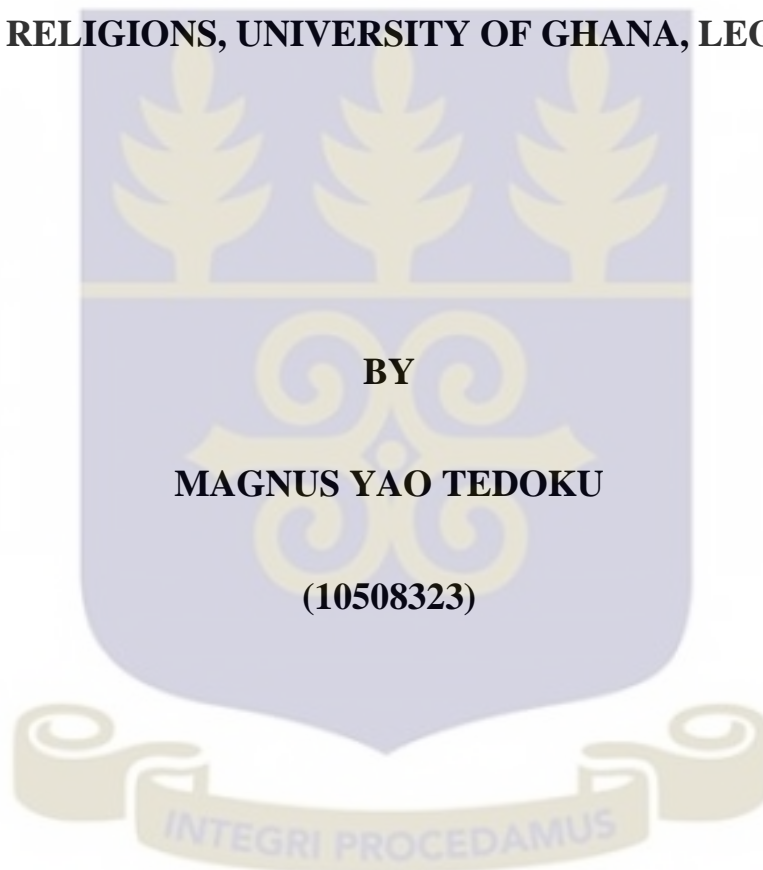


**AN EXEGETICO-THEOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE  
ESCHATOLOGICAL DISCOURSE IN MATTHEW 24:1-44**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT FOR THE STUDY  
OF RELIGIONS, UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON**



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AWARD OF MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY RELIGIONS DEGREE**

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## DECLARATION

This is to certify that this thesis is the result of research undertaken by Magnus Yao Tedoku under the supervision of Rev. Prof. Dan. Antwi and Rev. Dr. Branford Yeboah towards the award of M. Phil Religions at the Department for the Study of Religions, University of Ghana.

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## ABSTRACT

In contemporary Ghanaian society, some Christian prophets claimed to know the exact hour of the Parousia. They have often indicated specific days which, however, never come to pass or fulfilled. The effect is casting doubt in the mind of many believers about the end time. The interesting aspect is that all of them based their contention on the NT writings where eschatological concepts appear, not only in the entire book of Revelation, but in many other texts. Among them, the eschatological discourse reported by the three Synoptics (Matthew 24:1-44, Mark 13:1-37, Luke 21: 5-36), are considered particularly significant by scholars.

Matthew's account presents the disciples of Jesus keenness to know the exact time or hour in which the end will take place (24:3). The response of Jesus is surprising "But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (24:36). The text challenges the reader, not to dwell in the 'time' but to enter in a process of understanding and awareness (24:33). Against this background, the research intends to reach an informed understanding of Jesus' eschatological teaching through an exegetical and theological analysis of Matthew 24:1-44. The research answers the following questions: What is the meaning of Jesus' eschatological discourse in Matthew 24:1-44? How relevant is the call to action present in the text to Contemporary Ghanaian Christians? The integrated approach, proposed by Tate, is employed. The outcome of the study is expected to contribute knowledge to the ongoing eschatological debate, and offer suggestions for a more effective pastoral approach.

