond all dispute by the sacred history. . . . [If] we take another survey of the Psalm as relative to the person and concerns of the spiritual David, a noble series of events immediately rises to view, and the meaning becomes more evident, as well as more exalted. The coloring which may perhaps seem too bold and glaring for the king of Israel, will no longer appear so when laid upon his great Anti-type.10

b. The example of Isaiah 14:3-23 (4, 12-15). Is it about the king of Babylon alone, or Lucifer alone, this name originating here, or the king of Babylon and Lucifer (cf. Luke 10:18)?

c. The example of Daniel 11:21-35, 36-45. Is this whole section about Antiochus Epiphanes alone, or the coming Antichrist alone, or Antiochus Epiphanes in vs. 20-35 and the coming Antichrist in vs. 36-45?

d. The example of Micah 5:1-2. In v. 1 there is clear reference to Israel (Judah) being besieged by the Assyrians. Then in v. 2 we are suddenly transported 700 years forward to the Messianic prophecy of Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem which is well attested in the New Testament (Matt. 2:5-6; John 7:42).

e. The example of Zechariah 9. In vs. 1-8 most evangelical commentators, such as David Baron and Charles Feinberg, believe that there is a prophetic revelation of Alexander the Great’s conquest of Palestine from north to south along the Mediterranean coast that includes his remarkable visit to Jerusalem, as attested to by Josephus.11 Then, quite abruptly, in vs. 9-10 we have the prophecy of Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem, in stark contrast with the preceding more brutal militarism of Alexander, as well as the portrayal of His universal reign: “[T]he bow of war will be cut off. And He will speak peace to the nations; and His dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.” So in vs. 8-10, we are swept from 330 BC to 30 AD, that is Christ’s first

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coming, v. 9, and then on to His second coming at the end of this present age way beyond 70 to 135-136 AD, v. 10.

f. The example of Luke 21:7-28. Surely this gospel writer’s distinctive contribution concerning the Olivet Discourse, as with the Acts of the Apostles, is that of an historian.\(^{12}\) In vs. 7-19 Jesus mingles imminent judgment and persecution with ongoing future conflagration and eschatological climax, along with the warning, “but the end does not follow immediately,” v. 9. Then follows, in a plainly sequential, historic fashion, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD through to 135-136 AD, vs. 20-24a, on through the times of the Gentiles, v. 24b, followed by the apocalyptic end of this age that climaxes with the glorious return of Christ, vs. 25-28.\(^{13}\) Then the parable of the fig tree brings warning concerning the imminent \textit{commencement/beginning} of these traumatic events, vs. 29-33. In conclusion there is additional warning to contemporary and subsequent generations, vs. 34-36. Like the prophets, Jesus has both the \textit{present} and \textit{future} in view.

g. So with the preceding thoughts in mind, we consider the interpretation of Matthew 24. Is it about the pre-70 to 135-136 AD era alone, or the post-70 to 135-136 era alone, or progression from the former era to a latter eschatological era? We believe in this latter perspective which Alford well describes as follows:

\textit{Two parallel interpretations} run through the former part [of Matt. 24) as far as v. 28; the destruction of Jerusalem and the final judgment being both enwrapped in the words, but the former [v. 3), in this part of the chapter predominating. Even in this part, however, we cannot tell how applicable the warnings given may be to the events of the last times, in which apparently Jerusalem is again to play so distinguished a part. From v. 28, the lesser subject begins to be swallowed up by the greater, and our Lord’s \textit{Second Coming} to be the predominant theme, with however certain hints thrown back as it were at the event which was immediately in question: till, in the later part of the chapter and the whole of the next, the \textit{second advent}, and at last, the final judgment ensuing on it, are the subjects.\(^{14}\)


\(^{13}\) Mention should also be made of Luke’s exclusive record in 17:20-37 concerning “the Son of man . . . in His day,” v. 24, “the days of the Son of Man, v. 26, “the day that the Son of Man is revealed,” v. 30. Jesus is being questioned by the Pharisees “as to when the kingdom of God was coming.” By way of response, Christ’s second coming is plainly foretold. In vs. 26-36, in the midst of mundane worldly living even when sleeping in bed or processing grain, a great separation of the unrighteous from the righteous will overtake the world. There is no reference here to the imminent destruction of Jerusalem where flight is recommended (Matt. 24:16-18; Luke 21:21), but \textit{not} separation.

2. Proleptic expression in prophecy.

A further indication of this relationship between the present and the future is the frequent employment of proleptic expressions in Scripture, especially in prophetic declarations. In simple terms, a proleptic statement (a prolepsis) is the representation of a thing as existing in the now before it actually does occur. That is, it speaks of a future event as happening in the present. For instance, in John 17:11 Jesus declares, “I am no longer in the world.” He states as a present reality, just prior to His crucifixion, that which will subsequently and certainly come to pass at His death, burial, resurrection and ascension to His Father (John 13:31; 17:4). However in the Old Testament many prophetic declarations also refer to a future event as existing in the past or present. So in Isaiah 53:4, “Surely our griefs He himself bore, and our sorrows He carried.” The future saving atonement of Christ is described here as most definitely accomplished. But particularly in the realm of prophecy concerning judgment, the prophet often declares the eschatological future in past or present terms because of its certainty for the present and future generations. We focus on two examples from Isaiah.


“6 Wail, for the day of the LORD near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. 7 Therefore all hands will fall limp, And every man’s heart will melt. 8 They will be terrified, pains and anguish will take hold of them; they will writhe like a woman in labor, they will look at one another in astonishment, their faces aflame. 9 Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, cruel, with fury and burning anger, to make the land a desolation; and He will exterminate its sinners from it. 10 For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light; the sun will be dark when it rises and the moon will not shed its light. 11 Thus I will punish the world for its evil and the wicked for their iniquity; I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud and abase the haughtiness of the ruthless. 12 I will make mortal man scarcer than pure gold and mankind than the gold of Ophir. 13 Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken from its place at the fury of the LORD of hosts in the day of His burning anger.” Part of v. 10 here is quoted in Matthew 24:29. In this regard Gary DeMar refers to this quotation of Isaiah as “a localized judgment of a world power that existed long ago,”15 and of course this is partly true. Hank Hanegraaff takes a similar approach.

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15 DeMar, Last Days Madness, p. 150.
[Here in Matthew 24:29, referencing Isaiah 13:10] Jesus is employing hyperbolic language that is deeply rooted in Old Testament history. . . . To those unfamiliar with biblical language, these words may well be taken to mean that the end of the world was at hand. In reality, Isaiah was prophesying that the Medes were about to put an end to the glories of the Babylonian Empire.16

Again there is partial truth here with regard to the historic present, but it is what is left out concerning the eschatological future that makes such a vital difference, indeed a distortion. Both DeMar and Hanegraaff quote Isaiah 13:6-10, 17a. Yet it is significant that the more eschatological vs. 11-12 are not referenced, presumably because they address “the world,” and “mortal man,” and “mankind,” and thus conflict with a confined preterist understanding. However Delitzsch comments:

Instead of ‘eretz we have here tēbel [world], which is always used like a proper name (never with the article), to denote the earth in its entire circumference. . . . Word-painting is Isaiah’s delight and strength. . . . Thus does the wrath of God prevail among men, casting down and destroying; and the natural world above and below cannot fail to take part in it.17

The problem here of DeMar and Hanegraaff is that they are so rigidly locked into a preterist mindset that they cannot understand how Isaiah can combine both a present historic scene with eschatological prospects and grandeur in the same biblical account with close proximity. This is exactly the same problem they have with regard to denying eschatological integration within Matthew 24, and especially with regard to its conclusion. The next reference in Isaiah will make this principle all the more clear.


“1 Draw near, O nations, to hear; and listen, O peoples! Let the earth and all it contains hear, and the world and all that springs from it. 2 For the LORD’s indignation is against all the nations, and His wrath against all their armies; He has utterly destroyed them, He has given them over to slaughter. 3 So their slain will be thrown out, and their corpses will give off their stench, and the mountains will be drenched with their blood. 4 And all the host of heaven will wear away, and the sky will be rolled up like a scroll; all their hosts will also wither away as a leaf withers from the vine, or as one withers from the fig tree.”

Clearly we have here a declaration of God’s wrath and prospective judgment against the nations that surely to date have not known fulfillment. Yet v. 2

16 Hank Hanegraaff, The Apocalypse Code, p. 31,
17 Franz Delitzsch, Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah, II, pp. 300-301.
proleptically declares “For the LORD’s indignation is against all the nations, and His wrath against all their armies; He has utterly destroyed them, He has given them over to slaughter.” Here this divine intervention is spoken of as having been accomplished, the reason being that its eventual fulfillment is certain. So Edward J. Young confirms:

He [Isaiah] utters these statements in the past tense, as though the action of God had already taken place, and thus shows how sure he is that these things will occur. He has placed the ban upon the nations, devoting them to a full and complete destruction. They had determined upon such a destruction for Judah, but they were not successful. Despite their attempts, a remnant of grace was preserved by the mercy of God. For the nations, however, the ban is complete; there is no escape. . . . The punishment of the wicked nations, beginning with the defeat of Assyria will culminate in the complete overthrow of all nature.  


One further related problem in this area of prophetic interpretation, indeed with regard to Scripture in general, concerns the claim of Hanegraaff that,

[u]sing final consummation language to characterize a near-future event, Jesus continues using the pronoun you:

You will hear or wars and rumors of wars. . . . Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated of all nations because of me. . . . When you see standing in the holy place “the abomination that causes desolation,” . . . pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. . . . So if anyone tells you, ‘There he is, out in the desert,’ do not go out. . . . when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened (Matt. 24:6-34).

Question: To whom is Jesus speaking in Matthew 24? Does Jesus have His first-century audience in mind as He does in Matthew 23? Or does Jesus have a twenty-first-century audience in mind?  

Here is raised a most vital matter concerning Jesus addressees in Matthew 24? Granted that he is speaking to His disciples about “this [wicked] generation,” even so, as we shall see, this in no way excludes Jesus’ expectation that following generations will anticipate and experience greater eschatological events. If Hanegraaff and DeMar are correct, then the Lord Jesus, especially during passion week, was not that interested in speaking about events following 70 AD incorporated

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within the times of the Gentiles. However, to understand Matthew 24 as referring to “now” and the church age to follow, confirms His deep concern for gospel ministry reaching “the whole world [οἰκουμένη, oikoumenē] as a testimony to all the nations” (Matt. 24:14). Gary DeMar believes that “the whole world” here refers to the Roman Empire up to 70 AD, and certainly not beyond. Here again he is indicating that Christ has little interest in gospel outreach to the extremities of the globe. In spite of mentioning “the times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24) in this discourse, it has little contextual import for the preterist. So he argues from the use of oikoumenē in Luke 2:1, where census limitation is obvious in the exclusion of the populations of say China, Australia, the north and south poles, etc. Nevertheless quoting a singular instance of oikoumenē in no way settles the question of its meaning in the eschatological context of Matthew 24. Luke, whose account most closely identifies with the destruction of Jerusalem, does not record the broad evangelistic expectation of Matthew 24:14, as vital as it is. However Mark 13:10 speaks of the gospel being preached first to “all the nations,” πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, panta ta ethnē. The plural here, ta ethnē, speaks of the nations other than Israel. So in Matthew 25:31-32 we have a far more contextual reference: “31 But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. 32 All the nations [panta ta ethnē] will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.” To try and squeeze this into the consummation of the 70 AD era is simply a desperate attempt to avoid the obvious for the sake of saving a crumbling system.

From all of this we conclude that, as many prophetic declarations in both the Old Testament and New Testament speak of the present while also looking ahead to eschatological fulfillment, it is inconsistent for the preterist to rigidly cling to exclusionary “time texts” when the surrounding context employs apocalyptic language that obviously looks to the future. We might as strictly claim that the Gospel of Luke was solely intended for one person since the author specifically states that he wrote it out, “for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:3-4). Then what shall we say of Paul’s epistles being directed toward specific geographic communities during the first century prior to 70 AD? Paul wrote not only to the Romans (Rom. 1:7), but also the Corinthians (I Cor. 1:2; II Cor. 1:1), the Galatians (Gal. 1:1), the Ephesians (Eph. 1:1), the Philippians (Phil. 1:1), the Colossians (1:2), the Thessalonians (I Thess. 1:1; II Thess. 1:1), as well as Timothy (I Tim. 1:2; II Tim. 1:2), Titus (Tit. 1:4), and Philemon (Philem. 1). These letters were written by Paul in his day and at that time, but not exclusively for that day and for that time. Does the reasoning of Hanegraaff and DeMar, applied here, mean that these epistles were not really intended for us today in this twenty-first century? Such a suggestion would be quite ridiculous! Rather, like the inscripturated accounts of the Old Testament, in being the
underpinning of the New Testament writings, “whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Rom. 15:4; cf. 4:23-24). Consequently the New Testament writings, including their eschatological declarations, “were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (I Cor. 10:11). As we shall see, a right understanding of Matthew 24:1-34 incorporates this same principle instead of relegating much of God’s prophetic revelation to an outdated wasteland receding in the past. Rather, in Matthew 24 there is progression from the historic past and present to the eschatological future.

4. Jesus’ Christ’s anticipation in the Oliver Discourse.

Immediately following the Olivet Discourse during Tuesday of passion week, Jesus retires to the house of Simon the leper in Bethany, that evening, and there is anointed by Mary with precious ointment. Despite some criticism of this “excess” by some of the disciples, Jesus declares that a remarkable memorial will be awarded to her for such devotion to and preparation for His imminent burial. “Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world [κόσμος, kosmos], what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her” (Matt. 26:13; cf. Mark 14:9). Now this recognition obviously involves the inscripturated record of this incident in the gospels of both Matthew and Mark, and it reveals the omniscience of Jesus with regard to this subsequent written record. In other words, He was aware, indeed He appointed it to be, that Scripture would record the details of Mary’s devotion which in turn would be perpetuated over subsequent centuries. But further, there is the clear indication here that Jesus was anticipating, not merely that period of initial judgment up to 70 to 135-136 AD, but the period of the times of the Gentiles that would extend beyond this. Furthermore, this being the case, it is obvious that, on the evening of that Tuesday, Jesus was looking way beyond the judgment of Jerusalem. To suggest otherwise, for the sake of preserving a preterist agenda, is to infer that Jesus had little interest in the age of the Gentiles. Consequently, this scene bears out the argument that, in delivering the Olivet Discourse on that Passion Tuesday, days before his crucifixion, Jesus was looking beyond the narrow preterist conception of an eschatology that is essentially restricted to 70 AD and prior.

We also add that Jesus would surely have been looking beyond the times of the Gentiles to the conclusion of Israel’s dispersion, “the restoration of all things” at which time “all Israel will be saved” (Luke 21: 24; Acts 3:20-21; Rom. 11:25-29).

20 Concerning “upon whom the ends of the ages have come,” Hodge suggests “that, what, in this case, may be the more natural, the meaning is that we are living during the last of those periods which are allotted to the duration of the world, or of the present order of things. One series of ages terminated with the coming of Christ; another, which is the last, is now passing. Commentary on the First Epistles to the Corinthians, p. 181.
E. Two vital verses in the Olivet discourse.

