

THREE CRITICAL EXEGETICAL ISSUES IN MATTHEW 24: A DISPENSATIONAL INTERPRETATION

Jesus' Olivet (or Eschatological) Discourse in Matthew 24–25 contains the fullest record of the Lord's prophetic teaching during his earthly ministry. Each of the five great discourses (or sermons) by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew (chaps. 5–7, 10, 13, 18, 24–25) are of utmost significance to his followers, but the Olivet Discourse is given a unique importance since Matthew at its conclusion adds the word "all" to the formula by which he ends each discourse.¹ At the end of the discourse it says: "When Jesus had finished *all* these sayings . . ." Matt 26:1 ESV.² In other words it is the culmination of the great blocks of teaching in Matthew. In fact it is Jesus' Farewell Discourse or Testament in Matthew's Gospel.³

Jesus like biblical leaders before him such as Jacob (Gen 47:29–49:33); Moses (Deut 31:1–34:38); Joshua (Josh 23:1–24:30); Samuel (1 Sam 12:1–25), and David (1 Chron 28–29), near to the occasion of his death prepared his followers to face the future without his physical

¹ Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia: Jesus' Eschatological Discourse in Matthew's Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 2000), 13.

² Matthew 7:28 ESV at the end of the Sermon on the Mount says: "And when Jesus finished these sayings..." This is the typical formula used at the end of the first four discourses.

³ Many scholars since the time of Friedrich Busch, *Zum Verständnis der synoptischen Eschatologie: Markus 13 neu untersucht*, Neutestamentliche Forschungen, vol. 4 (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1938), 44, have viewed the discourse as being a Farewell Discourse rather than an apocalypse in terms of its genre. See e.g., W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, ICC, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), 326. Several elements separate the discourse from Jewish apocalypses. Apocalypses are invariably pseudonymous (being falsely attributed to an authoritative figure from the past), and are replete with bizarre images, heavenly secrets, esoteric symbols, ex eventu prophecy (prophecy of an event after it actually occurred), and timetables; its revelations come via a heavenly mediator. None of these are true about Jesus' discourse. The teachings in the discourse come from Jesus himself who discourages sign seeking and end-times calculations. The discourse discourages premature apocalyptic fervor and contains more parenetic (exhortations and commands) and parabolic material, than that which merely unfolds the future. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *A Commentary on Mark 13* (London: Macmillan, 1957), 18 writes of the Eschatological Discourse: "There is no other apocalyptic writing known to me which contains so high a proportion of admonitions and in which instruction and exhortation are so completely interwoven." For further information on the Olivet Discourse as a farewell discourse see Neil D. Nelson, Jr., "'Be Ready for the Hour Is Unknown': A Literary Critical Exegesis of Matthew 24" (Ph.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2000), 253–57.

presence. Farewell discourses usually contain warnings concerning false teachers,⁴ appeals to remain faithful and to exercise loving behavior toward one another,⁵ predictions of woes and tribulations,⁶ warnings of judgment against those who persecute his followers or who do not carry out his commands,⁷ and blessings to come to faithful followers.⁸

Jesus prophesied what the future would involve and prepared his disciples and those who would follow in their train to understand and to face future events and difficulties forewarned and forearmed. He prepared them for ongoing faithfulness to Christ, his people, and his commission while they awaited his return. The disciples with their heads clouded by ambitions of immediate glory⁹ desired a definitive pronouncement which would give them the signs and times for which they were looking (Matt 24:3). Jesus did not give them an apocalypse which would enable them to see where they were on the end-time timetable and how close they were to the end of history. He gave them what they needed to know to face a future fraught with adversity and to carry out a successful mission to the nations. He united predictions of the future with exhortations concerning the conduct required of faithful and wise followers.

The importance of the Olivet Discourse as his Farewell Sermon and great prophetic teaching makes sound interpretation of the discourse imperative. Yet as Wilkins writes: “Jesus’ predictions in this discourse have produced an almost dizzying array of interpretations.”¹⁰ This

⁴Matt 24:4, 5, 11, 23–26 cf. Acts 20:17–18; 2 Tim 2:16–18; 3:1–8; 2 Pet 2:1–22; 3:16–17. Both 2 Timothy and 2 Peter may be considered farewell speeches of Paul and Peter respectively (see 2 Tim 4:6 and 2 Pet 1:12–15).

⁵ Matt 24:4–14, 36–51; 25:1–30 cf. 2 Tim 1:13–14; 3:14–17; 2 Pet 1:5–12; 3:14–15.

⁶ Matt 24:4–13, 15–28.

⁷ Matt 24:38–51; 25:11–13, 24–30, 41–46.

⁸ Matt 24:31, 33; 25:10, 20–23, 34–40, 46b.

⁹ See e.g., Matt 18:1; 20:20–28 cf. Luke 19:11; Acts 1:6.

study will deal with three crucial interpretive issues in Matthew 24, showing the strength of a futuristic dispensational interpretation in comparison with other schools and varieties of interpretation.¹¹ The interpretive issues which will be covered are: 1) The identification and timing of the events in Matt 24:15–31; 2) The referent of “this generation” in Matt 24:34; and 3) Whether “one is taken, one is left” in Matt 24:40, 41 refers to the rapture or to the Second Coming.

Are the Abomination that Causes Desolation, the Greatest Tribulation, and the Coming of the Son of Man Past or Future Events?

Turner helpfully divides approaches of evangelical interpreters into four camps based on how much of the discourse they assign to the A.D. 70 fall of Jerusalem and the temple, and how much they assign to the end of the age.¹² Preterist or historical interpreters believe Matt 24:1–35 was fulfilled in the first century, especially in the judgment of God upon Jerusalem. While moderate preterists tend to believe that Matt 24:36–25:46 discusses the end of the age and the Second Coming,¹³ full or extreme preterists believe that all the events in the discourse were

¹⁰ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 789. See D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8:1–599 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 488–95 for a sample of the many issues with which an interpreter must deal in regards to the interpretation of the discourse. Matthew 24 is often considered the most difficult chapter to interpret in the Gospel of Matthew.