The thesis concludes that the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24:1-44 is structured into two main parts; namely the destruction of Jerusalem as a result of disobedience on the parts of the Jews and then what Christians in general are supposed to know and do whiles waiting for the Parousia and the end of the age. Jesus uses the discourse to correct the disciples' misguided perception that the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the age are single events. There is nothing in the discourse which indicates or predicts the actual time of the end, but rather was written to encourage persecuted Jewish Christians as well as all believers across the world to keep the faith alive and also to prove that the gospel is the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham and David in the Tanak.

The research recommends that the attitude present in contemporary Ghanaian Christianity of sign seeking for the parousia and the end of the age is discouraged. The researcher further recommends that the study of biblical Greek in theological institution is encouraged in order to be able to exegete the text in its original language and to reach a better understanding of its message. Finally, the researcher indicates the necessity of further studies on the relationship between the abomination of desolation (Matt 24:15) and the meaning of 1290 days in Dan 12:11.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis first of all to the Lord God Almighty for his guidance and protection, and all my lectures. Your guidance and assiduousness from the very beginning brought this thesis to a successful conclusion. Miss Margaret Menokpor is also not forgotten for her love and support towards this work. God bless you all.

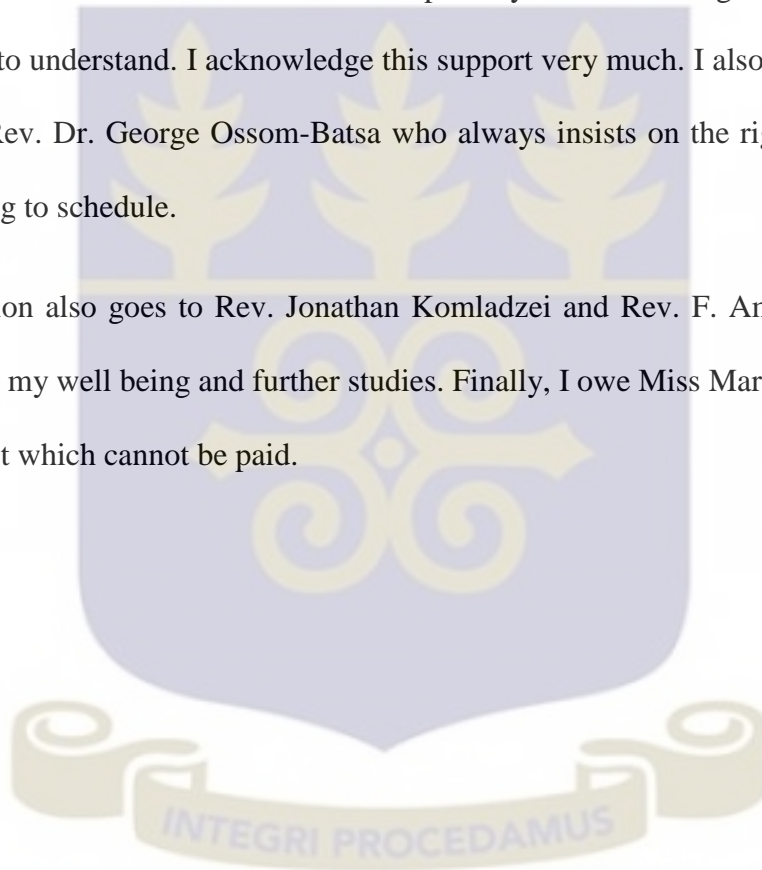


## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

To God be the glory now and forever. May his name be praised from generation to generation for the strength, protection, love and provision given me throughout the period of this work. I am most grateful to him. It is by his grace that this work has been completed on schedule.

With a thankful heart, I wish to hold Dr. Nicoletta Gatti in a very high esteem for her contribution towards the success of this work especially at its initial stages when things were very difficult to understand. I acknowledge this support very much. I also acknowledge the guidance of Rev. Dr. George Ossom-Batsa who always insists on the rightful thing to be done according to schedule.

My appreciation also goes to Rev. Jonathan Komladzei and Rev. F. Amevenku for their concern about my well being and further studies. Finally, I owe Miss Margaret Menokpor a very huge debt which cannot be paid.