If anyone would read Matthew 24 with prima facie comprehension, surely that person would conclude that here is not only reference to the past, but also a future and apocalyptic vision, and that notwithstanding the difficulty of arranging the details of this particular gospel account. To suggest that the Lord Jesus would mainly focus on the period leading up to 70 to 135-136 AD, and ignore the centuries ahead, is to miss the broader perspective, looking beyond Israel to “the times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:23-4). This period is introduced by Christ in Acts 1:7-8: “[Y]ou shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth [ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς, eschatou tēs gēs].” This perspective anticipates universal gospel witness being made to both Jew and Gentile, notwithstanding the Apostles’ misunderstanding at this juncture that was shortly to undergo course correction (Acts 10:1-11:18; 15:1-32). Reliable church tradition tells us that of the apostles, Andrew went to Asia Minor and Greece, Jude to Syria and Persia, and Thomas as far as Persia and India. So there is to be a future major ministry, of over nineteen hundred years to date, until “the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (Rom. 11:25; cf. Luke 23:23-24). Is this of little significance to Christ in Matthew 24, this His last prophetic word prior to His atonement? It is inconceivable that His perspective here would be so constricted, and especially with regard to the ongoing suffering of the Jewish diaspora beyond 70 to 135-136 AD.

In simple terms, having been asked about the destruction of the temple, the sign of Jesus’ coming and the end of the world, Jesus readily describes the imminent judgments of 70 to 135-136 AD earlier mentioned (Matt. 21:19, 43; 23:38), which becomes the micro model for the infinitely greater macro reality of tribulation over future ages and the climax of the apocalyptic, eschatological return of the Son of Man. Calvin makes the same point when commenting on Matthew 24:34.

Now though the same evils were perpetrated in uninterrupted succession for many ages afterwards, yet what Christ said was true, that, before the close of a single generation, believers would feel in reality, and by undoubted experience, the truth of his prediction; for the apostles endured the same things which we see in the present day. And yet it was not the design of Christ to promise to his followers that their calamities would be terminated within a short time, (for then he would have contradicted himself, having previously warned them that the end was not yet;) but, in order to encourage them to perseverance, he expressly foretold that those things related to their own age. The meaning therefore is: “This prophecy does not relate to evils that are distant, and which posterity will see after the lapse of many centuries, but which are now hanging over you, and ready to fall in one mass, so that there is

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21 In the light of the broad scope of Acts, to suggest here that tēs gēs should be translated “the land,” as the preterist might want to do, is to border on the nonsensical. In dealing with Acts, James Stuart Russell makes no mention of 1:7-8. However, concerning 1:11, he writes that Jesus’ return “in like manner [idiomatically ὁν τρόπον, hon tropon] must not be pressed too far,” *The Parousia*, p. 11. The obvious reason for this obscurantist comment is that the text plainly interferes with this author’s presuppositions.
no part of it which the present generation will not experience.” So then, while our Lord heaps upon a, single generation every kind of calamities, he does not by any means exempt future ages from the same kind of sufferings, but only enjoins the disciples to be prepared for enduring them all with firmness.\textsuperscript{22}

So for Calvin, the 70 to 135-136 AD judgment is the commencement/beginning of that which will befall “future ages.” Note that in commenting on Matthew 24:29, he also describes a more eschatological vista that future centuries will reveal.

\textit{Heaven} will not be darkened immediately, but after that the Church shall have passed through the whole course of its tribulations. Not that the glory and majesty of the kingdom of Christ will not appear till his last coming, but because till that time is delayed the accomplishment of those things which began to take place after his resurrection, and of which God gave to his people nothing more than a taste, that he might lead them farther on in the path of hope and patience. According to this argument, Christ keeps the minds of believers in a state of suspense till the last day, that they may not imagine those declarations which the prophets made, about the future restoration, to have failed of their accomplishment, because they lie buried for a long period under the thick darkness of tribulations.\textsuperscript{23}

Then, concerning Matthew 24:30, Calvin concludes that: “he [Christ] will appear openly at his last coming and, surrounded by the heavenly power, which will be a sign erected on an elevated spot, he will turn the eyes of the whole world upon himself.”\textsuperscript{24}

It needs to be understood that while only one Olivet Discourse was delivered by Jesus Christ during passion week, yet according to the providence of the Holy Spirit, each of the three accounts purposely has a distinctive emphasis derived from the particular focus given by its human author. Here is one three-fold eschatology. Obviously Matthew has the most detailed account, and it is for this reason that it commonly receives primary attention. Though it seems likely that the Matthew account at times conflates that clearer distinction which historian Luke makes between the destruction of Jerusalem (21:20-24a) and the eschatological revelation of Christ subsequent to when “the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled [culminative aorist passive subjunctive]” (21:24b-31).\textsuperscript{25} The order of Mark appears to be close to that of Luke.

Because of the restriction of time, we now focus on just Matthew 24: 3, 34, while drawing upon the broader context of this chapter as a whole. These verses get to the heart of the legitimacy or illegitimacy of either preterism or futurism, as defined.


\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{25} Norval Geldenhuys makes this connection between Luke 21:24b and 25a. He also remarks that: “In Luke’s shorter report of the prophetic discourse the predictions are far more clearly marked off from each other.” \textit{Commentary on the Gospel of Luke}, p. 537.
1. Matthew 24:3.

(v. 3) Καθημένου δὲ αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τοῦ ὄρους τῶν ἐλαιῶν προσήλθον αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ κατ’ ἓδιαν λέγοντες: εἰπὲ ἡμῖν, πότε ταύτα ἔσται, καὶ τί τὸ σημεῖον τῆς σῆς παρουσίας καὶ συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος;

(v. 3) “He [Jesus] having sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately saying, ‘Say/tell us, when will these things be, and what [will be] the sign of Your appearing/coming [παρουσία, parousia, following Your departure] and [what will be the sign] of the end/consummation of the age?’”

Variations in Mark 13:3-4. Concerning the disciples’ questioning of Jesus, actually “Peter and James and John and Andrew were questioning Him privately.” Only two questions are included: “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are completed/finished [συντελέω, sunteleō], all [of them].”

Variations in Luke 21:5-7. “[S]ome were talking about the temple.” On learning of the temple’s future destruction, “[t]hey questioned Him saying, ‘Teacher, when therefore will these things happen, and what will be the sign when these things are about to commence/begin [rather than “take place,” γίνεσθαι, ginesthai, present, middle/-passive infinitive of γίνομαι, ginomai]?’”

Up to this point the disciples have continued to have worldly, ambitious thoughts (Matthew 14:15-16; 15:11-20, 23; 17:19; 18:1, 21; 20:20-21) concerning which Jesus presents heavenly correction (18:1-4; 19:13-14). With this in mind, these eschatological questions imply shallow understanding and inadequate expectations, also with regard to expecting “the sign” (τὸ σημεῖον), to which Jesus gives a detailed corrective response (cf. Matt. 13:38-41).

There are three questions here in Matthew, this being the most detailed account. The first question is grammatically distinct from the other two that are grammatically related. The first question obviously relates to the shocking revelation of vs. 1-2 concerning the destruction of the temple. However, do the other two questions only focus on the period up to 70 AD as preterists, such as Gary DeMar, maintain, or do they look ahead, from the first to subsequent centuries, and to Christ’s future apocalyptic appearing, as the futurist believes? Again, I believe that a prima facie reading of Matthew 24 easily leads to a futurist understanding. However this perspective is certainly not without its difficulties, especially in Matthew, involving a degree of mystery concerning the present and the future, that characterized other teaching of Jesus (Mat. 13:10-11), but here especially because of the “two parallel [overlapping/abutting] scenarios,” especially in the earlier part of Matthew 24, that

26 That the preterist especially struggles with the language of Matthew 24:14, 21, 29-31, is born out by the attempted association with alleged Old Testament parallels and the attribution of hyperbole.
Alford previously described. However, we must go deeper than this. If there is some futurist perspective in mind in the second and third of the disciples’ questions, along with Jesus’ response and especially with what follows up to v. 34, then the case for preterism will not stand. This is even more so the case because of what some preterists acknowledge, namely that a future perspective is revealed in vs. 35-51. This being so, it is difficult to reject the view that a future perspective is integrated into the preterist elements of v. 1-34. Though again, v. 34 becomes the controlling principle here.

James Stuart Russell (1816-1895), a Scottish Congregationalist, the father of modern, full preterism, who Gary DeMar, as a moderate preterist, nevertheless commends as “a breath of fresh air in a room filled with smoke and mirror hermeneutics,”27 writes concerning v. 3: “

What precise ideas they [the disciples] entertained respecting the end of the age and the events therewith connected, we do not know; but we do know that they had been accustomed to hear their Master speak of Him coming again in His kingdom, coming in His glory, and that within the lifetime of some among themselves.28

Without digressing, we would challenge the necessity of agnosticism here concerning the disciples’ understanding with regard to the eschatology of the end of the age. Their comprehension may have been foggy, yet they had recently been taught that, “in the regeneration when the Son of man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt. 19:28). Surely such a revelation had to transcend the 70 AD scenario since John did not die till approximately 98 AD. Furthermore, it is true that Jesus told His disciples about his departure, that it would bring sadness, yet His post resurrection, glorified appearances, prior to His ascension, would bring great joy (John 16:16-20).

However, we do not believe that the second and third questions of Matthew 24:3 necessarily relate merely to a 70 to 135-136 AD fulfillment as with the first question. They are probing and yet surely reach beyond to the distant unknown, perhaps reflected in Acts 1:8. After all, it appears that the disciples were not cognizant of what was about to befall Jerusalem. According to Matthew 16:28-17:8, plainly and contextually, this kingdom glory had already been shown forth in a measure at Christ’s transfiguration, and that most visibly and radiantly, as a prototype and foretaste of that which was ultimately to come. Of course this is not the understanding of preterists such as DeMar. He explains that Matthew 16:28 was

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27 Gary DeMar, outside back cover commendation, James Stuart Russell, *The Parousia*.

really fulfilled in 70 AD when John alone, according to historic tradition, was alive.\textsuperscript{29} Yes, the judgment of Jerusalem during 70 to 135-136 AD did reveal the judgment of Christ upon Israel, though not in scripturally explicit terms concerning his coming at that time in the glory of His kingdom, that is as a personal, bodily, visible, dazzling (φαίνω, phainō, Matt. 24:27, 30) parousia. So we do believe that the answers to the second and third questions surely look forward, way beyond the lifetime of the apostles and centuries ahead, ultimately to the manifest eschatological second coming of the Son of Man. This we will now endeavor to prove. So what the disciples understood of Christ’s discourse here and what Russell thinks they may have understood in terms of His imminent revelation of glory as the Son of Man, has no necessary bearing on what Christ actually meant by what He said. So Gary DeMar representatively states: “These questions [concerning v. 3] are related to the destruction of the temple and the end of the Old Covenant redemptive system and nothing else. . . . Jesus never indicates that He has a distant coming in mind.”\textsuperscript{30} He quotes Alfred Plummer in support, who suggests that the disciples could well have had only the overthrow of Jerusalem and the Temple in mind. Yes, Plummer does mention that it is “quite possible that they [the disciples] would regard the destruction of the Holy City and of the Temple-worship as the end of the world.”\textsuperscript{31} However, DeMar totally neglects to reference Plummer’s vital following comment: “But the fact, if it be a fact, that the Apostles and the Evangelist understood the Messiah’s words in this sense is no proof that this was the sense in which He uttered them [emphasis added].”\textsuperscript{32} Furthermore, when interpreting vs. 30-31, which Plummer titles as “The Close of the Age foretold,” he sees them describing that time when, “under the Christian dispensation a Church of His elect will have been formed throughout the world.”\textsuperscript{33} Preterist belief could not possibly accept this futurist interpretation with regard to Matthew 24.

\textsuperscript{29} However Matthew, in parallel with the Mark and Luke accounts, makes the connection clear when he writes with specificity that “six days later,” after the declaration of Matthew 16:28, the transfiguration followed (Matt. 17:1). Further, if, as DeMar claims (Last Days Madness, pp. 43-46), that John “did not taste death” in 70 AD, and he alone according to historic tradition, how is it that Jesus speaks in the plural of “some” who will not “taste death,” v. 28? The answer is that, in first addressing the twelve, He spoke of “some,” Peter, James and John, who would not die until they witnessed His unclouded transfiguration glory. Jesus uses the expression “will not die” in 16:28 to simply stress the imminence of what was soon to be revealed, in contrast with the eschatological glory and judgment just spoken of in 16:27. In other words, the eschatological glory of 16:27 is the macro of which 16:28 is the micro revealed at the transfiguration. This is not unlike the prophetic micro and macro aspects revealed in the Olivet Discourse.

\textsuperscript{30} DeMar, Last Days Madness, p. 68.


\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid, pp 335-336.
a. The disciples’ second question to Jesus.

Now, concerning the disciple’s time based enquiry, v. 3, we first consider, the second question, “what will be the sign of Your coming [παρούσια, parousia]?” There are three other references, in Matthew 24, to Christ’s “coming/arrival,” as παρούσια, parousia; they are vs. 27, 37, 39, their later mention in the chapter being suggestive of an apocalyptic event. There are also four references to “the coming [ἐρχόμενοι, erchomai] of the Son of man” in Matthew 24:30, 39, 42, 44, again according to later mention in the chapter, which verb may have been employed by Christ because of its use, according to the LXX quotation, in the first reference, v. 30. Hence, both parousia and erchomai are used on eight occasions in Matthew 24 to variously describe the coming/arrival of Jesus as “the Son of Man.” There is also the use of φαίνω, phainō in v. 30 by which Christ declares that the Son of Man will “[brightly] appear” in the sky, which term suggests “visible shining” (cf. Matt. 2:7; 6:5, 16; 9:33; 23:27-28; 24:27). The cumulative effect of this repeated terminology we believe to be indicative of an unprecedented eschatological appearing and not that alleged to have mystically taken place in Jerusalem in 70 AD in the form of divine judgment.

There are also six references to “the Son of Man” in Matthew 24:27, 30 (2), 37, 39, 44, all of which involve Jesus certainly referring to Himself. In other words, the disciples enquired as to “the sign of . . . [the] coming [of the Son of Man], and of the end of the age.” Apart from this chapter, there are also twenty five other like references to “the Son of Man” in this Gospel. However the latter mentioning of these in this chapter is also suggestive of an apocalyptic event. But from where does this self-imposed title originate? Evangelical scholarship is generally agreed that the source is Daniel 7:13. Furthermore, highly significant confirmation of this is Jesus’ quotation of Daniel 7:13 in Matthew 24:30, which fact Gary DeMar necessarily misconstrues in terms of the broader context of Daniel 7:13-14: “I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.” So DeMar comments, using amillennialist N. T. Wright in support,

The ‘coming of the Son of Man’ is a depiction of the exaltation and enthronement of Jesus in heaven. Matthew 24:30 has nothing to do with the rapture or any end-
time scenario. Each time Jesus used the phrase, ‘the Son of God coming on the clouds,’ the reference had contemporary application.\textsuperscript{34}

Granted that the Son of God in Daniel is “coming” to “the Ancient of Days,” yet it is for the purpose of Him being given “dominion, glory and a kingdom” (Dan. 7:14). The following context concerns the coming of Christ’s indestructible kingdom that is further described in v. 27: “[A]ll the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints [distinctively Jews and Gentiles] of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions [Gentiles] will serve and obey Him.”\textsuperscript{35} To relate this to merely Christ’s first coming and 70 AD it to totally miss the big picture of Daniel 7. Nevertheless, Jesus has been asked about His “coming” so that this is a dominant theme which He repeatedly mentions as His address unfolds (24:27, 30, 37, 39, 42, 44). However, as already seen, Daniel 7:13-14 as a whole plainly has a universal context that is much broader than Jerusalem and a universal kingdom that extends far beyond Israel since it involves “the peoples, nations and men of every language,” also an everlasting dominion which will not pass away.” But of necessity, both DeMar and Wright have to disassociate eschatologically from all of this in a manner that the reader of Matthew 24 as a whole will find hard to digest. In the light of the apocalyptic revelation of Christ’s glory in v. 30, it is hard to believe that it, along with the other references in vs. 27, 37, 39, 44, merely refer to a Jerusalem “appearance” in 70 AD. Surely this whole approach greatly dims, indeed beclouds the “power and great glory” plainly revealed in the text here. In fact, the only description we have of this “power and great glory,” as interpreted according to Wright and DeMar, is the gruesome decimation of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. as described by unbelieving Josephus!