¹¹ The author of this essay does not mean to imply that dispensational interpretations of the discourse are monolithic. There is some variation in dispensational interpretation of these issues. In fact, concerning the difficult problem of the meaning of Matthew 24:34 (“Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place”) several dispensationalists have changed their views after continued study. Few dispensational writers on an academic level today continue to hold that “this generation” refers to Israel as a nation. Yet that had been a popular view decades ago.

¹² David L. Turner, “The Structure and Sequence of Matthew 24:1–41: Interaction with Evangelical Treatments,” *Grace Theological Journal* 10 (spring 1989): 3–27.

¹³ Examples of moderate or partial preterists include David E. Garland, *Reading Matthew* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), 240–41, 244–49; Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia*, 183–208; and R. T. France, *Matthew*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1985), 333. R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days according to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), 66, 158 sees himself as a partial preterist, but believes that all of Jesus’ prophecies in the Olivet Discourse were fulfilled in the period between the discourse itself and the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. He still believes in a literal Second Coming, future resurrection, and final judgment based on

fulfilled at the fall of Jerusalem and even the Second Coming, resurrection, and final judgment are all past events. Futurist interpreters, while differing as to whether Matt 24:4–14 refers to the interadvent age, or wholly or partly to a future “great tribulation” period immediately before the end,¹⁴ assign all of 24:15–41 to the future. There are two types of mediating positions, the traditional and the revised preterist-futurist positions. The traditional preterist-futurist position takes 24:15–26 as a “double reference” prophecy referring in a perspective common to biblical prophecy in the near view to the events of A.D. 70 and in the far view to the end of the age.¹⁵

other New Testament texts. He admits to being “still unsettled on some crucial matters” (p. 158). His purpose in that book is not to exegete Matt 24–25, but to evaluate the claims of partial and full preterism.

¹⁴John F. Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come*, 183 takes Matt 24:4–14 as a unit, describing the general characteristics of the age leading up to the end. He writes: “In general, these signs have been at least partly fulfilled in the present age and have characterized the period between the first and the second coming of Christ. They should be understood as general signs rather than specific signs that the end is near” (183–84). He does believe these general inter-advent difficulties will be “fulfilled in an intensified form as the age moves on to its conclusion.” Walvoord is probably “the greatest defender of the pretribulation rapture in [the twentieth] century” (from the dedication in Thomas Ice & Timothy Demy, eds., *When the Trumpet Sounds* [Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1995], 3). Other dispensationalist writers who hold this view include Wilkins, *Matthew*, 772–77; David K. Lowery, “A Theology of Matthew,” in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Roy Zuck (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 60; Joel F. Williams, “Mark,” in *The Bible Knowledge Key Word Study: The Gospels* (Colorado Springs, CO: Cook, 2002), 158 [concerning the Markan parallel to these verses]; Ed Glasscock, *Matthew* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), 461–97; and Nelson, “Exegesis of Matthew 24,” 191–94. C. I. Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1909), 1033, holds that 24:4–14 applies to the church age and to the end of the age. Louis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947), 5:120–21 believes that 24:4–8 describes events of the present church age and 24:9–26 describes the tribulation period. Dispensationalists who place the events of Matt 24:4–14 exclusively in an end times tribulation period yet future include: J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Findlay, OH: Dunham Books, 1958), 277; Paul P. Enns, “Olivet Discourse,” in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996), 287; and Paul N. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 317–20.

¹⁵Adherents of this view include George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 309–11; and Leon Morris, *Matthew*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1992), 593–608. Thomas Ice, “Back to the Future,” in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, 13 says that to be a pretribulationist, one must be a futurist. However, several dispensational interpreters hold to a traditional preterist-futurist view including Turner, “Matthew 24”; Wilkins, *Matthew*, 778–91; Glasscock, *Matthew*, 468; and John D. Grassmick, “Mark,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament Edition*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1983), 169–70. C. Marvin Pate, “A Progressive Dispensationalist View of Revelation,” in *Four Views on the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 135 sees the hermeneutical key for progressive dispensational interpretation of New Testament prophecy to be an “already/not yet” eschatological tension. For him both Rev 6–18 and parallel events in the Olivet Discourse were partially fulfilled in A.D. 70 yet have their ultimate fulfillment in the future. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, BEC (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 1675–77 carefully differentiates between the account in Luke 21:20–24 which describes Jerusalem’s fall and the account in Matthew 24:15–22 which looks at the end-time and speaks of consummation. He takes a futurist view on this section in Matthew.

The revised preterist-futurist view of Carson sees A.D. 70 as the subject of 24:15–21 and the church age being addressed in 24:22–28.¹⁶

Preterists and the Parousia

There are significant problems with the preterist and preterist-futurist views of Matt 24:15–31. For example, the view of preterists like France, Garland, and Sproul is that “this generation” in Matt 24:34 must refer to Jesus’ contemporaries who experienced “all these things” (24:33, 34) including “the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (24:30b). To protect the veracity of the Lord and the authority of Scripture this then mandates that Matt 24:27–31 refers not to the Second Coming, but rather to a coming in judgment on Jerusalem in A.D. 70.¹⁷ However, in the context of the discourse words like *παρουσία* (“coming,” v. 27), *ἐρχόμενον* (“coming,” v. 30), and *δόξης* (“glory,” v. 30) likely refer to the Second Coming of Christ. *Παρουσία* is used in Matt 24:37, 39 (“the coming of the Son of man”),¹⁸ which are verses these moderate preterist interpreters take to refer to the future return of Christ.¹⁹ To see *παρουσία* in Matt 24:27 as a symbolic or spiritual coming of the Lord would be to use the word in a way unprecedented in Matthew and in the entire New Testament.²⁰ Forms of the verb *ἔρχομαι* (“come”) which is used in Matt 24:27, are used throughout the rest of the discourse in passages that clearly speak of the Second Coming (24:42 “your Lord is coming”; 24:44 “the Son of Man is coming”; 24:46 “when he comes”; 25:10 “the bridegroom came”;

¹⁶ Carson, “Matthew,” 499–504.