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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

Christianity was introduced to Ghana in the late fifteenth century by Roman Catholic friars who sailed with Portuguese merchants. However they were not successful in making a tremendous impact on the indigenes by way of converting them into Christianity as expected of them by their superiors. Nevertheless, about four decades later Christianity began flourishing especially in Southern parts of Ghana and soon after spread to the rest of the country with different denominations such as the Main Line churches (Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana, Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Methodist, Anglican etc), the Pentecostals and the Charismatic etc.<sup>1</sup>

Currently Ghana Statistical Service has revealed that 71.2% of the Ghana's 24 million population considered themselves as Christians<sup>2</sup> which is an indication that Christianity is the principal religion in Ghana, and since its inception, Christians in general have become aware that Jesus Christ of whom their faith in God is centered would return into the world literally to take them to the eternal paradise devoid of all kinds of sufferings and death. They consider this second return or the 'Parousia' as a reward for being faithful to their Lord Jesus Christ here on this earth, and that all things would be brought to an end, as predicted in the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 at the time of his return and they have been fervently waiting for this second coming or the 'Parousia'.

Ever since some Christian Prophets mostly from the Charismatic churches have been claiming to know the time or the hour in which the end time would come. They often

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<sup>1</sup> Cephas Omenyo Narh, Pentecost outside Pentecostalism (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2006), pg 45ff.

<sup>2</sup> [www.statsghana.gov.gh/.../Census2010](http://www.statsghana.gov.gh/.../Census2010) Census. Accra (2016).

indicated specific days which, however never come to pass or fulfilled. For instance, the leader of the First Century Gospel Church at Tsito Awudome in the Volta Region about two decades ago prophesied that the whole world would come to an end on a certain date, and as a result majority of his followers prior to the said date virtually stopped working especially on their farms, some others also sold their life time properties and were only waiting for the said date to come for the world to end based upon the prophecy of their leader.

That day finally came and the world is still in place as the prophecy was not fulfilled and some of his followers through disappointment and frustration did a lot of things which they were not supposed to do when they were actually in their rightful mind set.<sup>3</sup> This type of prophecies about the end time have been ongoing in the country for some time now and the most recent one which caught the attention of almost all the media houses was that of Prophet Peter Anamoah, the founder and overseer of the Machaira Community Church in Accra.

Prophet Peter Anamoah of the Machaira Community Church in Accra predicted that the world would come to an end on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November, 2011 and that only a village near Bolgatanga in the Upper East Region of Ghana which would not be destroyed by God. Like many before him, Prophet Anamoah was able to convince his followers about the impending doom and some left their jobs and followed him to Bolgatanga to wait for the end of the world as well as being saved from the catastrophe. One of such followers was Peter Asiedu, a technician with his own business in Accra who disclosed to Africa Review that he told his families to join him but they did not because they claimed the prophecy was false, however he believed in everything that the prophet predicted due to the numerous miraculous works that God had been performing through him.<sup>4</sup> Some concerned relatives of prophet

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<sup>3</sup> Djirentsi, Magnus, Interview, 27 February 2016, Tsito.

<sup>4</sup> Francis Korkutse, 'Ghanaian Fanatic Prophecies End of the World.' [www.africareview.com/News](http://www.africareview.com/News) (2011).

Anamoah's followers expressed their dismay. Ebenezer Tenkorang, an uncle of a church member called Bernard Owiredu told the Independence Daily Guide News Paper that his nephew, a university Graduate had succeeded convincing his siblings to flee with him to Bolgatanga, and even prior to that, there had been a lot of some unusual changes in his behavior which was a source of worry to the entire family.

Mr. Tenkorang then reported his strange behavior to the police and appealed to both the government and all the religious organizations to call the prophet to order since he was suspected to be poisoning the minds of his followers with false teachings. Since 7<sup>th</sup> November, 2011 the Machaira church had been running adverts in the media warning the public about God's decision to destroy the world, the Prophet warned that God had intended to do what would come to pass. Destruction would come to the world on the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month of the 11<sup>th</sup> year and on the 11<sup>th</sup> hour. This destruction was deep to understand and that he knew people could not easily grasp the prediction but must keep in touch.