Now if the third question here concerning “the end of the age” is also proved to be eschatological, and not preterist, then any question about v. 30 being preterist is surely invalidated.

b. The disciples’ third question to Jesus.

Concerning the disciples’ third question: “[W]hat will be the sign . . . of the end of the age” in Matthew 24:3, it should go without saying that Gary DeMart believes this to be solely related to the period leading up to the 70 A.D. destruction of Jerusalem. He writes:

\textsuperscript{34} DeMar, \textit{Last Days Madness}, p. 164.

The "end of the age" refers to the termination of the exclusive Jewish entitlement to the Jewish covenant promises and the inclusion of the Gentiles into the blessings of the covenant and the privileges of the gospel and kingdom. . . . Therefore, the expression "end of the age" refers "to the end of the Jewish age."36

Moreover, DeMar's understanding is that here we are concerned with "covenantal language," in other words disenfranchisement of Israel and enfranchisement of the Christian church, not apocalyptic revelation.37

There are four other significant references to "the end of the age" in Matthew, two of which are found in the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares which DeMar appears to never mention. Here Jesus, in revealing His eschatology rather than that of the apostles, declares that: "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, and the field is the world; . . . the enemy who sowed them [the tares] is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age" (13:38-40). Surely the scenario here concerning "the end of the age" encompasses, not Israel in 70 to 135-136 AD, but the apocalyptic end of the "times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24). So Jesus' prophetic eschatology here looks way beyond the immediate judgment of Israel, as is the case in Matthew 24.

Further, in the subsequent Parable of the Dragnet we have the same emphasis (Matt. 13:47-50): "So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous [within the world?]." For this reason DeMar is wrong when he adds: "[T]he expression, "end of the age" refers to the end of the Jewish age," i.e., the time of transference from a national [Israel only] to an international people of God [in the world]."38 We repeat, the great separation here, hardly fulfilled at 70 to 135-136 AD, will be at the subsequent "end/consummation of the age," even as Plummer understands.39 Therefore it is most reasonable to conclude that the "end of the age" in Matthew 24:3 is also apocalyptic and universal.

Moreover, consider the Great Commission (28:19-20) where Christ's presence is promised until "the end/consummation of the age [τοῦ αἰῶνος, tou aionos]."

36 DeMar, Last Days Madness, pp. 69-70, referencing, with obvious agreement, R. T. France, The Gospel According to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary, p. 337. Here is clearly seen the root of DeMar's replacement or supercessionist theology. We might ask, what is the ground of God nullifying the unconditional Abrahamic covenant promises to Israel according to Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-21? Can a Christian be subject to such nullification since he also participates in the same Abrahamic covenant (Gal. 3:29)? Refer to the author's Future Israel.

37 Ibid., pp. 70-71.


Surely this has mainly a future perspective. However preterists, such as DeMar, see this passage being understood by the apostles as necessitating fulfillment toward Israel until the demise of the nation in 70 AD, and not beyond to “all the nations” in a universal sense. Romans 16:26, cf. Galatians 4:4, is claimed in support, but only through ignoring the context of the preceding v. 25 which surely anticipates a universal unveiling, a historic bestowal of the “revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past” upon “all the nations,” obviously of the presently known world and beyond. It is claimed that the apostles only understood the Great Commission in this light. But in any case, the reasoning here is fallacious, namely that “all the nations” in Romans must have identical meaning in Matthew. Is then world missions nullified? The preterist perspective here is really senseless! However, for the sake of argument, even if this understanding was true, the real question, as was the case with Matthew 24:3, concerns the meaning and intent of the Lord Jesus when He announced the Great Commission. Certainly Peter’s misunderstanding at this juncture was divinely corrected at Caesarea (Acts 10) and confessed at Jerusalem (Acts 15). Hence, for the preterist, is there any explicit commission for the preaching of the gospel to the four corners of the earth after 70 AD? Was the great missionary awakening of the eighteenth century mistaken in terms of its biblical mandate? Were William Carey and Andrew Fuller unbiblical in their missionary endeavors?

2. Matthew 24:34.

(v. 34) ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη ἕως ἀν πάντα ταύτα γένηται.

(v. 34) “Truly [emphatic], I say to you, this generation/race will not/in no way [emphatic double negative] pass away/cease to exist until these things take place/begin/commence [γίνομαι, ginomai, γένηται, genētai, aorist middle subjunctive, 3s].”

One of the greatest dangers in serious Bible Study, especially when a perplexing difficulty arises, is becoming locked into a theological system or a box of our own logical construction that cannot be challenged in terms of its interlocking parts. We know that if we yield at one point, then our tidy edifice collapses. So it has become the case with the interpretation of Matthew 24:34, and especially γενεὰ, genea, “this generation,” as if its meaning alone settles the matter at hand when in fact it does not. However the preterist, in being utterly convinced of its meaning with regard to the wicked Jewish generation that suffered God’s severe judgment in 70 AD through Rome, comes to the conclusion that his argument here is watertight. At least he
believes this to be so insofar as his whole system is thought to be in support of his understanding here. So all which is prophesied in the preceding vs. 4-33 is alleged to be concerned solely with the events before and up to 70 AD. However, the danger here is that we fail to think through the other elements of this verse, as well as the way they relate to the broader context. Because of difficulties on both sides of the fence that seem to restrict our quest for unity concerning God’s truth, it will help if we consider spiritual lateral thinking and thus attempt to think “outside the box,” so to speak.

a. The meaning of “γενεὰ, genea.,” this generation/race.

_Arndt and Gingrich_ gives the first category of meaning as literally “those descended from a common ancestor, a clan, . . . then race, kind.” “The meaning _nation_ is advocated by some.” Then the second category of meaning in the New Testament is given as “generation, contemporaries.”40 Concerning the context here, there is some legitimacy in translating “race/nation” rather than “generation” when the meaning of “all these things” is understood as describing the centuries during which Israel will endure persecution and tribulation while God covenantally upholds its existence. Alternatively “race/nation” could refer to “all those things” previously described as occurring just prior to Christ’s second coming. So “race/nation,” as the historic Jewish people, is also a viable translation, especially in conjunction with God’s inviolate keeping of Israel according to Jeremiah 31:35-37, yet nevertheless not altogether satisfying for this writer, again with regard to the immediate context. We conclude that “race/nation” is at best, particularly in the synoptic gospels overall, a secondary rather than the primary meaning. Furthermore Christ is repeatedly concerned about Israel as a _present_ evil generation. So this more immediate context, especially as Christ draws near to His crucifixion, is of fundamental importance here and not so much the more broad consideration of Israel’s historic, covenantal existence. Certainly the overall meaning of genea references in the synoptic Gospels cannot be ignored, especially since if most of them suggested “race/nation,” we might be quick to reference this usage. Excellent exegesis of this understanding is provided by, Marshall Entrekin, though his eclectic approach is not finally conclusive here.41 From a Messianic perspective, David


41 [http://www.thingstocome.org/whatgen.htm](http://www.thingstocome.org/whatgen.htm). Entrekin concludes: The context of the Olivet Discourse leads us to believe that Jesus was speaking either of the race of the Jews, the generation of God’s children, or of a future generation that was near in consideration. (The reader will be left to decide which of these three alternatives seems most likely. I welcome correspondence regarding this).
Stern translates: “Yes! I tell you that this people will certainly not pass away before all these things happen.”\(^{42}\) Nevertheless none of these options with regard to “race/nation” are altogether satisfying for this writer, and again especially with regard to the immediate context; the alternative and prevailing term, “generation,” is much to be preferred. Thomas Ice believes that “generation” refers to people alive when "all these things" (i.e. the events of the 7-year tribulation of vv. 4–31) take place.\(^{43}\) Also refer to C. E. B. Cranfield\(^{44}\) and Neil D. Nelson Jr.\(^{45}\) So the primary, prevailing meaning of “generation/[national] contemporaries,” specifically the wicked generation of Israel and its leadership at the time of Christ, seems most suitable, and especially when the same meaning, as frequently used by Christ in other nearby places (Matt. 12:39, 41-42, 45; 16:4; 17:17; 23:36), is understood. However, as we shall see, this meaning, namely “generation/[national] contemporaries,” does not necessitate that the “these things” of vs. 4-33 are wholly, without exception referring to 70 AD and events immediately preceding.

b. The meaning of “πάντα ταῦτα, panta tauta” all these things.”

Gary DeMar writes that he came to the conclusion that “[t]he generation to whom Jesus was speaking would not pass away until all those things listed in Matthew 24:4-31 came to pass.”\(^{46}\) Of course his meaning is that “all these things,” in every respect, would exclusively find their fulfillment up to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, but in no way beyond. However, we would suggest that, according to vs. 4-31, we will later see in more detail how they describe a panorama of tribulation that plays out beyond 70 AD, even as vs. 6, 8, 13-14, 48-51 suggest.

\(^{42}\) David H. Stern, Complete Jewish Bible, p. 1255, who elsewhere comments that if this is the correct translation, “Yeshua is guaranteeing that the Jews will persist as a people until his second coming. He is echoing the promise of Jeremiah 31:35-37.” David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Commentary, p. 75. He does briefly comment on the alternative translation of “this generation.”


\(^{44}\) C. E. B. Cranfield, “St. Mark 13,” Scottish Journal of Theology 7 (July 1954):291. In accepting “this generation” as preferable in v. 30, “all these things” means “the signs of the End (vv. 5-23), so the same as ταῦτα in v. 29.

\(^{45}\) Neil D. Nelson Jr., “This Generation” in Matthew 24:34: A Literary Critical Perspective,” Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 38:3 (September 1966):385. “This generation’ in Matt. 24:34 does not refer to all people alive from AD 30 to AD 70 because they did not witness the events of 24:15-28, and Jesus stated that neither he nor any of his followers knew nor could anticipate when the parousia would be (24:36, etc.). Nor does ‘this generation’ speak of Israel as a race... ‘This generation’ (24:34) represents an evil class of people who will oppose Jesus’ disciples until the day he returns” p. 385.

\(^{46}\) DeMar, Last Days Madness, p. 15.
Further, DeMar’s claim is made in the light of the historic evidence that all of the twelve apostles, except John, died or were martyred before 70 AD. The argument here is also heavily based upon the account of the destruction of Jerusalem recorded by the historian Josephus, a Jew and Pharisee with a cruel, self-serving propensity,47 who appended the name Flavius in 69 AD in recognition of his meeting with and emancipation by the Roman Emperor, Flavius Vespasian. In accompanying the victorious Titus, sometimes being an intermediary with the Jews pleading for their surrender, he wrote that 3,000,000 inhabitants would be in Jerusalem at the Passover season, while 1,100,000 were killed during the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Verifiable charges of Josephus’ proneness to numeric exaggeration will not be considered here.48 So the city was leveled except for three towers and one wall. This remainder was “to demonstrate to posterity what kind of city it was, and how well fortified, which the Roman valor had subdued.”49 However this generally well known scenario avoids the fact that the final demise of Jerusalem and utter desolation of the surrounding region of Judea was not until 135-36 AD following the rebellion of the messianic claimant, Simon Bar-Kokhba (cf. Matt. 24:5, 23-24), supported by the celebrated Rabbi Akiba. This was

the last, and perhaps most terrible, encounter between the Jews and Imperial Rome [that] took place. . . . The suddenness of the rising took the Romans quite unawares, and in a very short time Bar-Kokhba was master of Judea. . . . [So] the war dragged on for three years and a half. . . . [W]ell over 500,000 Jews fell in the fighting. . . . On the Roman side the losses were likewise very serious.50

The Jewish combatants, often guerilla in style, were drawn from throughout Judea in response to the prohibition of circumcision and further pagan intrusion. As a consequence, the emperor Hadrian ploughed up the temple foundations, decreed the exclusion of Jews from Jerusalem, and rebuilt the city calling it Aelia Capitolina after himself, while he named the surrounding region Palistina, a form of Philistia, or Palestine, as further insult to the Jews. He also erected a shrine to Zeus on the temple site, which would have better application to Matthew 24:15 as well as apocalyptic fulfillment of Daniel 9:27; 11:31. So,

the Temple-tax, which the Jews all over the world had hitherto paid for the upkeep of their sanctuary and its services, was now used for the benefit of the

48 Ibid., p. 258.
temple of Jupiter Capitolinus in Rome. . . . From this time onward the Jews became more and more . . . ‘aliens in a heathen world.’

Only now was the destruction of Jerusalem and the devastation of Judea fully accomplished, as with the fulfillment of Matthew 24:2, except that many Jews still remained in the land. After 70 AD the Sanhedrin moved westward to Jamnia on the coast while after 135-136 AD this center of Judaism moved north to Usha west of Galilee. Here a rabbinical school was established, the president of which was regarded by Rome as the spiritual head of Jewry.

The point here is that the preterist makes too much of 70 AD as a cut off point and ignores the significance of 135-136 AD which the Olivet Discourse seems to more broadly anticipate, and thus the centuries that follow. Of course “70 AD” is not anywhere mentioned in the biblical account. Certainly Luke 21:20 declares: “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation/being laid waste is near.” However, historically, it is clear that this “desolation” was by no means complete until 135—136 AD. Furthermore it would be fair to say that Christ’s prophecy, “Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles [both Titus and Hadrian] until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:24), really incorporates Jerusalem and Judea, and thus Hadrian’s thorough completion of this desolation. This is further indicated when Luke refers to this judgment upon Jerusalem while also incorporating “Judea” and “great distress upon the land” (Luke 21:21, 23), which broader perspective is exactly what was accomplished in 135 to 136 AD. Hence “all these things” seems to have a less restricted frame of reference that proceeds beyond 70 AD. Note the use also of “all these things” in vs. 8, 33, as well as following Luke 21:32 in v. 36. As we shall see, “all” here speaks more representatively of “merely the beginning of birth pangs” (Matt. 24:8), the micro, and not totally of the macro that will follow up to “the end” when the universal preaching of the gospel shall have been completed (Matt. 24:14).

c. The meaning of “γένηται, genētai (γίνομαι, ginomai),” be fulfilled/be done/take place, according to most translations.

To begin with, both the KJV and the NKJV are somewhat wide of the meaning of γένηται, genētai when they translate “fulfilled” in both Matthew 24:34 and Luke

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53 Refer to the earlier response to Gary Demar concerning his interpretation of Matthew 24:14 as describing evangelism strictly before 70 AD.
21:24. Should the Greek text have employed πληρώω, plēroō, such a translation would have been suitable, but this is not the case. However in Mark 13:30 “take place” is used in these versions, while in all three gospel accounts the exact same form, that is genētai, is used.

(1) The meaning of “γένηται, genētai (ginomai)” by C. E. Stowe.