¹⁷ France, *Matthew*, 333–47; Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 235–39; Sproul, *Last Days*, 41–65.

¹⁸ *Παρουσία* also refers to the Second Coming in Matt 24:3.

¹⁹ Stanley D. Toussaint, “A Critique of the Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse,” 476 notes that *παρουσία* is always used of the actual presence of a person and that in 1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thes 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thes. 2:1, 8; Jas 5:7–8; 2 Pet 1:16; 3:4, 12; and 1 John 2:28 it refers to the Lord’s presence at his Second Coming.

²⁰ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 363.

25:19 “the master of those servants came”; 25:27 “at my coming”; and 25:31 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory”). In Matt 25:31 the word “glory” is used twice (δόξή, δόξης) of the Lord’s glorious presence at his Second Coming.

The coming of the Son of Man with his angels to divide humanity at the future judgment accompanying the Second Coming is emphasized previously in the Kingdom parable in Matt 13:41 (cf. 13:49) and later in Matt 25:31 (cf. 24:44; 26:64).²¹ The reward of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked at the Second Coming in fact is a major theme throughout the rest of the Olivet Discourse (cf. 24:40–44, 45–51; 25:1–13, 14–30, 31–46). That is the same event spoken of in Matt 24:27–31.

The event described in Matt 24:27–31 is also both universal and unmistakably visible to all on earth, which was not the case in the local judgment which befell Jerusalem in the first century. There is a very strong emphasis here on the universal visibility of the coming of the Son of Man (24:27 “for as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man”; 24:30 “then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”) in contrast with repeated warnings concerning deceptive reports of a secret coming (24:23–26). This coming judgment causes all the tribes of the earth to mourn since Jesus’ return means judgment.²² It also means that the elect throughout the globe in 24:31 (who are dispersed so widely because they

²¹ See Eugene W. Pond, “The Background and Timing of the Judgment of the Sheep and Goats,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159 (April–June 2002): 201–20 for evidence that the judgment of Matt 25:31–46 occurs on the earth immediately following Christ’s return to reign.

²² Gustav Stålin, *TDNT*, s.v. “κοπετός, κόπτω,” says that the word “mourn” in Matt 24:30par. is “the world’s mourning for itself in its final, hopeless distress.” The world has come to the realization that it is too late and each one grieves concerning their personal fate at the “immediately impending judgment of God.” The mourning of those about to be judged contrasts with the gathering of the elect into the kingdom by the Lord’s angels. The consistent pattern throughout the rest of the discourse of dividing humanity into two groups begins here. When the sign of the Son of Man (the sign *is* the Son, a genitive of apposition) appears it is too late to repent. See also Rev 1:7. An alternate interpretation is taken by Toussaint, “Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse,” 477–79. He says that the mourning is the repentance of the tribes of Israel when Jesus returns in fulfillment of Zech 12:10. If so this would be further proof of the future salvation of Israel in line with Matt 23:39.

have carried out the Lord's commission cf. 24:14; 28:19–20) will be gathered by the Lord's angels to enter into the kingdom, eternal life, and the joy of the master (cf. 25:21, 23, 34, 46).²³ Only a physical return of the Lord in total judgment satisfies the language in 24:27–31. The use of Dan 7:13–14 in Matt 24:30, where one like a son of man comes with the clouds of heaven and receives authority over all the nations from the ancient of Days also signals that Matt 24:29–31 is speaking of the future return of Christ. In Daniel 7 God passes judgment on the four kingdoms that dominate the earth and gives all authority to one like a son of man (Dan 7:13–14). His kingdom will be over all the earth and he will reign forever.

The Abomination and the Great(est) Tribulation

There are several events or references in Matt 24:15–28 which do not fit an A.D. 70 fulfillment. Matthew declares that the abomination comes first, followed by the great tribulation and flight. The abomination *causes* desolation.²⁴ However, in the siege of Titus in A.D. 70, the tribulation preceded the abomination. In Daniel, the abomination is always linked to the temple. The abomination of desolation takes place “in the holy place”; that is in the temple. Yet when the Romans entered the temple with their standards, it was too late to escape and for flight into the mountains.²⁵

The phrase “abomination that causes desolation” comes from the book of Daniel (Dan 9:27; 11:31; 12:11 cf. 8:13). Abomination (βδέλυγμα) refers to “what defiles a sacred place and

²³ There is no rapture found in the Olivet Discourse. Blomberg, *Matthew*, 363, no pre-tribulationist himself, correctly affirms this.

²⁴ Preterists are quite divided as to the specific event in the first century which Matthew calls the abomination of desolation. See Toussaint, “Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse,” 479–80 for four possibilities. France, *Matthew*, 340–1, a preterist himself, points out problems with various preterist views as to the exact identity of the event and comes to no conclusion other than that it had to occur in A.D. 66–70.

²⁵Toussaint, “Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse,” 480.

causes it to be left desolate.”²⁶ While originally it referred to the act of Antiochus Epiphanes IV (who in 167 B.C. outlawed Jewish religious practices, slaughtered swine on a temple altar devoted to Olympian Zeus and then destroyed much of the temple precincts and the city of Jerusalem, Dan 8:13; 11:31; 1 Macc 1:54, 59; 4:38; 6:7; 2 Macc 8:17), Jesus by his words in Matt 24:15 (“when you see . . .”) foresees a yet future fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy shortly before the end of the age. The Danielic reference in Matt 24:15, points the reader to Dan 9:27 and 12:11 which look at the consummation and the end of the age.²⁷ Daniel 12:2–3, 11, 13 speaks of the time of the end and the resurrection of the righteous. Daniel 9:27 speaks of Daniel’s 70th week and a future figure who will set himself up as God in the temple in the middle of the seven years which precede Christ’s Second Advent.²⁸

Further, A.D. 70 was not “great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be (24:21).” Though Josephus reported terrible atrocities, the tribulation Jesus is predicting here must be greater than the devastation caused by the universal flood in Noah’s day to which Jesus in context directly compares the events of the end

²⁶ BDAG, s.v., βδέλυγμα.

²⁷ Matthew 24:15 with its formula “spoken of through the prophet Daniel” is different than the other “fulfillment” quotations in Matthew in that although it has other essential elements of a fulfillment formula, it is the only one that lacks an explicit reference to any fulfillment of the prophet’s words, in this case, the text of Daniel. Matthew therefore intentionally does not want this text to be understood as fulfilled. See Fred W. Burnett, *The Testament of Jesus-Sophia: A Redaction-Critical Study of the Eschatological Discourse in Matthew* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1981), 306–7. Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, 2d ed (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 481 points out that the very command that the reader “understand” alludes to Daniel 12:9–10 immediately before Daniel’s final mention of the abomination of desolation. These words speak of the end-time.

²⁸ Other revelation in the New Testament identifies the future abomination as a person (Mark 13:14 where the masculine participle ‘standing’ refers to a person standing where he should not),²⁸ who proclaims himself to be God and is called “the man of lawlessness” (2 Thes 2:1–9) and “the beast” whom earth dwellers are made to worship (Rev 13:1–18).

(24:37–39).²⁹ Matthew 24:22 says, “if those days had not been shortened, no human being (flesh) would be saved.” Πᾶσα σὰρξ (“all flesh”) is a technical term referring to all humanity nine times in the New Testament.³⁰ “All flesh” here is not limited to Jews who died in Judea in the first century. Rather it implies that all humanity would be extinguished in the future “great tribulation” as happened at the flood (except for Noah and his family), if not for God’s intervention for the sake of his elect. Jesus here was speaking of an event much worse than A.D. 70.

A final proof that Matt 24:15–28 speaks of the great tribulation of the future, rather than of a first century event is in Matthew’s use of the words “cut short” in Matt 24:22 and “immediately” in 24:29.³¹ Carson, because of the word “immediately” takes Matt 24:22–28 to refer to the entire interadvent period of the tribulation now stretching almost 2,000 years. But then “immediately,” seems to have lost all meaning and effect and it is hard to see how God has “cut short” or limited the days (v. 22). Jesus, in Matt 24:29–30 says, “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened . . . then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven.” This means that immediately after the great and unparalleled tribulation described in Matt 24:21–26, the Second Coming will occur. The words εὐθύς or εὐθέως (“immediately”) in all 18 occurrences in Matthew mean “immediately,” “at once,” “without delay,” or “instantaneously.” The word means the same thing here in this context.³² Futurists have no

²⁹ Lowery, “Theology of Matthew,” 190. Josephus *Jewish War* 5–7 reported the death of 1.1 million Jews, but most scholars believe that the population of Jerusalem during the feast time was closer to 150,000. In any case the world (and the Jewish people) have experienced greater tribulations than this in the past century.

³⁰ Matt 24:22; Mark 13:20; Luke 3:6; John 17:2; Acts 2:17; Rom 3:20; 1 Cor 1:29; Gal 2:26; 1 Pet 1:24. In 1 Cor 15:39 Paul uses the phrase in the sense of all human and animal life, an even wider usage. See Toussaint, “Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse,” 481.

³¹ For more on this see Nelson, “Exegesis of Matthew 24,” 185–88.

difficulty in seeing the parousia immediately after the future abomination that causes desolation and the great tribulation. This unparalleled tribulation will last about three and a half years according to Dan 9:27; 12:7, 11; Rev 11:3; 12:6, 14. God “cut short” the days by limiting them to 1,260 days (Rev 11:3). Preterists who use Matthew’s “immediately” in 24:29 to tie the siege of Jerusalem to a symbolic “parousia” of Christ in a temporal judgment on Jerusalem err because “immediately after the tribulation of those days” (24:29) refers back to “those days” (24:22) of the future great tribulation. Preterist-futurists who stretch the tribulation to include the whole interadvent age rob the words “immediately” and “cut short” of their plain meaning in Matthew.³³

The futurist interpretation of Matthew 24:15–28, the view of most dispensational interpreters, best explains this important section of Jesus’ sermon. The combination of the temporal and inferential conjunctions “therefore when” which begin Matt 24:15–28 signal a shift³⁴ to the important topic of a major event prophesied in Daniel 9:27 and 12:1–12, the still future event when Antichrist sets up his image in the temple to be worshipped which in turn commences the never to be equaled “great tribulation” which lasts three and one half years. God cuts this tribulation short for the sake of his elect. The tribulation then ends immediately as Christ comes in his full glory to judge the nations and to gather his elect, that is tribulation saints, into his kingdom.³⁵

³² BAGD, 320–21. Redaction critics see εὐθρόωβ as a deliberate redactional addition to his Markan source in order to deliberately tie the tribulation to the parousia.

³³ Carson, “Matthew,” 594–95 differentiates between the time of the “great distress” of A.D. 70 in Matt 25:15–21 and the general interadvent age in 24:22–28. Therefore Jesus does not affirm that his Second Coming would be immediately after A.D. 70. A better solution is to see that 25:15–28 is one unit. The word καί (“and”) in v.22 ties 24:15–21 to 24:22–28. Therefore the event which is “immediately” before the Second Coming is the great tribulation, which commences with the great abomination.