An outstanding article published in 1850, “The Eschatology of Christ, with Special Reference to the Discourse in Matthew 24 and 25,” by C. E. Stowe, Professor of Biblical Literature at Lane Theological Seminary (Presbyterian), Cincinatti, Ohio, is included here as Appendix A. Here we have eye-opening exegesis at this point that calls for serious study. Apart from so many helpful insights, we particularly draw attention to Professor Stowe’s consideration of “γένηται, genētai,” being the aorist middle (reflexive), deponent subjunctive, 3rd person singular, of γίνομαι, ginomai, commonly understood as meaning “to become/to come into being,” and also “to commence/to begin.” It is the latter meaning here, especially its correctness in context regarding v. 34, that we shall consider in detail, and then relate to the import of what Jesus is really saying in the light of vs. 4-33.

The lexical sources that Professor Stowe draws upon are substantial, even if referenced from the mid-nineteenth century. He plainly demonstrates with considerable detail that the proper translation here is “[c]learly this: this generation shall not pass, till all these things begin to be, or, till all these things take their beginning. So Luther interprets it, in his note on the passage: . . . ‘All this will begin to take place in the present time, while you are yet alive.’” Such an interpretation will place a totally different complexion upon our understanding of Matthew 24, indeed that which results in unity of understanding rather than conflict and confusion.54

(2) The meaning of “γένηται, genētai (ginomai)” in various lexical sources.

In Arndt & Gingrich, it is interesting that the extensive entry on ginomai makes no reference to genētai in Matthew 24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32, so that no specific meaning is attributed. Even the exact form genētai is not parsed. The primary meanings are come to be, arise, which suggest “beginning, commencing,” also become, originate. A notable meaning is when day came, when a convenient day arrived, again with the obvious nuance of

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54 The lexical argument does not rest on whether or not we have an ingressive aorist here, as some have considered. Refer to http://www.preteristsite.com/docs/warrengreek.html. The issue chiefly concerns contextual lexicology, not syntax.
“beginning, commencing.” In Grimm-Thayer, the principal meaning is to come into existence, to begin to be, also to arise, to appear in history. In Abbott-Smith, the principal meaning is to come into being, to be born, to arise. It is interesting that in these three lexical sources, not one of them considers γένηται, γενηταί, or thus allocates any specific meaning to it. However what we do learn from this is that Professor Stowe’s comprehensive analysis of ginomai is essentially correct.

It is also important to notice that Professor Stowe makes reference to the fact that, “it is often erroneously supposed [that γίνομαι is] to be [regarded as] synonymous with εἰμί” (page 53). Indeed Matthew 24:34 is often rendered so that the impression given is as if εἰμί is in fact the basis of the translation when it is not. Surely this is so with “be done” KJV (Mark 13:30), “have happened” NIV, “take place” NASB, ESV, HCSB. While the distinctive meaning of these terms may at times merge, yet eimi describes existence/being while ginomai means to become, to come into existence. The two terms are distinctively used in Luke 21:7: “They questioned Him saying, ‘When therefore will these things be/happen [eimi]? And what will be the the sign when these things are about to begin/commence [ginomai]?’” As a final example, consider Matthew 27:24: “When Pilate having seen that he was gaining/accomplishing nothing, but that a riot was starting [ginomai, NASB]/beginning [ESV], he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd.”

(3) The meaning of “γένηται, genētai (ginomai)” as “begin” in Matthew 24.

Apart from the meaning of γένηται, genētai in Matthew 24:34 as “begin/commence,” first consider the appropriateness of the same meaning in v. 32. “Learn from the fig tree the parable: when its branch begins [γένηται, genētai] sprouting and puts out leaf, you know that summer is near.” So with 23:15: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, because you travel over sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he begins/commences [γένηται, genētai], you make him [by way of ongoing instruction] a son of hell/Gehenna as yourselves.” Yet again with 26:5: “But they were saying, ‘Not during the festival, in order that a riot might not begin/commence [γένηται, genētai] among the people.’” Furthermore, it is significant that the NASB translation of Acts 8:1 is as follows: “And on that day a great persecution began [ἐγένετο, egeneto, aorist middle indicative] against the church in Jerusalem.”

So the immediate contextual indications in Matthew 24:34 of “all these things . . . begin [γένηται, genētai, v amsp],” play out in vs. 6, 8, 13-14, 48-
51. If the nuance of “beginning, commencing,” being lexically well supported, is intended, then surely the preceding context, especially in these specific verses, would support such an understanding, and in fact this proves to be the case. In other words, “all these things” will begin, vs. 4-28, during the present wicked generation of Israel; it will not miss out on such traumatic events, even in the micro, that yet will continue through the centuries and lead to the macro, an apocalyptic, eschatological climax at the second coming of Christ of infinitely greater proportions. So “those things must take place, but that is not yet the end,” v. 6; “But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs,” v. 8; only when the gospel has been preached “to all the nation [οἰκουμένη, oikoumenē] . . . the end will come,” vs. 13-14; the inference is that “my master is not coming for a long time,” vs. 48-51.

(4) The meaning of γίνομαι, ginomai in Luke 21:36, “praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about [ταύτα πάντα τὰ μέλλοντα] to take place/begin, γίνεσθαι [ginesthai, inf pm/p], and stand before the Son of Man.”

After the use of γένηται, genetai in v. 32, here we are faced with the same question concerning the translation of γίνεσθαι, ginesthai. The final part of this warning also presents a difficulty if it speaks here that “all these things are about to take place,” so that the whole verse refers only to believers up to 70 AD who are to “stand before the Son of God” at that time, as the preterist would maintain. If this interpretation is to hold, then it requires considerable linguistic accommodation in terms of believers “standing before the Son of God” in 70 AD. However when the above translation speaks of “all these things about to begin,” it includes the pre 70 AD period and beyond regarding that apocalyptic time, this surely being the obvious intent here, when “men stand before the Son of God” (cf. Matt. 16:28; 19:28; 24:30, 37, 39, 44; 25:31; 26:64).56

55 If vs. 27-28 infer the judgment of Christ upon Jerusalem in 70 to 135-136 AD, surely they are transitional in terms of the greater eschatological vistas of vs. 29-31. So Alford, Greek New Testament, I, p. 223; Broadus, Matthew, 489. Such blending or overlap or progression would be in full accord with Old Testament prophetic revelation. The transition from the micro to the macro judgment in Mark 13:23-24 and Luke 21:24-25 appears to be far more explicit than in Matthew.

56 Of course Gary DeMar, as with most preterists, challenges the eschatological referencing of all these passages. However, the cumulative effect is so plain and transcendentally glorious, namely that the Lord Jesus looks way beyond the foretaste of 70 AD and 135-136 AD to the future day, like no other, when, as the concluding hymn of Appendix C in this paper by Cennick and Wesley declares:

Lo! He comes with clouds descending
Once for favored sinners slain.
F. Conclusion.

Jesus Christ, in answering the disciples’ questions concerning His future “coming” and the future “end of the age,” is also concerned about confronting the present Jewish generation of His time with immanent judgment because of national apostasy and the rejection of His messianic witness. He does not desire to describe a shocking future scenario of events that involve Israel so that, in sensing them to be distant eschatological prospects, they, the present Jewish community, would then be able to comfortably detach themselves from personal application because they relate to a future generation, which in fact they also do. No, Jesus will not permit any such way of escape for His generation. The present nation of Israel will not escape tribulation because of future expectations of judgment! So the future generation as well will not escape, especially at the climactic, glorious appearing of the Lord Jesus at His second coming. The failure to grasp these two perspectives is a fundamental weakness in the whole preterist system.

Hence preterism tends to find refuge in disassociation from the future by means of its exclusive 70 AD mentality. The apocalyptic in Scripture is past, so don’t worry. The future is the glorious bland gradualism of the evolving kingdom of God. There is no need today for the cry, “flee from the wrath to come” (Matt. 3:7). after the manner of John the Baptist’s proclamation. The Jews certainly merited and received a load of divine penal trouble back then in 70 AD, but that does not apply to us today! Apocalyptic eschatology, last days terror, is all finished with. But this is dangerous soporific error that closes its eyes to a world that, lemming-like, rushes toward its fearful awakening to sudden apocalyptic encounter with a holy God!

Some preterists witness in the streets of Tucson with signs such as, “We Are Not In The Last Days!” Of course “the last days” are times of cresting toward imminent terrifying judgment, yet these people tell us not to worry since that is all past. The great portions of the prophets that cause our hair to stand on end are past. They have no contemporary relevance. So preterist Hank Hanegraaff tells us that such declarations are really hyperbolic expression, localized in past history, without universal significance. In other words it is extreme, inflated literary style that tells of events, already fulfilled, that were

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57 A careful study of “the last/latter days” in the Old Testament, especially the prophets (Gen. 49:1; Isa. 2:2; Jer. 23:20; 30:24; 49:39; Ezek. 38:16; Dan. 2:28; 10:14; Hos. 3:5; Mic. 4:1) generally describes eschatological portrayal of sin and judgment and the Messianic kingdom to come in relation to Israel’s future. In the New Testament, the church age embodies “last days/times/hour” situations, especially Messiah’s appearing in conjunction with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:2; I Pet. 1:20), sin and judgment situations (II Tim. 3:1-9; Jas. 5:3; II Pet. 3:3, 7; I John 2:18; Jude 18) and the consummation of Christ’s kingdom (I Pet. 1:5). DeMar rather arbitrarily declares that: “In A.D. 70 the ‘last days’ ended with the dissolution of the temple and the sacrificial system [and presumably Israel],” Last Days Madness, p. 38. To accomplish this conclusion he must confine the above list of New Testament references within a 70 AD matrix. It is a bad fit. Surely I Peter 1:5, in describing to distressed believers “a salvation to be revealed in the last time,” which Selwyn describes as an eschatological hope, First Epistle of Peter, p. 125, looks way beyond 70 AD.
not really as dramatic and severe as they might appear to be described in Scripture! Doubtless many in Noah’s day declared that, in his preaching, he was overstating his case with regard to a universal flood! We reference again Hanegraaff’s comment on Matthew 24:29 (see page 13-14) which quotes Isaiah 13:10 and describes this as Jesus’

employing hyperbolic language that is deeply rooted in the Old Testament. . . . To those unfamiliar with biblical language, these words may well be taken to mean that the end of the world was a hand. In reality, Isaiah was prophesying that the Medes were about to put an end to the glories of the Babylonian Empire.58

However a half-truth here ends up being a serious avoidance of the full truth. Granted, as we have already seen, that Babylon is at the historic background, but, like so many Old Testament prophecies, as have been earlier referenced, there is an eschatological foreground here that, of necessity, preterism must deny, especially with regard to Matthew 24-25. So Edward J. Young comments on the relationship between Isaiah 13:1-5 and 6-12.

The day of the Lord is the day of final judgment, but a forerunner of that judgment appeared in the destruction of Babylon. . . . One Babylon after another will be destroyed until the last sinner is removed from earth. . . . Not only is that day about to come, but it is about to come as a cruel one. It is hard and unfeeling, breaking out in vehement destruction, showing no mercy and sparing none. With that day there will be no sunlight of blessing but wrath and the heat of anger. Over the world city the judgment deepens for the purpose of making the earth, represented by and affected by Babylon, a desolation.59

But further, what of other awesome prophetic descriptions of the eschatological judgment of the whole world. As a further example, consider the broader context included in Isaiah 62:1-8; 63:1-6. Concerning 62:1-8, God’s ultimate restoration of Israel is revealed according to sworn declaration, v. 8, in the presence of the nations, v. 2. Concerning 63:1-6, one might say that Edom, and its capital Bozrah, are the objects of judgment here. But no, as the picture here as a whole plainly represents, they are merely types of the great eschatological antitype. Again Young explains:

[Edom] displayed a vicious attitude toward Israel (cf. e.g. Amos 1:11-12). . . . Edom is mentioned as a representative of the powers that oppose God, and in its destruction we see their destruction. The reference is not to the destruction of the empirical nation of Edom, although that nation in course of time did pass away, but to the fact that all who would hinder the establishment of God’s kingdom upon earth must pass away through judgment.60

As a final instance of eschatological judgment on a world scale prefigured by a past historic setting, consider Zephaniah 1, 3. Prophesying under King Josiah who reigned from 641 to 610 BC, Zephaniah writes of God’s coming judgment upon Judah and

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59 Young, Isaiah, I, pp. 419n, 421-422.
60 Ibid., p. 476.
Jerusalem (1:4-13). So “the great day of Jehovah is near and coming very quickly, . . . the day of the Lord, . . . a day of wrath is that day” (1:14-15). But then we are transported way beyond to a more encompassing, universal scenario. “I will bring distress on men so that they will walk like the blind, because they have sinned against the L ORD; and their blood will be poured out like dust and their flesh like dung. Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to deliver them on the day of the L ORD’S wrath; and all the earth will be devoured in the fire of His jealousy, for He will make a complete end, indeed a terrifying one, of all the inhabitants of the earth” (1:17-18). The same order is also found in Zephaniah 3. Jerusalem is to be further judged (3:1-7), then a more universal judgment follows. “My decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out on them My indignation, all My burning anger; for all the earth will be devoured by the fire of My zeal” (3:8). After this the nations will be purified (3:9-11) and the remnant of Israel saved so as to dwell gloriously in Zion as part of the Messianic kingdom since: “the King of Israel, the L ORD, is in your midst; you will fear disaster no more” (3:12-19). Then, concerning “the daughter of Zion,” . . . ‘at that time I will bring you in, even at the time when I gather you together; indeed, I will give you renown and praise among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes,’ Says the L ORD” (3:14, 20).

In the light of Scripture, along with the current state of this tottering world, preterist hunkering down in the past, at the expense of the future, is not merely wrong eschatology, a slight deviation from a major prophetic scenario. Rather it is stupefying, delusional error, that parallels, in a number of ways, the warning of Peter: “[I]n the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the Fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation’” (II Pet. 3:3-4). For the preterist, there is no “looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus” (Tit. 2:13). For Russell this was a “looking” prior to 70 AD, and certainly not beyond.61 So for us today, there is no “blessed hope,” and with it no encouragement to “live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age” (Tit. 2:12). But further there is insistence that right now, not only is the apocalyptic past, but also we are living in a postmillennial “millennium” and the “new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.” As Russell declares, “[t]he old Jerusalem was to give place to the New Jerusalem.”62 In the light of this hallucinatory vision of today’s real world resting upon a nuclear precipice,63 we cannot escape the parallel with Mary Baker Eddy’s illusory denial of the reality of sin and death. Of course, in the long run, reality eventually catches

61 Russell, The Parousia, p. 263.
62 Ibid., 324-325.
63 Robert Hutchinson, Weapon’s of Mass Destruction (2003), 283 pp. The author was a founder of Jane’s Defence Weekly. The outside jacket declares: “Within ten years a nuclear warhead will devastate a major city. This is not a movie outline, but the sober consensus among intelligence analysts.”
up with such a jarring shock. We therefore commend the reader to Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones’ sober exhortation, near the end of his life, in Appendix B.