³⁴ Wilkins, *Matthew*, 777.

³⁵ The disciples addressed by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse represent Jewish tribulation saints in Matthew 24:15–31. They also represent both the church and Jewish tribulation saints in Matt 24:4–14, which covers the entire interadvent age (church age plus the tribulation). The parables in Matt 24:32–25:46 apply in one way or another to

**The Identity of “This Generation” in Matthew 24:34:
What Kind of People Do Not Pass Away
until All These Things Take Place?**

View #1: The Contemporaries of Jesus Witness the Second Coming

Perhaps the most difficult phrase to interpret in the entire Olivet Discourse is “this generation will not pass away until all these things take place” (Matt 24:34).³⁶ Some interpreters have concluded Jesus taught (erroneously it turns out) that his contemporaries would be alive at his Second Advent.³⁷ The most decided criticism of this interpretation is that it makes Jesus a false prophet and the church perpetuated this error when it continued to pass on these words after the disciples had died.³⁸ Yet Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel is portrayed as one who is absolutely true and who teaches the way of God truthfully (Matt 22:16). In Matt 24:35, the verse immediately following, Jesus stakes his truthfulness on this prediction and everything else in the discourse when he says: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.” Jesus’ prophecies, including that of 24:34 are more dependable than the universe itself. Further, in Matt 24:36 Jesus strongly affirms: “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.” How could Jesus on the one hand assert that his own contemporary generation would see the fulfillment of all his prophecy and then assert just two verses later that no human, not even he, could know the time of fulfillment?³⁹

both groups. All believers of both eras need to be faithful and ready for the Lord’s return. The Olivet Discourse was therefore specifically relevant to the first disciples and it remains relevant to all saints until the end of the age.

³⁶ For a fuller study of “this generation” in Matt 24:34 see Neil D. Nelson, Jr., “‘This Generation’ in Matt 24:34: A Literary Critical Perspective,” *JETS* 38 (Sept 1996): 369–85, and Nelson, “Exegesis of Matthew 24,” 159–221.

³⁷ E.g., Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:367–68 affirm that Matt 24:34 teaches all the events of vv.4–31 including his return in glory would occur before all his contemporaries had died. Since some of Jesus’ contemporaries were probably alive when Matthew wrote, “he did not have the problem we do.” They say that most modern commentators take this view.

³⁸ Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 1689.

View #2: The Contemporaries of Jesus Witness the Coming of Jesus in A.D. 70

The preterist interpretation of this phrase and Matthew 24 in general is a reaction to the interpretation above. Their view is that Jesus' contemporaries will not pass away until they see all the things of Matt 24:4–31, but “all these things” must therefore be restricted to the events of A.D. 70.⁴⁰ However, “all these things” in Matt 24:34, as demonstrated above, include the future abomination that causes desolation, the future great tribulation, and the Second Coming itself.⁴¹

View #3: The Contemporaries of Jesus Witness the Beginning of End Time Events

Another view takes the verb “take place” in 24:34 (γένηται) as an ingressive aorist, which would produce the meaning “this generation will not pass away until all these things *begin* to take place.”⁴² This view is unlikely for several reasons. First it ignores the comprehensive nature of the word “all.” To impose a limitation on the words “before *all* these things take place” really makes Jesus say: “before *some* of these things take place.”⁴³ “All” has a naturally comprehensive force throughout the discourse (24:2, 8, 9, 14, 22, 30, 33, 34, 47; 25:5, 7, 29, 31, 32). Also, not all these things begin to happen by A.D. 70. The future abomination (24:15), great

³⁹ This is an absolute prohibition of any knowledge of the time. The expression “day and hour” is a formula using synonymous parallelism which refers to time in general, with the word “day” being used frequently in Matthew for the time he will come in eschatological judgment (Matt 7:22; 10:15; 11:22, 24; 12:36). In the following context in the discourse “day,” “part (watch) of the night,” and “hour” are used interchangeably of the unexpected time of the coming of the Son of Man (Matt 24:42–44). Matt 24:50 and 25:13 again use “day” and “hour” in parallelism. See Blomberg, *Matthew*, 365.

⁴⁰ Preterist-futurist interpreters such as Blomberg, *Matthew*, 363–64; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1995), 715; and Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 588–90 have a similar interpretation, but they restrict the reference of “all these things” in Matt 24:34 to the events of Matt 24:4–26 or Matt 24:15–26 which they say were fulfilled in the fall of Jerusalem in the first century.

⁴¹ In Matthew, since the immediately following pericope (24:36–44) and the immediately preceding context (24:29–31) both speak of the parousia, this suggests that “all these things” in 24:34 include the end as well as the preliminary events which announce the certainty of its arrival. The words of Matt 24:35 also refer to the consummation of all things. When Jesus speaks of “all these things” in v. 34, he is surveying all the events he has just announced.

⁴² D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” 507; Toussaint, “Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse,” 485–86.

⁴³ Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1979), 116.

tribulation (24:21–22), and the Second Coming (24:27–31) do not begin to take place during the lifetime of Jesus’ contemporaries. Moreover, the aorist subjunctive γένηται is much more likely a consummative aorist in light of the prophetic nature of Jesus’ statement.⁴⁴ In Matt 5:18, a verse with a very similar phraseology, γένηται is certainly a consummative aorist. The verb γίνομαι is used of consummated events in 24:6, 20, 21 [2x], and 32.⁴⁵

View #4: This Generation Is Israel as a Race

An old view abandoned today by many dispensational interpreters is that “this generation” in Matt 24:34 refers to Israel as a race.⁴⁶ However, while 24:34 implies that “this generation” will *pass away* after the events of 24:4–28 take place, Matthew envisions a mission to Israel until the parousia (10:23), a conversion of Israel before the Second Coming (23:39 cf. Rom 9–11; Isa 66:22; Zech 8, 13–14), and the presence of Israel in the kingdom (Matt 19:28).⁴⁷ In other words, Israel in contrast will *not* pass away when “all these things take place.” The word “until” (ἕως) means “up to the point at which and no farther” here, implying that “this generation” (unlike Israel) will “pass away” in judgment at the Second Coming of Christ.⁴⁸ Also the fig tree in the parable of Matt 24:32–35 is not a type of Israel. Jesus instead uses it to make a

⁴⁴ See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 558–61. It could also be a constative aorist, which is the most frequent use of the aorist tense.