64 Cartoon, by courtesy of Dr. Thomas Ice.
APPENDIX A

THE ESCHATOLOGY OF CHRIST, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE DISCOURSE IN MATTHEW 24 AND 25

by

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Bibliothea Sacra 7 (July 1850), pp. 452-478

INTRODUCTION

It will be admitted, I presume, by every intelligent reader of the Bible and the commentaries upon it, that there is often very great vagueness, uncertainty, and inconsistency in the interpretation of its language. It will also be admitted, I believe, that these faulty interpretations cannot fairly be attributed to the language itself; for most readers are convinced that there is scarcely a mode of speech in the whole compass of literature more simple, direct, and intelligible than is the language of the Bible as to much the greater portion of it. There must be some other cause, and the following, I suppose, will generally be received as the true cause, namely: Men who profess to be Christians usually feel obliged to believe what the Bible affirms; if any passage of the Bible, therefore, understood in its obvious and true sense, states a sentiment which they are strongly disinclined to believe, there is a powerful temptation to reconcile the words to some other meaning more agreeable to the interpreter. Hence has arisen a very general practice of interpreting meanings derived from other sources into the words of the Bible, instead of simply explaining the words themselves according to grammatical usage, the context, and the nature of the subject. The art of interpretation, instead of being a simple hydrant by which the waters of life may be drawn out of their receptacles for our use, has too often been made a sort of forcing-pump, by which other waters, not of life, have been driven into the Scriptural reservoirs. Some interpreters are in this respect much more guilty than others, but almost all have participated in the sin more or less. There is scarcely one who does not find some passage somewhere in the Bible, in respect to which he would like a little more latitude than the strictest rules of grammatical interpretation, faithfully carried out, will allow him; and if he himself takes this latitude, he cannot be very severe on others when they take the same. Hence the very great prevalence of the practice in all parties.
In view of these remarks, I propose to examine, by the strictest rules of grammatical interpretation some of the more important eschatological texts contained in our Lord’s discourse, particularly Matthew 24:29-31, and its parallels in Mark 13:24-27 and Luke 21:25-27, and see what they really import when thus examined.

The reader, that we may enter upon the subject understandingly, is earnestly requested, before we proceed any further with these remarks, to take the Greek Testament and carefully examine for himself the following eschatological passages from the discourses of Christ recorded in the Gospels.

**MATTHEW**

5:29-30 
10:33
12:31-32 
13:41-43, 49-50
16:24-27 
18:6-9
25:31-46 
26:64

**MARK**

3:28-30 
8:34-38
9:42-50 
14:62

**LUKE**

9:24-26 
12:9-10

**JOHN**

5:25-29 
6:39-40, 44

It is the purpose of the following pages to point out and illustrate the right interpretation of these and similar texts. In respect to all which are cited in the above paragraphs, there is but little difference of opinion among interpreters of any authority or note. They are generally understood in their obvious sense, as being really eschatological, as pertaining to the final judgment and a future state of rewards and punishments in the eternal world. The passage in Matthew 24:29-31, however, though in all respects similar to these, on account of the connection in which it stands, and some difficulties which are supposed to arise from the context, has not been so unanimously agreed upon. To this text, therefore, our attention will be principally directed; for if it can be shown that this must be understood eschatologically, must be interpreted as referring to the final judgment, there will be but little difficulty in applying all the others to the future state; while, if the eschatological interpretation of this text be given up, if this text is regarded as referring to the Jewish-Roman war, the destruction of Jerusalem, or any other temporal event, it will not be easy to prove philologically that any of the other passages, usually considered eschatological, necessarily have reference to an eternal condition of rewards and punishments in the world to come. The importance of the subject justifies and requires a careful, patient, and minute investigation; and in order to such an enquiry, we will first make a brief statement of what we regard as the right.

**PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION**

**IN RESPECT TO ALL TOPICS OF THIS KIND**

These principles of interpretation, (and in regard to them I suppose there will be no dispute,) are he two following:

1. We are never to depart from the obvious meaning of language without a necessity created by the context or by the nature of the subject.

   I say a necessity created by the context or by the nature of the subject; because if we admit necessities which are created by the theories, the opinions, or the feelings of the interpreter, interpretation at once becomes arbitrary, and we are all at afloat on a sea of conjecture.

   Interpretation then, is the art of forcing meanings into language, and not the art of eliciting meaning from it.

2. Inasmuch as the use of language is always modified by the opinions, feelings, and circumstances of those who use it, in the interpretation...
of any document, its contemporary history is an indispensable auxiliary.

These two principles give three things, and three only, which are ever allowed to modify the literal meaning of words, namely: 1) the nature of the subject; 2) the context; and 3) the contemporary history. When we say that a man that "he flies into a passion," and of a bird that "she flies into her nest," the nature of the subject at once indicates which of two very different meanings the word flies bears in each of these sentences.

In strict accordance with these principles I now propose to examine the passage in Matthew 24:29-31, and its parallel in Mark and Luke, and I earnestly request the reader to keep a strict watch over me, and see if in any instance I swerve in the least degree from the principles I have stated.

**TEXTS TO BE EXAMINED**

**Matthew 24:29-31**

29 Εὐθέως δὲ μετὰ τὴν θλίψιν τῶν ἡμερῶν ἐκείνων ὁ ἥλιος σκοτισθήσεται, καὶ ἡ σελήνη οὐ δώσει τὸ φέγγος αὐτῆς καὶ οἱ ἀστέρες τοῦ ἄνθρωπου ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ.

30 καὶ τότε φανήσεται τὸ σημεῖον τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐρχόμενον ἐν νεφέλαις μετὰ δυνάμεως καὶ δόξης πολλῆς καὶ ἀστέρων ἀνέμων.

31 καὶ ἀποστελεῖ τοὺς ἀγγέλους αὐτοῦ μετὰ δυνάμεως καὶ ἀποστελεῖ τοὺς ἐκλεκτοὺς αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τῶν κόσμων.

**Mark 13:24-27**

24 Αλλὰ ἐν ἑκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις, μετὰ τήν θλίψιν ἐκείνην, ὁ ἥλιος σκοτισθήσεται, καὶ ἡ σελήνη οὐ δώσει τὸ φέγγος αὐτῆς,

25 Καὶ οἱ ἀστέρες ἐσονται ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ πίπτοντες, καὶ οἱ δυνάμεις αἱ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς σαλευθήσονται.

26 Καὶ τότε ὃς ἄρθρῳ ἐρχόμενον ἐν νεφέλαις μετὰ δυνάμεως καὶ δόξης καὶ ἀστέρων ἀνέμων.

27 Καὶ τότε ἀποστελεῖ τοὺς ἀγγέλους αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐπισυνάξει τοὺς ἐκλεκτοὺς αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων ἀνέμων, ἀπ’ ἀκροὺς γῆς ἐως ἀκροὺς οὐρανοῦ.


25 Καὶ ἐσονται σημεία ἐν ἡλίῳ, καὶ σελήνῃ, καὶ ἀστροις, καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς συνοχὴ εὐθύνον ἐν ἀπορίᾳ, ἡχούσης θαλάσσης καὶ σάλου.

26 Αποψυχόντων ἀνθρώπων ἀπὸ φόβου καὶ προσδοκίας τῶν ἐπερχομένων τῇ οἰκουμένῃ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς συνοχῆ ἐθνῶν καὶ τοῖς ἄστροις.

27 Καὶ τότε ὃς ἄρθρῳ ἐρχόμενον ἐν νεφέλῃ μετὰ δυνάμεως καὶ δόξης πολλῆς.

In regard to these passages it must be observed, that the nature of the subject is the very thing in dispute respecting them. If the subject be the day of judgment, the words may be understood in their literal and most obvious sense; if the subject be the destruction of Jerusalem, the literal and most obvious sense of the words must be entirely abandoned, given up, and put far away; and for it a metaphorical meaning must be substituted, so far below the literal, so infinitely inferior to it, (even more unlike it than a picture of Niagara made of paint and canvas is unlike the roaring, thundering, rushing cataract itself,) that the very statement of the fact, after a careful reading of the words, is almost enough of itself to settle the whole question of criticism.

Conceding, however, this whole ground, I admit in the outset, for the argument’s sake, that the subject being the very thing in dispute, the nature of it cannot come in to modify our
interpretation, till we have ascertained what it is; and accordingly, the only sources left to enable us to ascertain the meaning of the passages are: 1) the literal import of the language, 2) the context, and 3) the contemporary history.

THE LITERAL IMPORT OF THE LANGUAGE.

What is the literal import of the language, as it stands in the pages of the Bible, and without any other source of information respecting its meaning than what the words themselves give? Read the passage in Matthew 24:29-31, read it either in the Greek original or in any competent translation, and see what kind of an impression the language, considered by itself, most obviously and most naturally makes. Here it is:

(29) Immediately (ἐὐθέως in the Greek) after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. (30) And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. (31) And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

We must remember that our Savior did not utter his speech in the same language in which the report of his remarks is given. He probably spake in the conversational Hebrew, the Syro-Chaldaic or Aramaean dialect, (as it is sometimes called), of his time; and the report of his remarks is made in Greek. The passage in Matthew, therefore, is a Greek translation of what Jesus spoke in Hebrew. Matthew, therefore, is a translator of what Christ said, and not a reporter merely. There are two other reporters and translators of what our Savior said on this occasion, for all three were divinely inspired to give the ideas with perfect accuracy. Let us then read their report and translation, as well as that of Mathew. Here they are:

Mark 13: (24) But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light. (25) And the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. (26) And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds, with great power and glory. (27) And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth, and shall gather his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven.

Luke 21: (25) And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring. (26) Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth; for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. (27) And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud, with power and great glory.

Observe in the 29th verse of Matthew, the great changes in nature, the darkening of the sun and moon, the falling of the stars, the tossing of the hosts of heaven; in the 30th verse the sign (σήμειον) or visible appearance of Christ in the clouds of heaven and compare this verse with Matthew 16:27; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; in the 31st verse compare the angels, the trumpets, the gathering together of the elect for the whole habitable world (ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων ἀνέμων, ἀπ’ ἄκρων οὐρανῶν ἐως ἄκρων αὐτῶν) (no translation scarcely do justice to he force of the original), and compare this verse with Matthew 13:41-42; I Corinthians 15:51-52; I Thessalonians 4:15-17; II Thessalonians 1:7-10; Revelation 20:11-14. How in all the world were the elect gathered together, with a great sound of trumpets, from the very extremities of the heavens, at any time during the Roman-Jewish war? So far from being gathered then, they were every where scattered, literally, spiritually, and in every way. Compare also
Matthew 13:41-43, 49-50; 25:31-46. Certainly, according to the literal import of the language, here is as plain and as fearful description of the great day of judgment as can be put into human speech. All its expressions, all its figures, all its imagery, taken in their obvious import, must belong to that event, and cannot without extreme violence be made to refer to any other. Anyone who can read verses 29-31 carefully and thoughtfully, and then spiritualize or allegorize them into a description of any thing which took place during the siege and overthrow of Jerusalem, need never be disturbed by any of the most extravagant allegorizing interpretations of the church fathers or the mediaeval mystics; nor can such an interpreter find much difficulty in making any conceivable description of the day of judgment, that can possibly be expressed in human language, to refer to the destruction of Jerusalem. With such latitude of interpretation there is an end of all eschatology, and and interpretation itself becomes wholly subjective. The thing needs only to be looked at; and it must be a blind eye which cannot see through it.

Thus much for the language taken in its literal and obvious sense. It is alleged, however, that the ursus loquendi [usage in speaking] of the prophetic writings justifies the application of such language as the above to such events as the siege and destruction of Jerusalem; that the darkening of the sun and moon, the shaking and falling of the heavenly bodies, etc., are prophetic symbols of the overthrow of nations, governments, etc. All this may be true, or partly true, and yet not reach the point for which the assertion is made. Let us examine the texts adduced on this point, and see how they compare with the descriptions in our Lord’s discourse. They are such as these. Amos 8:9; “I will cause the sun to go down at noon, I will darken the earth in the clear day.” Micah 3:6; “Night shall be unto you . . . it shall be dark unto you . . . he sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them.” Ezekiel 32:7; “I will cover the heavens and make the stars thereof dark, I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over thee.” Jeremiah 15:9; “Her sun is gone down while it was yet day.” Isaiah 13:10; “For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light; the sun shall be darkened in his going down, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine.” Compare also Psalm 18:7-14. Here indeed we see strong poetic description, highly wrought metaphor; but how immeasurably different from the Lord in his discourse! The only really strong passage, the only one which fairly admits of comparison with the expressions in the discourse of our Lord, is in Isaiah 34:4, and in regard to this prophecy, I accord fully with the following judicious remarks of Bishop Lowth in his commentary upon it:

By a figure very common in the prophetic writings, any city or people, remarkably distinguished as enemies of the people and kingdom of God, is put for these enemies in general. This seems here to be the case with Edom and Bozra. It seems, therefore, reasonable to suppose, with many learned expositors, that this prophecy has a further view to events still future; to some great revolutions to be effected in later times, antecedent to that more perfect state of the kingdom of God upon earth, which the Holy Scriptures warrant us to expect.¹

The passage in Revelation 6:12-17 is supposed by some to indicate merely the temporal realities of the Jews in the Roman war; but I suppose the chapter is intended as a picture of the kind of calamities, (foreign conquest, war, famine, pestilence, etc.), by which the Jews, as the enemies of God’s kingdom, would be swept away; and that the picture is not confined to the

¹ Bishop Lowth’s Commentary on Isaiah, p. 297. [Certainly the universal context of vs. 1-3 would support this interpretation. BEH]
Roman war, but takes in all time till the final judgment. To this view, the next chapter as a picture of the deliverance of the elect, exactly corresponds. The principle of the remark quoted from Lowth is applicable to both these chapters.

THE CONTEXT

Let us now come to our second source of information respecting the meaning of the text, namely the context. For the present I shall consider only that part of the context which precedes the text. The context following the text, and the word εὐθέως in Matthew 24:29, can be more appropriately investigated hereafter under the head of objections. In the first place let us read Matthew 24:21 and Mark 13:19.

(21) For then shall be great tribulation, (θλῖψιν) such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.

(19) For in those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be.

The affliction (θλῖψιν) here spoken of, all will admit to be the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, for that, all acknowledge, is the subject of discourse before and after; and no other affliction can answer to this description, for that was the very climax and acme of all human suffering, and it is remarkable that Josephus describes it in almost the same form of expression, namely: “It appears to me that the misfortunes of all men from the beginning of the world, if they be compared to those of the Jews, are not so considerable as they were.”

And this melancholy testimony is abundantly confirmed by the narrative which Josephus has himself given of the facts, of which he was an eye-witness, and by the statements of Tacitus and other historians.

Now Matthew in our text (24:29), refers to that affliction when he says, or, more properly, reports Christ as saying, μετὰ τὴν θλῖψιν τῶν ἡμερῶν ἑκείνων, after the affliction of those days, and Mark also (13:24), in the words ἐν ἑκείνοις ταῖς ἡμέραις, μετὰ τὴν θλῖψιν ἑκείνην, in those days after that affliction; and then they proceed to describe the events under consideration. Thus they both affirm that the words of our text refer to something which was to take place after that affliction, after the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, and of course, according to the testimony of both these evangelists, the words of our text must refer, not to the destruction of Jerusalem, but to something which was to take place afterwards; how long afterwards we shall consider by and by.

The context thus far, then, decides the point that the verses under consideration must refer to some event which was to take place subsequent to the destruction of Jerusalem; and to what other event has any one ever thought of referring them but to the great day of Judgment?

Two, then, of the only three sources of information to which we can appeal, the literal import of the language, and the context (preceding it) refer the passage under consideration, necessarily, to the great day of judgment.

How is it with the third?

THE CONTEMPORARY HISTORY

We come here to our third and only remaining source of information respecting the meaning of the language under consideration, namely, the contemporary history, or the opinions, feelings, and circumstances of the apostles and their Master at the time of the delivery of this discourse. Our first remark under this head must be made up of two elements, namely, the context in connection with the contemporary history.