⁴⁵ John Francis Hart, “A Chronology of Matthew 24:1–44” (Th.D. diss., Grace Theological Seminary, 1986), 217.

⁴⁶ E.g., this was the former view of Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 281 which he abandoned in *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 405.

⁴⁷ Toussaint, “Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse,” 484 says, “this would imply that Israel would cease to exist as a nation after the Lord’s return.” See also John F. Walvoord, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* (Wheaton: Victor, 1990), 391; I. H. Marshall, *Commentary on Luke*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1978), 780. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1943), 953 and Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to St. Matthew* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975), 458 say it means that Israel will remain wicked until the parousia, at which time it will be judged.

⁴⁸ For a full discussion see Nelson, “Exegesis of Matthew 24,” 204–209. This “exclusive” use of ἕως predominates in eschatological contexts in Matthew (e.g., 13:30; 23:39). The verb “pass away” means to come to an end or to perish. See Johannes Schneider, *TDNT*, s.v., “παρέρχομαι.”

straightforward analogy.⁴⁹ Just as the budding fig tree inevitably results in a harvest of figs, so the events of 24:4–25 will inevitably usher in the judgment of the Son of Man at his coming. “This generation” will pass away in judgment when Christ returns, but Matthew holds out the promise that Israel will be preserved and will enter into the kingdom.

*View #5: This Generation Is an Evil Kind of People
Who Oppose Christ and His Messengers*

A fifth view, which is an old dispensational view and at the same time relatively new in current dispensational circles takes seriously both the Old Testament background of the word γενεά (“generation,” דור in the Hebrew OT) and how “this generation” (ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη) is characterized throughout Matthew and the rest of the New Testament. Ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη in Matt 24:34 describes unbelieving, rejecting humanity, unresponsive to God’s messengers and headed toward eschatological judgment.⁵⁰ John Nelson Darby, the acknowledged father and developer of dispensational Premillennialism, made the point over a century and a half ago that ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη in Matt 24:34 refers to *an evil type of people*. He wrote:

The difficulty as to ‘this generation shall not pass away’ is a prejudice flowing from the English use of the word ‘generation.’ It is quite as much used for a moral class in scripture, as for the period marked by human life; and if Deuteronomy 32:5, 20 (where this very subject is treated of) be referred to, the sense is plain.⁵¹

⁴⁹ This is evident in the Lukan parallel where Jesus says: “Look at the fig tree, *and all the trees.*” Any deciduous fruit tree would make the same point.

⁵⁰ Modern dispensationalists who take this view include David K. Lowery, “Matthew,” in *The Bible Knowledge Key Word Study*, 100; Joel F. Williams, “Mark,” 139, 161; and Nelson, “Exegesis of Matthew 24,” 159–221; idem., “This Generation,” 369–85. Darrell Bock, *Bible Knowledge Key Word Study*, 247–48 says this negative ethical view or the idea that once the end starts it will be completed in a generation are the most likely views.

⁵¹ John Nelson Darby, *Apologetic*, No. 2, Vol. 9, 277, in *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, vol. 3, 176.

Again Darby comments:

As to the generation not passing away, a reference to Deuteronomy 32:5, 20, will give the plain and sure sense of it, and that in reference to this very subject [the Lord's coming]. The mere common use of the word is a class of persons, as, the generation of the wicked, not the period of a man's life.⁵²

The primary Old Testament background for Jesus' reference to ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη here is in the Old Testament descriptions of the rebellious Israelites during their wanderings in the wilderness.⁵³ Adjectives such as "evil," "perverse," "adulterous" and "faithless" used by Jesus to characterize "this generation" (Matt 12:39, 45; 16:4; 17:17) come from the Song of Moses (Deut 32:5, 20). Culver notes that the Hebrew word דֹר ("generation") "is used widely to indicate a class of men distinguished by a certain moral or spiritual character," such as in the phrase "generation of the righteous" or "generation of the wicked." He says this metaphorical (non-chronological) use of the word is theologically the most significant use of דֹר in the Old Testament and becomes the basis of Jesus' use of γενεὰ ("generation") in the Gospels.⁵⁴

Psalm 12:7 (11:8 LXX) uses the exact phrase ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη and says: "You, O Lord, will keep them (LXX "us"); You will preserve him (i.e., the godly man) from 'this generation' forever." "This generation" is described in this context as lying, boastful, proud, violent and wicked. The godly do not belong to this generation, though they live among these evil people of their age (cf. Acts 2:40; Phil 2:15). Matthew seems to have juxtaposed the phrase "this generation" in 24:34 with his account of the days of Noah (24:37–39), an explicit type of the coming of the Son of Man. This seems to be a purposeful echo of Gen 7:1 where Noah is

⁵² John Nelson Darby, *Collected Writings*, vol. 11, Prophetic, no. 4, "Brief Remarks on the Work of the Rev. D. Brown," ed. William Kelly (London: G. Morrish, n.d.: reprint, Sunbury, PA: Believer's Bookshelf, 1972), 372.

⁵³ Cf. Num 32:13; Deut 2:14; Ps 12:7; 78:8; 95:10. See Williams, "Mark," 139.

⁵⁴ R. D. Culver, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, s.v. "dōr."

described as the sole righteous man in “this generation” (τη : / γενεα / : τούτη / : :), which is described as wicked, violent, corrupt, and self-absorbed in Gen 6:5–11. Noah, like the godly man in Psalm 12, lived among, but did not belong to “this generation.”

A study of the use of ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη (Matt 11:16; 12:41, 42, 45; 23:36; 24:34) and γενεά with other descriptive adjectives (12:39, 45; 16:4; 17:17) used in the same sense, reveals that the kind of people referred to with the words “this generation” are characterized as those who reject Jesus and his messengers and the salvific message they preach, who remain unbelieving and unrepentant, who actively test and persecute Jesus and his messengers, and who will face eschatological judgment. The pejorative adjectives given to “this generation” (evil, adulterous, faithless, perverse) throughout the Gospel are qualities that distinguish between those who are subjects of the kingdom and those who are not.

The use of “this generation” in Matt 23:36 right before the Olivet Discourse is particularly instructive. There Jesus’ prophetic condemnation falls on “this generation” both for murdering the righteous men of the Old Testament (23:29–31, 35) from the beginning of the Hebrew canon (Abel) until the end (Zechariah in the last book of the Hebrew Bible, 2 Chronicles; note Jesus says: “whom *you* murdered”) *and* for scourging, and killing, and crucifying “prophets, and wise men, and scribes” (i.e., his disciples cf. Matt 5:12; 7:24; 10:41; 13:52) all the way up until the Second Coming. The contemporaries of Jesus did not murder Zechariah (23:35–36), nor will they murder Jesus’ disciples until the end of the age. Therefore the phrase “this generation” here and in 24:34 extends beyond Jesus’ contemporaries to also include the murderers of God’s servants in the Old Testament and forward to those who will persecute disciples until Jesus’ return (23:39). Since the persecution extends until the Son of Man comes (10:23; 23:34; 24:9–14, 15–26), the judgment also does not fall until that time.

The reader of Matt 24:34 should therefore interpret ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη (“this generation”) in the same way it has been consistently used throughout Matthew, as a kind of people who reject Jesus, who remain hostile to Jesus’ disciples, who are blind to the signs of his coming, and who remain opponents of the gospel and its messengers until the end. Then finally they “will pass away” at the judgment when Christ returns.⁵⁵ In the context of Matthew’s Gospel, the disciple is not above his teacher, nor is the servant above his master (10:24–25). The obedience of Christ in the midst of “an evil and perverse generation” as he endured its hostility and obstinate unbelief, becomes then the pattern for his disciples.⁵⁶ The Lord’s teaching in Matt 24:32–35 is that the followers of Christ will continue to endure the persecution and opposition of “this generation.” This sinful class of opponents of Christ and his messengers will continue to be present right up to the coming of the Son of Man. Yet saints have the sure hope, based on Christ’s word (24:35) that Jesus as Son of Man will come and gather them into his kingdom and vindicate them by judging “this generation.” Just as Christ suffered, so will disciples in this age. Just as Christ was subsequently glorified, so they will “inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (25:34).

View #6: This Generation Is All the People Alive at the End

A final view, held by several dispensationalists is that “this generation” refers to *all* the people who are alive when Jesus returns.⁵⁷ This view says that the end-time generation will see

⁵⁵ The discourse says that this evil type of people (“this generation”) will be “swept away” (24:39), “taken” in judgment (24:40–41), dichotomized and put into hell (24:51), “shut out” of the marriage feast (25:11–12), “cast into outer darkness” (25:30), and they will go into the eternal punishment prepared for the devil and his angels (25:41, 46).

⁵⁶ In Matt 17:17 Jesus was exasperated with a “faithless and perverse generation” ensnared in the grip of Satan. He exclaimed: “How long am I to be with you?” But to his disciples at the end of the Gospel he proclaimed: “And behold I am with you always, to the end of the age” (28:20).

the completion of the end-time signs. It seems somewhat tautologous to say that the last generation will not pass away until the end-time events conclude. Jesus hardly needed to state this sort of truism. However, the emphasis in this interpretation is that when the end comes, it comes quickly. The generation that experiences the great tribulation will also witness the end.⁵⁸

The major problem with this view is that it ignores the negative force of ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη (“this generation”) throughout the New Testament and Matthew in particular and the moral use of the phrase in the Old Testament. The negative connotation of the phrase as referring to ungodly people united in their opposition to God’s messengers is found in all previous uses of ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη.⁵⁹ The reader of the Gospel would naturally take the phrase to have the same connotation in Matt 24:34.

This view also ignores the implication that “this generation” will “pass away” at the Second Coming. Only the wicked belong to this type of people. This evil generation will be “swept away” in judgment and put into hell (24:39, 51). The righteous in contrast will inherit the kingdom and enter into eternal life in the presence of the Son (25:20–23, 34, 36). Therefore, “this generation” in Matt 24:34 refers to an evil and faithless people guilty of resisting the messengers and the message of Christ. This view best aligns with the use of the phrase throughout Matthew and the purpose of Jesus in the discourse and the Gospel to prepare the disciples to endure the rejection of unresponsive humanity as they obediently serve Christ and others and thus ready themselves for the Lord’s glorious return.

⁵⁷ E.g., Stanley D. Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1980), 279–80; Glasscock, *Matthew*, 475; Paul N. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 319; Pentecost, *Words and Works*, 405; Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 1688–92.

⁵⁸ Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 1691–92.

⁵⁹ Matt 11:16; 12:39, 41, 42, 45; 16:4; 17:17; 23:36.

One Taken, One Left: Does This Refer to the Rapture or to the Second Coming?