The disciples (Matt. 24:3) had asked our Lord two questions; (1) when the destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem, which had just been predicted (Matt. 23:32-39), would take place? and (2) what would be the sign of his coming and of the end of the world? (συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος).

Whatever others may understand by this question, the disciples unquestionably understood by it the great consummation, the final judgment. This I believe is not often questioned. The Jews and early Christians, generally, supposed that the final consummation would immediately follow the destruction of Jerusalem. No fact of human history, I think, is better attested or more generally credited than this. This opinion was very prevalent, and nearly if not quite universal, and some expressions in I Thessalonians 4:15-18 (then we which are alive and remain, etc.) tended to establish the idea that the great consummation would take place during the existence of the generation then living. This misunderstanding produced so much perturbation, that the apostles felt themselves called upon to utter solemn warnings against it (II Thess. 2:1-8; II Pet. 3:3-14). Now we beseech you (says Paul in reference to the misunderstanding of his first epistle) by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our fathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by our epistle, as that the day of Christ is at hand. He then proceeds to show that so many and such important events were to take place before the final consummation, that this could not reasonably be supposed to be immediately impending; but neither he nor Peter undertake to show how distant the day was, for neither of them knew;—that had never been revealed to them. For aught that they could tell, it might be sooner or later, and they undoubtedly expected that it would occur at no very distant date. On points not revealed to them by inspiration, they did not presume to decide, for on such points their judgment was as fallible as that of other men.

Christ assured the apostles in this very discourse, that he would not tell them the time in regard to their questions generally (Matt. 24:36; Mark 13:32); and he afterwards solemnly assured them that the time was not to be made matter of revelation at all (Acts 1:7). How then, could the apostles know anything about the time, any more than we?

In the verses preceding our text, Christ has answered their first question as definitely as he intends to answer it, impressing the certainty of the event without defining the time; and then, from the 29th verse he proceeds to answer the second question proposed. He then proceeds, from Matthew 24:37 to 25:30, to give various warnings and instructions and practical exhortations equally applicable to both events,—the destruction of Jerusalem and the day of judgment—and finally closes the whole with a solemn and impressive description of the principal scenes of the last great day (Matt. 25:31-46). In all this he says not one word to determine whether those two events would be contem- poraneous or not; he studiously avoids giving any hint either to correct or confirm their error on that topic; on the contrary he emphatically assures them that they knew nothing about the time, that he should tell them nothing about the time; nay, that if he should undertake to tell them the time, he would be altogether exceeding his commission and his powers as the Messiah, the Son of God (Mark 13:32). How, then, I ask again, were the disciples to know anything about the time? How could they know that the day of Judgment would not immediately follow the destruction of Jerusalem? How could they know anything at all

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3 Gary DeMar is one of those exceptions, and his explanation of Matthew 24:3 has been answered in the earlier part of this paper.
about the matter, except this, that they knew nothing?

The light of contemporary history is necessary for the understanding of these and the other eschatological passages of the New Testament, because some contend that he Hebrews and early Christians had no idea of a future state of retribution, and no word even to indicate a place of future punishment. If this were truly so, some of the expressions of Jesus in this discourse, and in other paces, must have sounded very strangely to them; but as they could not imagine him to be speaking of things which had no existence and of which they had no conception, they would prob-ably endeavor to give his words some exposition which would make them apply to circumstances destined to take place in this world. But if, on the contrary, the doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishment, of eternal retributions, were as fully established among them as it has been among Christians since, if they had definite and well known expressions to indicate the place of future punishment,—then, most unquestionably, they must have understood our Savior’s discourses, which we have quoted as eschatological, as referring to a future state; and he, knowing the attitude of their minds on this subject, must have intended, in these words, to convey to them ideas of the future state. Of this, certainly, there can be no reasonable doubt on the mind of any one who examines these discourses of our Lord as they are recorded in the Gospels.

Let us then examine the statements of the proper writers on this subject; and first, of Josephus, a Hebrew, a Pharisee, and for some portion of his life a contemporary of the apostles. The passages which I shall quote from this writer may be found in his Antiquities XVIII. 1, 3, and the Jewish Wars II. 8. 11, 14. III. 8. 5. In giving an account of the opinions of his own sect, the Pharisees, Josephus says: “They also believe that souls have an immortal vigor in them, and that under the earth there will be rewards and punishments, according as they have lived virtuously or viciously in this life; and the latter are to be detained in an everlasting prison, but that the former shall have power to revive and live again.” They also say “that the souls of bad men are subject to eternal punishment”—while the Saddu-cees “take away the belief of the immortal duration of the soul, and the punishments and rewards of Hades.” On this subject we know that the followers of Christ took ground with the Pharisees and against the Sadducees. See Acts 23:6-9.

Josephus also expresses it as his own opinion that “for bad souls there is a dark and tempestuous den full of never-ceasing punishments.” He says: “The vehement inclinations of bad men to vice are restrained by the fear and expectation they are in, that though they should lie concealed in this life, they would suffer immortal punishment after their death.” Again, “the soul is ever immortal.” “The souls of those whose hands have acted madly against themselves, are reserved in the darkest places in Hades.” In these extracts I have used the old translation of Whiston as being the one on general use, and though clumsy, faithful and accurate. Let any one who chooses consult the original. Human language cannot be stronger, more perfectly unequivocal as to the opinions of the Hebrews in the time of Christ and the apostles. The Sadducees were but a small sect, they were the infidels, the freethinkers of the time; and their opinions never greatly influenced the popular belief; and in respect to the point we are now discussing, their existence is of no importance whatever.

The other Jewish writers fully corroborate the testimony of Josephus in this regard; as is well known to all who are familiar with the Talmud. Paulus (Comment. III, 499) gives us the following extract from the Tanchuma. “Thy righteousness is as the mountains of the Lord
(Ps. 36:7). What are the mountains compared to it? Answer: They have no end; and so also the retribution of the rewards of the just in the future time will have no end. Thy judgments are a great deep. Why is the great deep compared to them? Answer: Because no one is able to search it through; and so also no one is able to search through the punishment of the wicked in the future time.” Here the reward of the he righteous and the punishment of the wicked in the future state are placed on precisely the same ground as to intensity and duration, just as they are in our Savior’s discourse, according to the obvious, literal import of the words in Matthew 25:46.

Such being the prevailing impression on the public mind at the time of the delivery of our Savior’s discourses, his language on this subject could not possibly have been otherwise understood by his hearers than in its plain, obvious literal sense. Precisely the same ideas on this subject we accordingly find prevalent among all the early Christians. Clement, the companion of Paul (Phil. 4:3), in an epistle to the Corinthians (II Cor. 3:12-16), expresses himself as follows:

“Thus speaks the prophet concerning those who keep not their seal (Isa. 66:24); ‘their worm shall not die and their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be for a spectacle unto all flesh.’ Let us therefore repent while we are yet upon the earth; for we are as clay in the hands of the artificer. For as the potter, if he make a vessel and it be turned amiss in his hands, or broken, again he forms it anew; but if he have gone so far as to throw it into the furnace of fire, he can no more bring any remedy to it; so we, while we are in this world, should repent with our whole heart for whatsoever evil we have done in the flesh, while we have yet the time of repentance, that we may be saved by the Lord. For after we shall have departed out of this world, we shall no longer be able either to confess our sins or to repent in the other.”

Language cannot be made to express more clearly the idea of eternal punishment in a future world, than it is done in this passage of Clement. It is true the New Testament expresses the same sentiment in language equally plain; but we are required by some to modify the meaning of the language of the New Testament, to turn it aside from its plain literal import on account of what they allege to be contemporary adverse opinions! But how is it when we show that the contemporary opinions are precisely the same as those expressed by the language of the New Testament understood in its obvious, literal sense? Certainly we have double proof that Christ and his apostles clearly taught the doctrine of endless retribution in a future state.

But it is said the New Testament has no word to indicate the place of future punishment, (and if it had not, would that prove there is no future punishment?) that the word Gehenna, for example, the term most frequently used, is derived from the Hebrew Geh-hinnom, and means the same thing, namely, a valley on the south side of Jerusalem where children were once offered in sacrifice to Moloch, and which subsequently became the receptacle for burning the ofal and sweepings of the city (I Kings 2:7; II Kings 16:3-4; 23:10). Critics of the highest eminence, and on this subject entirely disinterested, have denied this etymology altogether, and assigned to the word a very different origin, as for example Paulus in his Commentar I, 673.

But allowing that the Greek word γέεννα is derived from the Hebrew words יִבְנָה יֹהַן does that prove that the two phrases denote the same thing? That Gehenna is the vale of Hinnom? Is the etymology of a word always a sure guide to its meaning? Does a derived word always indicate the same idea as its primitive? Very far from it—often just the reverse, as every student of language knows. Our English word constable comes from the Latin comes stabuli, count or superintendent of the stable; but does that prove
that all our constables are necessarily hostlers? Our English esquire is from the French escuyer, and that again from the Latin scutum, a shield, and that from the Greek σκύτος a hide, of which shields were originally made; but does that prove that our justices of the peace are all tanners? The English word lady is from the Saxon hlafdīg, which comes from a word meaning a loaf of bread; but does that prove that ladies are loaves of bread? The argument in all these cases is the same, and as good in any one of the cases as in any of the others.

It is use which determines the meaning of a word, and not etymology; and contemporary history gives ample testimony to the usage, in the times of Christ and the apostles, in respect to the words Gehenna, as also Tāρταρος, and other words employed to express the same idea. And first, as to Jewish usage: “Says Rabbi Eliezer, seven things were created before the world was created; these are, the law (Prov. 8:22), Gehenna, (Isa. 30:33), paradise (Gen. 2:8), the throne of glory, the (heavenly) temple, penitence, and the name of the Messiah” (Paulus, Comment. III. 495). If the Jews meant by Gehenna a valley in the neighborhood of Jerusalem, we may well ask, how would that be created before the world was created?

The testimony as to Christian usage is no less explicit. Justin Martyr, a native of Palestine, and born not far from the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, says expressly: “Gehenna is the place where those who have lived unjustly shall be punished.” (Apol. ad Anton. P. 66.) Bretschneider’s N. T. Lexicon, art. γέεννα.

For numerous examples of the same kind, examine the copious collections made by Wetstein in his Nov. Test. I. 513-515; and also Kuinoel’s Comment. I. 683.

RESULT

According, then, to all the sources of information which we have or can have, for the determining of the meaning of words, namely, their literal import, the context, and the contemporary history, our Savior everywhere, in his eschatological discourses, speaks of the day of judgment and the eternal retribution in the future world, and not of the destruction of Jerusalem in this world; and this is very emphatically true in respect to the passage more immediately under consideration (Matt. 24:29-31).

This destruction of Jerusalem is a very convenient resort, a kind of universal tertium quid [a third way after two options] to a certain class of expositors. Whatever in the New Testament would make them afraid, if properly understood, they call it destruction of Jerusalem, and so let it pass.

The interpretation of the passages in question, it seems to me, is settled, is positive proof can settle anything.

Objections

We will now proceed to consider the objections which are urged with most plausibility against our interpretation of Matthew 24:29-31. They are the three following:

1. Christ speaks to his disciples as if they themselves would witness the transactions which he describes (Matt. 24:33; Luke 21:28).

2. He places the judgment in immediate proximity to the destruction of Jerusalem (Matt. 24:29).

3. He says that generation should not pass away till the accomplishment of his predictions (Matt. 24:34).

Objection 1st. Christ speaks to the disciples as if they themselves would witness the

Throughout this address, and in his eschatological discourses generally, Christ so selects his phraseology as to give his hearers no means of inferring anything in regard to the time of judgment. On this point he intended to keep them ignorant, and he made repeated and open declarations of this intention. Whether it would be in their own day, or some subsequent period, they knew not; though they rather supposed it might be in their own day, and Christ said nothing either to confirm or correct this impression. That the disciples were fully aware of their own ignorance in this respect if manifest from the fact that they repeated their question to him just before his ascension (Acts 1:7), but with no better satisfaction than before, for his reply was: *It is not for you to know the times or the seasons*—thus peremptorily cutting them off from all hope of knowing.

In view of all these facts, can any one suppose that Jesus intended to intimate in Matthew 24:33 and Luke 21:28, that his twelve disciples would live to see the destruction of Jerusalem? If he did, he made a great mistake, for not one of them lived to see the destruction of Jerusalem. They were all dead before it took place except John; and he was then at Ephesus, a great way off, and saw nothing of it. But every one who heard Christ’s discourse, and every one who read it or who may hereafter read it, since its delivery, will see the day of judgment and witness the signs of its approach. The objection, so far from weakening, confirms our interpretation.

*Objection 2nd.* He places the judgment in immediate proximity to the destruction of Jerusalem (Matt. 24:29).

This is true, and it is exact accordance with the genius, the universal idiom of prophecy. A local temporal event is taken as the sign and pledge of a universal spiritual transaction; and the two things ever so remote in time, and whatever important events may have intervened between them, are represented in immediate succession. Thus every considerable temporal deliverance in the Old Testament prophecies, is followed immediately by predictions of the coming of the Messiah and the millennium immediately with the Jewish deliverance from the Assyrian oppression (Isaiah 9-11 compared with Matthew 4:15-16), as if they were to occur in immediate succession. Again in other places the same prophet connects these same events with the deliverance from the Babylonian captivity, as if they were to occur immediately after that. See Isaiah 40 and the following chapters. The deliverance from Assyria was to take place more than two centuries earlier that the deliverance from Babylonia; and the prophet certainly knew that the coming of the Messiah with the Millennium could not succeed immediately to both the Assyrian and the Babylonian deliverances; yet in different passages he connects these events with both the others, in accordance with the genius and constant custom of prophecy, in which generally the succession of events only is regarded, and exact chronology studiously avoid-ed. The prophets themselves, for the most part, knew not the chronology of the events which they foretold, but only the succession. The apostle Peter expressly informs us (I Pet. 1:10-12) that the prophets who predicted the Messiah, diligently sought to now the time when he would appear, but could not ascertain it; the most that they could learn being that he would not appear in their day.

There is another important principle here, which must not be overlooked. In II Samuel 7 (cf. Heb. 1:5) Solomon (the son and successor of David) and the Messiah—the Hebrew temple and the Christian church—are blended together in prophetic vision, so that it is impossible satisfactorily to separate the two elements linguistically. Compare also Psalm 8 with Hebrews 2, Psalm 16 with Acts 2:25-31 and 13:35, Psalm 22
with Matthew 27:35-50. This principle is carried so far and so clearly recognized in the Bible, that sometimes the proper names are actually interchanged. Thus John the Baptist is called Elijah (Mal. 4:5, cf. Mat. 11:14), and Christ is called David (Ezek. 24:23-24). There is in this way often a two-fold reference in prophecy, both in prediction of events and of persons (cf. Isa. 7:14-17 with Matt. 1:22-23). No one who admits that the writers of the New Testament are inspired and divinely authorized interpreters of the Old Testament, can consistently deny the existence of this two-fold view in at least several of the scriptural prophecies. I am sorry to see that such critics as Neander, Tholuck, and Hengstenberg, rather than admit this principle, have concluded, though reluctantly, (especially the last), to give up the authority of the New Testament as a correct interpreter of the Old Testament. Everywhere you find proof of this in the Commentaries on the Psalms by Hengstenberg and Tholuck, and in the Life of Christ and History of the Apostles by Neander. And so it must needs be: there is neither logical nor critical consistency without it.