The language “one is taken and one is left” in Matt 24: 40, 41 suggests to some that the rapture of the church is being addressed.⁶⁰ However, the only future coming of the Son of Man described in the discourse is the glorious and universally visible return of Christ (24:3, 27–31 cf. 24:14, 33, 50–51; 25:1–13, 14–30, 31–46). The language of 24:27–41 does not suggest that a different event is now addressed.⁶¹ Matt 24:40–41 occurs in the context of judgment. The future time of judgment at the Second Coming is compared with the day when Noah entered the ark and “the flood came and swept them all away” (24:39). The day of judgment, concerning which no one but the Father knows the timing, parallels the sudden judgment and loss of life of the unresponsive in Noah’s time. As the wicked were “swept away” in that day, so the world will “pass away” (24:34) at the future arrival of the Son of Man. This universal judgment is that of the Second Coming, not a pretribulational rapture. The parallel passage in Luke 17:26–37 makes it especially clear that the reference is to the judgment at the Second Coming. That passage after mentioning the destruction brought by the flood and the fire and sulphur raining down on Sodom, mentions that “one will be taken, and the other left” (Luke 17:35). When the disciples ask Jesus, “Where, Lord?” He responds with a grisly image of the gathering of vultures. (17:37).⁶²

⁶⁰ Hart, “Chronology of Matthew 24,” 242–44, is an example of a dispensationalist who takes this to speak of the pre-tribulation rapture.

⁶¹ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 366. Contra Hart, “Chronology of Matthew,” 242–44, elsewhere in Matthew the phrase *περὶ δὲ* (24:36) is used to continue discussion of the same subject or to continue the movement of the narrative (20:6; 22:31; 27:46).

⁶² Bock, *Bible Knowledge Key Word Study*, 236 says: “The fact that the stress is on judgment means there is no rapture here.”

The synonyms ἤρην (“taken away” or “swept away,” 24:39 from αἶρω) and παραλαμβάνεται (“taken,” 24:40, 41 from παραλαμβάνω) seem here to stand for analogous concepts. Just as the entire generation of the flood was “taken away” in the cataclysm of Genesis, so “this generation” in its entirety will be “taken” in the judgment of the parousia. The thoughts are parallel, not contrastive. The difference in verbs may be due to precision of description (“swept away” ESV is an apt translation of ἤρην in relation to the flood) or to stylistic variation. If “taken” in 24:40, 41 means being taken in judgment, this eliminates reference here to a rapture, that is being caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Yet granting that the reference in 24:36–44 is to the Second Coming, the point then becomes virtually moot as to whether “taken” in 24:40, 41 means gathered to meet the Lord (cf. 24:31) or taken in judgment (cf. 24:39). The essential point is that a permanent separation of humanity occurs at the Second Coming with the righteous being taken into the kingdom and the unrighteous being taken in judgment.⁶³

Conclusion

This study has presented a futuristic, dispensational view of three important exegetical issues in Matthew 24. The evidence derived from a careful study of the Olivet Discourse in the context of Matthew’s Gospel suggests that both the preterist and the preterist-futurist views of Jesus’ teaching about the abomination of desolation and the great tribulation of Matt 25:15–26 are incorrect. Neither event occurred in A.D. 70. The abomination that causes desolation is a yet future event near the end of the age in which the image of the Antichrist is set up in the temple and Antichrist himself is worshipped as God. This is the meaning of Dan 9:27 and 12:11 (also indicated in 2 Thes 2:1–12; Mark 13:14; Rev 13:1–18). The great tribulation is also a yet future

⁶³ Carson, “Matthew,” 509. Lowery, “Matthew,” 100 says that παραλαμβάνω (“taken” in 24:40, 41) is often a positive term in the Gospel (e.g., 1:20, 24; 2:13, 14, 20, 21; 17:1; 26:37). But it is used in a bad sense significantly in 27:27 cf. 4:5, 8. ἀφίημι (ἀφίεται “left”) in 24:40, 41 can carry a negative connotation in Matthew (4:20, 22; 8:22; 19:29; 23:38; 26:56), but it also has positive connotations in 4:11, 20, 24; 6:12.

event which is of such severity that it exceeds the devastation of the universal flood in the days of Noah. All humanity would perish in this tribulation except for the intervention of God on behalf of tribulation saints. This greatest of all tribulations occurs “immediately” before the Second Coming of Christ.

The preterist view that equates “the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (24:30) with his symbolic coming in the judgment of A.D. 70 is also in error. Rather this is the literal, visible coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in his full glory and power. The use of the vocabulary to describe his coming elsewhere in Matthew and in the Olivet discourse itself, and the stress on the universal visibility of the parousia should assure believers of the validity of Jesus’ own precious and great description of his Second Coming.

A study of “this generation” as used in Matthew and in its Old Testament background shows that it speaks of a wicked kind of people through the ages who are steadfastly opposed to the messengers of God and who are described as faithless, evil, perverse, and adulterous. Jesus does not promise his saints a future mission free from difficulties. In fact the Olivet Discourse is full of predictions of tribulation and opposition. In the Parable of the Fig Tree (Matt 24:32–35) Jesus affirms that his followers will experience the difficulties mentioned in Matthew 24, but that as they see Jesus’ predictions come to pass they may be assured “that he is near, at the very gates” (v.33). They will face opposition from the same sort of evil people who opposed the prophets and Jesus before them, but when all these things take place, “this generation” which is evil, will “pass away.” Then the faithful servants of Jesus (24:45–47) will be vindicated and they will enter into the kingdom and the joy of their master.

Finally, Matt 24:40–41 does not speak of a pretribulation rapture. The rapture is not the subject of the Olivet Discourse. The Second Coming is. The Second Coming is certain, yet its

timing is unknown. Therefore Jesus calls in the strongest terms for his saints to be faithful, prepared, and ready for his return. If this is the case in relation to the Second Coming, “how much more important is it for people to be prepared for the unannounced and ‘sign-less’ resurrection and rapture of the church.”⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Mark Bailey and Tom Constable, *The New Testament Explorer* (Dallas: Word, 1999), 51.