It is to this principle mainly that Lord Bacon refers (Advancement of Learning, B. II.), when he speaks of a “latitude which is agreeable and familiar unto divine prophecies, being of the nature of their author, to whom a thousand years are but as one day; therefore they are not fulfilled punctually at once, but have springing and germ-inant accomplishment throughout many ages, though the height of fullness of them may refer to some one age.” In reference to this principle also we find the following significant remarks of Herder (Werke XII. 261ff.) written in vindication of his method of interpreting the Apocalypse. “The more I compared the imagery of the whole book (the Apocalypse), with the prophecy of Christ in Matthew 24 and 25, and its frightful fulfillment according to Josephus, the more there seemed to me a resemblance, an analogy, a solution of the vision and its imagery.”

“The whole destruction of Jerusalem I viewed as Christ viewed it, as the sign, the pledge, the type, of the last great issue of things.” “With that Jesus connected the end of the world itself, and prefigured his final coming in that first coming.” “The higher prospect came to John in the same connection; but no figure now applies to Jerusalem alone; every thing acquires gigantic proportions; the view pertains to a higher, a final, a universal future, yet all in images borrowed from the first one.” “This whole frightful history is only the pledge, the symbol, the sign, of still another fulfillment.” Compare here the remarks of Lowth quoted on a preceding page. (supra p. 458.)

This idea I feel compelled to retain so long as I hold the New Testament to be an authoritative interpreter of the Old Testament; and while we retain this idea there is no difficulty in Christ’s placing the great day of judgment in direct proximity with the destruction of Jerusalem; it is just what he ought to do; it is just what the prophets always do in all predictions of this kind; it is one of the most uniform, most constantly occurring idioms of scriptural prophecy.

But there is another peculiarity of prophecy, which will of itself abundantly account for and justify the proximity, in question, even without recurring at all to the important principle just stated.

Events of the same class are often represented in successive series without allusion in any one series of events which belong to another class, however important these events in themselves may be. In this respect prophecy may be compared to a series of historical pictures suspended in a gallery, in the order of the occurrence of the transactions, but without any record of the dates. Imagine such a picture gallery in reference to the history of our own country, in two departments, one for the peaceful, the other for the warlike events. The first picture in the peaceful series
might be the landing at Jamestown, the second the landing at Plymouth, the third the first harvest, the fourth the first legislative assembly, the fifth the Congress at Philadelphia, the sixth the declaration of independence, the seventh the inauguration of Washington, the eighth the settlement of Cincinnati, the ninth the commencement of steam navigation, the tenth the opening of the first canal, the eleventh the laying of the first railroad. Here we have succession but not chronology; you know the order but not the dates, the intervals of time between the events as they actually occurred were widely variant, but their proximity in place as they hang in the gallery is all the same, however different the absolute intervals of time; and there is no picture in this series of any warlike event, though very numerous and important occurrences of this kind were actually all along intermingled with the peaceful events.

Here may be another series in the gallery representing only warlike events, and these may be the Indian massacre in Virginia; Philip’s war in New England; capture of Montreal under Wolf; battle of Lexington; surrender of Burgoyne; capture of Cornwallis; the taking of Washington city; the battle of Baltimore; the barrel of New Orleans, etc. Here also the same remarks are applicable as in the former case, as to succession without chronology, order without dates, proximity in place without proximity in time. The superintendent of the gallery hangs the pictures along close together, without leaving spaces between the frames corresponding to the intervals of time which intervened between the transactions represented in the several pictures.

Now, just so is prophecy constructed—just such a picture gallery do we have in the prophets—succession without chronology, order without dates, proximity in place, without proximity in time. For illustration take Zechariah 9:1-10. This was written 200 years before Alexander the Great, 500 years before Christ, and probably at least 2,500 years before the millennium. Here are four pictures, namely, (1) the victories of Alexander vs. 1-5; (2) humiliation and eventual conversion of the Philistine cities, vs. 6-7; (3) safety of the Jewish nation during the progress of Alexander, v. 8; (4) advent of the Messiah, his universal reign, and the means by which it is to be accomplished, vs. 9-10, cf. Matthew 21:5.

The destruction of Jerusalem was the first of a long series of judgments, which Christ is to execute on his enemies, and which is to terminate in the great day of judgment. Christ in this discourse (Matt. 24-25) holds up only two pictures, the first and the last of the series; and in accordance with the universal rule of prophecy, brings them into immediate proximity if place, though they were widely separated in time, yet not so widely as some of the events of the first 10 verses of Zechariah 9, which yet are placed in the same immediate proximity.

Remember—prophecy is not anticipated history, nor is it written according to the rules of history—it has rules of its own, which (like everything else) must be learned by a laborious process of induction—by a careful study of the prophetic writers themselves.

We have said enough to vindicate our interpretation of this verse even were we to admit that the word ἐνθέως here is properly translated by the word immediately. On this point, however, we offer a few remarks.

Matthew says ἐνθέως δὲ μετὰ τὴν θλίψιν τῶν ἡμερῶν ἐκείνων, and Mark, ἐκείνας ταῖς ἡμέραῖς, μετὰ τὴν θλίψιν ἐκείνην—an expression entirely indefinite as to time, and indicating only the latter days, or days of the Messiah, as in all the prophets. Jesus, as before observed, did not speak in Greek but in the Aramaean. Matthew and Mark are both (as we believe) divinely inspired translators of what he
did say, and therefore both correct. Our Savior, then, must have used some term which was indefinite in its meaning, admitting of both translations. Certainly he could not have used a term which was definite as to time, because he had assured his disciples that he should not tell them the time. It would be after the destruction of Jerusalem, but whether early or late, during their life or after their death, he never informed them. Paulus, Schott, and others conjecture that he might have used the word ἄνωθεν [pithom, suddenness/suddenly], which is found in Job 5:3 in the sense of suddenly, and is there translated in the Septuagint by the Greek word εὐθέως. See Schleusner’s Sept. Lexicon on this word. The εὐθέως and the μετά extend over the whole period of conflict and trial to the final triumphant decision.

Nothing is more certain, as a philological fact, than that εὐθέως is not universally, always and everywhere to be translated by the English word immediately. Every Greek lexicographer will teach us that. Schleusner gives us, as his second definition of the word, subito, suddenly; and the most recent and most esteemed of the Greek lexicographers among the Germans. Passow, Rost, and Schmidt, give as one definition of εὐθέως the German word plötzlich, suddenly. So Liddell and Scott, in their new Greek-English Lexicon, under εὐθέως give suddenly in the second class of definitions. Bretschneider, in his New Testament Lexicon, gives the sense of εὐθέως in some connections by ex improviso, unexpectedly. In the New Testament there are many places where this is evidently the meaning of the word. For example Mark 9:15 καὶ εὐθὺς πᾶς ὁ ὄχλος ἰδόντες αὐτὸν ἔξεσθαιμβήθησαν, and the whole multitude SUDDENLY seeing him were astonished. Says Kuinoel on the passage, “subitaneus et inopinatus, sed peropportunus Christi adventus, erat causa stuporis—the sudden and unexpected but very opportune arrival of Christ, was the cause of astonishment” (cf. Luke 6:49; Acts 12:10; Rev. 4:2). Now this is the meaning of the word which belongs to it in Matthew 24:29. He always represents his coming to judgment as a sudden, an unexpected coming (Matt. 24:27, 42, 44, 50; Rev. 3:3; cf. I Thess. 5:2-3; II Pet. 3:10). According to all usage and all analogy, then, we are authorized and required to translate the verse in question, suddenly, or unexpectedly, after the affliction of those days, etc. The context plainly requires this, vs. 27, 42, 44, 50. I know not why it is that so many have supposed themselves, in this case, tied down to the word immediately. The word εὐθὺς has quite a latitude of definitions. In classic Greek it is often used in the exact sense of our English phrases for instance, for example.

Objection 3rd. But Christ says, that generation should not pass till the accomplishment of these predictions. Matthew 24:34 ἄν πάντα ταῦτα γένηται.

If in this verse Christ meant to tell the time, it is exceedingly strange that in the verse immediately following he should so solemnly declare, that no one, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only, knew anything about the time (Matt. 24:34-35; Mark 13:30-31). Our English translation here makes a glaring inconsistency between these two declarations, which the Greek entirely avoids. In the original there is no word which means fulfilled, or which can in this place, with any propriety, be so translated. The word here in the original, the word used by all three of the evangelists, though they very seldom in other passages use the same word when repeating the same sentiment, the word here used by all three of the evangelists, is γένηται, the subjunctive present, third person singular of γίνομαι. Now what is the meaning of γίνομαι? Hedericus and Schleusner give, as the first definition, orior, which Lyttleton defines, to arise, to begin, to have a beginning. The modern
German lexicographers, as Schmidt, Rost, Wahl, Passow, and Bretschneider, define γίνομαι by the German word entstehen, almost without except-ion, making this the very first definition; and entstehen according to Rabenhoorst, Noehden, Adler, etc., means to begin, to originate, to arise. Take the definition of entstehen, as given in Weber’s Kritisch erklärendes Handwörterbuch der deutschen Sprache, and you have the exact meaning of the Greek word γίνομαι in the passage under consideration. It is this: Entstehen seinen Anfang nehmen = to take its beginning. The proper definition of γίνομαι is to begin to be, to take a beginning. Dr. Robinson, in his Greek Lexicon of the New Testament, art. γίνομαι, says: “This verb is Mid. Dep, intrans. With the primary signification, to begin to be.” And again, in the definitions: “I. To begin to be,” etc. This, as the appropriate sense of the word, can be established, not only by the authority of all the best lexicographers, but also by numberless examples from the classical Greek, the Septuagint, and the New Testament. John 8:58, Jesus says, πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμί, which Kuinoel very properly translates: antequam Abraham ESSE COEPISSET, me exitisse. For a like use of the word in the New Testament compare Matthew 8:16; John 6:16-17, 19—in the Sept. I Chronicles 20:4 (ἐγένετο ἐπὶ πόλεμος ἐν Γαζεί, there began yet a war in Gerar—very well translated in the Vulgate, initium est bellum), Psalm 89 (90):2; Tobit 3:8. Among the classics, Herodotus (II. 11.) says πρὸς τερον ἦ ἐνε γενέσθαι, before that I began to be, and he also uses the word in the same sense in I. 198. III. 85. So Xenophon in his Cyropaedia (I. IV. 17) says ἡδη δὲ ἐστερας γενομένης, but when it began to be evening—and also, I. VI. 42 ἐπειδὰν ἦμερα γένηται, when the day begins to be, and Memorab. IV. VII. 19 ἐπεὶ ἐστέρα ἐγενέτο, after it began to be evening. The very common use of the word γίνομαι in the sense of to be born, depends entirely on its meaning, begin to be.

What, then, philologically considered, is the proper translation of the text? Clearly this: this generation shall not pass, till all these things begin to be, or, till all these things take their beginning. So Luther interprets it, in his note on the passage: Es wird solches alles angfangen zu geschehen noch bey dieser zeit, weil ihr lebet: All this will begin to take place in the present time, while you are yet alive. Let there be no quibbling, as if γίνομαι must always be so translated. Every word, beside its original, primitive meaning, has also derived meanings, which are in frequent use. No word, especially no verb of such extensive use as the Greek γίνομαι, can ever be translated into another language, in all its variety of meanings, by the use of one unvarying synonym. Try the experiment with the English verbs take, make, put, and see what infinite absurdities you would fall into.

The destruction of Jerusalem was the first occasion on which Christ appeared as a judge, taking vengeance on his enemies. Before, he had appeared as a suffering Redeemer, an atoning sacrifice. The destruction of Jerusalem was the first in that series of judgments which terminates and is consummated in the great final judgment, which in the preceding verses had been so vividly and so terribly described. The three judgments began, now are they going on, and at length they will be completed, on

“That day of wrath, that dreadful day,
When heaven and earth shall pass away.
That generation which saw Jesus, the meek, the uncomplaining, the suffering, victim, should not pass till it had seen him assume the character of the mighty, the inexorable, the avenging judge, taking vengeance on then that know not God and obey not his truth (cf. Matt. 16:28; Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27).

The three evangelists, though they use different words in translating every other part of this discourse, all use the same words here, in the same person, number, mode, and tense,—they all say γένηται, thus sowing that they use the word in its peculiar and appropriate sense of BEGIN TO BE. We will place them one above the other, that the identity may be seen.

**Matthew 24:34**

Αὕτη λέγω ὑμῖν, οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ ή γενεὰ αὕτη ἐως ἃν πάντα ταῦτα γένηται.

**Mark 13:30**

Αὕτη λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ ή γενεὰ αὕτη μέχρις οὗ ταῦτα πάντα γένηται.

**Luke 21:32**

Αὕτη λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ ή γενεὰ αὕτη ἐως ἃν πάντα γένηται.

According, then, to all the rules of critical judgment, which can be applied to a case of this kind, and in full view of all the objections which can be urged against our interpretation, we decide unhesitatingly that these solemn words of the gospel under consideration are, that they were by the disciples understood to be, that they were by our Savior intended for a fearful description of the great day of final judgment, when the dead, small and great, shall stand before God, and the books shall be opened, and another book will be opened which is the book of life: and the dead will be judged out of those things which are written in the books, according to the works. And whoever is not found written in the book of life, will be cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death (Rev. 20:12-15).

In conclusion, I would say, that even if γίνομαι had not the meaning which all the best lexicographers and the best usage give it, if it were, as it is often erroneously supposed to be, synonymous with εἰμί, if it might properly be rendered be fulfilled instead of begin to be; even in this case, the common usage of the prophetic writers, the style, structure, and custom of the prophetic speech, would fully justify the interpretation we have adopted. What is more common in the prophecies that to speak of a thing already determined upon in the divine counsels as already done? than to speak of a fulfillment as completed when it has decidedly commenced? In prophetic style, when the first of a series is done, the whole is done (Rev. 11:15; cf. Nahum, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, on Nineveh, Babylon, Tyre, Edom etc.). And in the prediction of an event fully resolved upon in the divine mind, it is very often spoken of as already past, insomuch that one of the common rules given for the interpretation of prophecy is, that the past tense indicates certainty of fulfillment.6

**AUTHORITIES**

I am aware that many of the best scholars, many of the most judicious, learned and reliable critics, both in our own country and in Europe, have entertained and with great ability defended the opinion that the whole of Matthew 24 which precedes v. 35 must refer exclusively to the judgments on the Jews in connection with their wars with the Romans from Vespasian to Hadrian. They suppose that in no other way can a consistent interpretation be made out for v. 34. Were it not for this verse, and the εὐθέως in v. 29, they would be very glad to interpret vs. 29-32

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otherwise. Are these difficulties really insurmountable? Is not the interpretation proposed in the preceding pages fairly and philologically sustained?

I know not that I should have ventured publicly to defend a view so different from that of many whom I so highly esteem, to whose judgment I so gladly defer, were it not for the long list of names, no less venerable, no less worthy of confidence, of those who, in one way and another, confidently affirm that Matthew 24:29-3 must of necessity be referred to the great day of final judgment, and who maintain that view by reasons that seem to me unanswerable. These writers are found in all generations and of all sorts, from the beginning of Christian literature to the present hour, church fathers and reformers, philologians and preachers, Catholics and Protestant, orthodox and rationalist, of every shade of belief and unbelief, of every variety of zeal and indifference.

An enumeration of a few of the names alluded to will fully justify my statement. In defense of this view we have Chrysostom, Augustine, Jerome, and the church-fathers generally; Bede, Luther, Calvin, Gerhard, Hammond, Bengel, Paulus, Schott, D. Schultz, Olshausen, Fritzsche, Neander, Mayer, De Wette, Von Gerlach, Allioli, and many others. From some of the more recent of these I now propose to make a few extracts, to show how the matter is viewed by the most eminent New Testament scholars of the present day. They shall be of entirely different schools and different modes of thinking, and the date shall be given of each work from which the extract is made.


Speaking of Matthew 24, he says that Christ represented therein “partly his triumph in the overthrow of the hitherto sensuous form of the theocracy and thereby advanced more free and effective diffusion of his kingdom, partly his last return for the perfecting of his kingdom—the judgment over the degenerated theocracy, and that last judgment—the final more free and mighty development of the kingdom of God, and that last completion of the same—elements corresponding to each other, the last of which is prefigured in the first.” “In regard to a prophet we might with probability say, that in his conception the image of a glorious development of the future, which disclosed itself before his prophetic look in moments of religious inspiration, were unconscious mingled with the perceptions of the present; that things separated by long intervals of time presented themselves to him as contemporaneous.” “In Christ we can suppose no such commingling, no error.” “But it is easy to see how it might happen, that in the apprehending and reporting of such discourses from the position of the hearers, the elements which Christ himself kept separate (though he presented them in a certain correspondence with each other and made no definite limits as to time) might become intermingled.” “It has already been noted as a peculiarity of the editor of our Greek Matthew, that he collects into one discourse the related ideas which Christ spoke at different times and in varying circumstances.” “Therefore it is not at all surprising that a clear separation of the different elements cannot here be made out, and we should not, in order to effect this, resort to forced interpretations, which are injurious both to he truth and the love of truth. There is far less of such intermingling,—the different elements of the judgment on Jerusalem and the last coming of Christ are much more clearly separated, in the representation of this last as given by Luke 21; though even here all difficulties cannot be avoided.”

“We may say, perhaps, that Luke here, as in other places, gives the more original, the truer, the purer representation of Christ’s discourse.”
Any one accustomed to Neander will know very well what he means to say here: Christ was all right. He kept the two subjects sufficiently distinct, but the editor of our Greek Matthew has rather confused and blended them.

(2) Meyer, (rationalist, clear and strong,”

First remark on Matthew 24. “Exegetically it stands fast that from the 29th verse onward, Jesus speaks of his παρουσία after he had spoken thus far of the destruction of Jerusalem, and, indeed, as the immediate antecedent of his παρουσία. All attempts to fix in any other place the transition point, where the discourse on to the παρουσία (Chrys. V. 24. Kuinoel, v. 43. Lightf. Wetst. Flatt, John and others 25:31,) are the products, not of exegesis, but of history, and lead to the grossest violation of exegesis.”

“The attempts to explain this whole discourse of the Destruction of Jerusalem (Michaelis, Bahrdt, Ekkerm. and others,) are worthy of notice only as a sign of the times.”

“In respect to the difficulty, that Jesus place his παρουσία directly after the Destruction of Jerusalem, which was not confirmed by the result, the following things are to be remarked: (1) Jesus spoke of his παρουσία in a three-fold sense; for he designated as his coming, (a) the communi-cation of the Holy Ghost, which as to come shortly (John 16:16 et al.) and did come; (b) the historical revelation of his dominion and power in the triumph of his work on earth to be experienced forthwith on his ascension to the Father, of which we have an evident example preserved in Matthew 26:64. (c) his παρουσία in the literal sense for the awakening of he dead, the holding of the judgment, and the establishing of his kingdom. This is exactly set forth in several passages of John (5:28; 6:40, 54), and it is remarkable that in John the ἀναστήσω αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ ἐσχάτῃ ἡμέρᾳ [John 6:39] contains no trace of the proximity of this act, but presupposes the death of the believers who were living.”

“Unconsciously the form of the expectation passed over to the form of a promise; the ideal παρουσία and establishment of the kingdom became identified with the real, so that the first disappeared in conception and tradition, and the last only remained as the object of expectation, not merely surrounded with all the splendid colors of the prophetic delineation, but also perplexed with that reference to the destruction of Jerusalem, in which the promised ideal παρουσία had originally stood in the picture-language of prophecy.”


“It is undeniable, and is at the present day acknowledged by all unprejudiced interpreters (Paul., Schu., Fr., Zech., Ols., May.), that in vs. 29-31 (of Matt. 24), the discourse is of the coming of the Messiah to his kingdom; and that this, according to Matthew, follows directly after the destruction of Jerusalem. This idea of the near coming of Christ, is also distinctly expressed in other places (16:28), and the apostle Paul likewise cherished it. Only Luke, who probably wrote after the destruction of Jerusalem, appears to defer it some; for he limits to the Romans a certain time for the possession of Jerusalem (21:24), and introduces the last great decision with an indefinite καί.”

“The distorted interpretations by which all thus far (that is, to v. 31) is understood of the destruction of Jerusalem, are scarcely worth notic-ing.”—“Some find in chapters 24 and 25 a double coming of Christ, one invisible at the destruction of Jerusalem, the other visible at the judgment of the world, but they can separate
the ff.). (the both judgment, parables of Jerusalem, finds fulfilled the Das strongest speech, the Jewish state, necessary which the primary only Jerusalem and the Jewish state are spoken of. Yet this stands in the most intimate typical connection with the last judgment, and Christ himself designates both as his coming (Matt. 10:23; 16:28; Luke 17:22 ff.).

“In this picture everything tends to the nearest future (the destruction of Jerusalem), except that certain features, by their strength, point particularly to the end of the world; likewise it all tends to the most distant future (the last judgment), of which the former is but the image, so that that which was accomplished but imperfectly and weakly in the destruction of Jerusalem, will be thoroughly and powerfully fulfilled at the entrance of the final judgment. On the whole three divisions may be recognized (in Matt. 24:1-31); 1) a general review of the whole subject (vs. 4-14); 2) a more particular detail of the destruction of Jerusalem (vs. 15-28); 3) the stronger reference to the end of the world (vs. 29-31). When we thus view the whole, it is easily comprehended how v. 34 can follow upon what precedes, and how the exhortations to watchfulness can be so easily connected with the parables and figures which relate to the last judgment in ch. 25.”

Again, in the introductory remark to vs. 29 ff. “Now follows the more definite reference to the last times, though even here the destruction of Jerusalem is still primarily referred to, yet is chiefly as a type” (a prefiguring of the other).

(4) Von Gerlach (pious and strictly orthodox) Das Neue Test. mit Anmerk, 3rd edition, 1843. Vol. I. p. 147-148, 150. “In this prophecy of Jesus, everything arranges itself about the 28th verse. The necessary destruction of the external kingdom of God on account of its corruption, is particularly the chief subject of this prophetic speech, in which primarily only Jerusalem and the Jewish state are spoken of. Yet this stands in the most intimate typical connection with the last judgment, and Christ himself designates both as his coming (Matt. 10:23; 16:28; Luke 17:22 ff.).

“The view of some moderns, that Christ here predicts only the destruction of Jerusalem, has against it not only the united voice of antiquity, but also the letter of the prophecy itself.”

These extracts are brought together for the purpose of showing how he most eminent Biblical scholars of the present day, of the most
diverse habits of thought, and in relations the most widely separated, and amid all the light of the most recent investigations and discoveries in Biblical sciences, have at last come to view the much disputed passage in Matthew 24:29-31. It seems to be agreed on all hands, that these verses must be referred to the great day of final judgment, that they cannot, without the utmost violence to the text and to the idiom of Holy Writ, be limited to the events connected with the destruction of Jerusalem. Rather than admit an idea apparently so incredible, Mayer and DeWette at once and boldly deny the inspiration and accuracy of the sacred record; the pious, learned, and amiable Neander meets them more than half way on the same ground; while the orthodox Protestant Von Gerlach, and the orthodox Catholic Allioli, still retail the old idea, the patristic idea, of a twofold reference in prophecy. And this idea of a twofold reference they all, Neander, Meyer, De Wette, as well as Von Gerlach and Allioli, admit to be a New Testament idea; and so also does Tholuck, Hengstenberg, Ewald, Rosenmeuller, and the whole host of continental critics, orthodox and rationalist, pious and not pious, whether they themselves believe in it or not. How can any one who reads the New Testament, help admitting it?

The interpretation of Matthew 24:29-31, which I have advanced in the preceding pages, does not depend on the idea of a twofold reference in prophecy; it stands firmly on other grounds. Yet I believe fully that this principle of typical interpretation is clearly recognized and acted upon as entirely correct by the writers of the New Testament, and that no one can reject it without at the same time repudiating the authority of the New Testament writers as divinely inspired interpreters of the Old Testament.
APPENDIX B

POLITICS, CIVILIZATION, AND THE END TIME

An interview of
Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones
by Carl F. H. Henry

Christianity Today, February 8, 1980, pp. 33-34

Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1900-1981) was regarded by the late Wilbur M. Smith as “the greatest Bible expositor in the English-speaking world.” Called to the Christian ministry at age 27, he was a brilliant young doctor on the staff of Lord Horder, physician to the royal family. With no formal theological training, he and his wife, also a talented physician, went to South Wales where he made the Bible his full-time text as he ministered to a small Presbyterian congregation. He soon became known as a dedicated and disciplined expository preacher.

Lloyd-Jones was called to Westminster Chapel, London, in 1938 until his retirement in 1968. He was an associate with G. Campbell Morgan, and became the sole minister in 1943 due to his colleague’s failing health. He preached 45 minute sermons on Sunday mornings and hour long expositions at night. His Friday evening Bible studies, begun in 1952, attracted 1,200 persons. He taught without interruption for an hour, and many listeners wished he would continue longer. He took twelve years in expounding the Epistle to the Romans.

Q: What do you think Christianity ought to say to the economic situation today?
A: I think the great message we must preach is God’s judgment on men and on the world. Because man is a sinner, any human contrivance is doomed to fail; the only hope for the world is the return of Christ—nothing else. It amazes me that evangelicals have suddenly taken such an interest in politics; to do so would have made sense 50 or 100 years ago, but such efforts now seem to me sheer folly, for we are in a dissolving world. All my life I’ve opposed setting “times and seasons,” but I feel increasingly that we may be in the last times.

Q: What undergirds that conviction?
A: To me 1967, the year that the Jews occupied all of Jerusalem, was very crucial. Luke 21:43 is one of the most significant prophetic verses: “Jerusalem “ it reads, “shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the time of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” It seems to me that that took place in 1967—something crucially important that had not occurred in 2,000 years. Luke 21:43 is one fixed point. But I am equally impressed by Romans 11 which speaks of a great spiritual return among the Jews before the end time. While this seems to be developing, something even more spectacular may be indicated. We sometimes tend to foreshorten events, yet I have a feeling that we are in the period of the end.

Q: Would you agree that even if we might have only 24 or 48 hours, to withhold a witness in the political or any other arena is to withdraw prematurely from the social responsibility of the Christian and to distrust the providence of God?
Might he not do something even in the last few hours that he had not done before? The closer we get to the end time, isn’t that much more important to address public conscience? Must we not press the claims of Christ in all the arenas of society and remind people, whether they receive Christ or not, of the criteria by which the returning King will judge men and nations?

A: No; I’m afraid I don’t agree. It seems to me that our Lord’s own emphasis is quite different, even opposed to this. Take Luke 17 where we read, “As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives . . . until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came . . . .” You can’t reform the world. That’s why I disagree entirely with the “social and cultural mandate” teaching and its appeal to Genesis 1:28. It seems to me to forget completely the all. You can’t Christianize the world. The end time is going to be like the time of the Flood. The condition of the modern world proves that what we must preach more than ever is “Escape from the wrath to come!” The situation is critical. I believe the Christian people—but not the Church—should get involved in politics and social affairs. The kingdom task of the church is to save men from the wrath to come by bringing them to Christ. This is what I believe and emphasize. The main function of politics, culture, and all these things is to restrain evil. They can never do an ultimately positive work. Surely the history of the world demonstrates that. You can never Christianize the world.

Q: Let’s grant that the regenerative church is the New Society and the only enduring society, that the world as such can never be Christianized and turned into the New Society, and that apart from regeneration there is no participation in the kingdom of God. Having said that, does not the church nonetheless have a mission of light and salt in the world? Even if the institutional church is not to be politically engaged, does not Christ wish to expand his victory over evil and sin and all the forces that would destroy him, by penetrating the social order with Christians to exemplify godliness and justice? Are they not to work for good laws and a just society, even though they cannot hope to Christianize society?

A: Certainly. Such effort prevents the world from putrefying. But I regard it as entirely negative. I do not regard it as something positive.

Q: Is it not possible that here or there at some points Christian effort might bring about what in quotation marks might be called “Christian culture?”

A: No. It will never come. All Scripture is against that. It’s impossible. In the present world situation—surely it has never been more critical—all civilization is rocking, and we are facing collapse, morally, politically, and in every other way. I would have thought that surely at this time our urgent message should be, “Flee from the wrath to come!”

Q: Do you see any prospect for evangelical renewal in England?

A: I really don’t. Nothing but a great outpouring of the Spirit—which is what I mean by revival—can possibly retrieve the situation.

Q: How would you chart the next 20 years of world history, if we have them? What will give way, and what will endure?

A: I’m afraid I see nothing but collapse. I think that democracy is the ultimate position politically; we’ve passed through all other forms of government. But beyond democracy there now looms either dictatorship or complete chaos. The end is more likely: 666 is the number of man, and this is democracy—man worshiping himself, his own likeness. I’m not sure at all that we have 20 years. Several factors are present that have never been present before. In the past, great civilizations in various parts of the world would collapse but would not devastate the rest of the world. Today the world is one vast whole. What
happens in one place happens everywhere. I think we are witnessing the breakdown of politics. I think even the world is seeing that. Civilization is collapsing.

Q: What parting word have you for the secular man or woman who does not take Jesus Christ seriously?

A: I can only say: “Flee from the wrath to come” and “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.”
LO! HE COMES WITH CLOUDS DESCENDING

1 Lo! He comes with clouds descending,
   Once for favored sinners slain;
   Thousand thousand saints attending,
   Swell the triumph of His train:
   Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
   God appears on earth to reign.

2 Every eye shall now behold Him
   Robed in dreadful majesty;
   Those who set at naught and sold Him,
   Pierced and nailed Him to the tree,
   Deeply wailing, deeply wailing, deeply wailing,
   Shall the true Messiah see.

3 Every island, sea, and mountain,
   Heav’n and earth, shall flee away;
   All who hate Him must, confounded,
   Hear the trump proclaim the day:
   Come to judgment! Come to judgment! Come to judgment!
   Come to judgment! Come away!

4 Now redemption, long expected,
   See in solemn pomp appear;
   All His saints, by man rejected,
   Now shall meet Him in the air:
   Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
   See the day of God appear!

5 Answer Thine own bride and Spirit,
   Hasten, Lord, the general doom!
   The new Heav’n and earth t’inherit,
   Take Thy pining exiles home:
   All creation, all creation, all creation,
   Travails! groans! and bids Thee come!

6 The dear tokens of His passion
   Still His dazzling body bears;
   Cause of endless exultation
   To His ransomed worshippers;
   With what rapture, with what rapture, with what rapture
   Gaze we on those glorious scars!

7 Yea, Amen! let all adore Thee,
   High on Thine eternal throne;
   Savior, take the power and glory,
   Claim the kingdom for Thine own;
   O come quickly! O come quickly! O come quickly!
   Everlasting God, come down!

John Cennick & Charles Wesley (Tune: Helmsley)