He however said It was possible for one to prepare and escape this destruction that was about to strike the world; this had aroused a lot of media interest in the prophecy. According to him, one can only enter into Heaven upon payment of some fees starting from the class of clay which is only GHC 30. The other classes were iron, brass, silver, gold and diamond and one had to pay 5 million old cedis for the diamond class which was the highest.<sup>5</sup> Prophet Anamoah revealed that after the announcement of the various classes, many Ghanaians had opted for the diamond class which was 5 million old cedis and they were the ones, who would be saved when God had come in November, 2011. He further said, many people paid the money and he used part to buy brand new tires for his car to enable him travel to the

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<sup>5</sup>Prophet Anamoah Collects 5 Million Old Cedis as Heaven Gate Fees. [www.ghanaforum.com/showthread.php/5474](http://www.ghanaforum.com/showthread.php/5474), 2011.

Western Region to do the work of God and it was that same money that helped them to organize a conference in Accra, he revealed.

The prophet disclosed to the Ghana Palava(a daily publication news paper) that he would be having a special meeting with those who were paying the money especially the diamond class to let them know what to do before the end time in November, 2011. Those who couldn't pay any money would not be welcomed at the meeting and the poor is disqualified from attending the meeting that would prepare the people before the time, Prophet Peter Anamoah added.

Commenting on Anamoah's prediction about the end of the world, Prophet Emmanuel Kankam Atta Kakra who is the leader of Jesus Christ of Nazareth for all Freedom Fighters Fellowship said, Prophet Peter Anamoah was a fraudster who should be arrested by the police and face the full rigors of the law. He again revealed that Prophet Anamoah had been collecting money from the unsuspecting members of the general public to satisfy his personal parochial interest and gains but not to take anybody to heaven. Prophet Kankam argued that nobody was aware of the time that the Almighty God would come; and that Prophet Anamoah was deceiving members of the general public with his supposed November date for the destruction of the world. He predicted that God was going to use Ghana to free the world from the shackles of the devil and this prophecy would have to be fulfilled. It was therefore not true that God would destroy the world in November, Ghanaians should treat the prophecy of Anamoah with the contempt it deserved.

Prophet Kankam said God was going to expose prophet Anamoah through a seminar to be held on June 4 in the same 2011 and that would be the last time he (Prophet Anamoah) would call himself a prophet of God. God was not going to kill Prophet Anamoah but he

would expose him for the whole world to see his lies after the seminar on June 4 and that would be the end of him in the pastoral work, he added.

Despite the fact that some other prophets such as Kankam entreated Christians and the general public to treat Prophet Anamoah's prediction about the end time with the contempt that it deserved, there had been reports that some Christians, Muslims and traditional believers had gathered at Zuarungu Tua, a suburb of the Bolgatanga Municipality in the Upper East region to pray under the directives of Prophet Peter Anamoah in order to be saved from the catastrophe. Peter Anamoah asserted that the whole world would be destroyed except the town of Zuarungu Tua, and all who would be in it.

The remnants, according to the prophet would form a new generation that would live to restructure the world. He said two prophecies he gave had come to pass. They were President Obama going to be the president of the United State of America by 2009, and the overthrow of some leaders in the Arabian countries including Brother Gaddafi of Libya, and all had been fulfilled. Hence his prediction concerning the end time would surely come to pass.<sup>6</sup>

In spite of the predictions given by the successive Prophets including Peter Anamoah concerning the end time, the world still remained undestroyed even though their calculated dates had elapsed. As such predictions were not new to the general public; a lot of people have developed keen interest in knowing the time the world would finally end through inquiries from other men and women of God. At this point it can be said that not only a section of the Ghanaian population that are eager to know the time in which the world would end, Matthew's account of the New Testament also presents the disciples of Jesus keenness to know the exact time or hour in which the end would take place (Tell us, they said, 'when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?' 24:3).The

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<sup>6</sup> Prekeseghanamedia.tumblr.com/post/1184152402241/end-time-prophet-dash-to-bolga (2016).

response of Jesus is so surprising, ‘Περὶ δὲ τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης καὶ ὥρας οὐδεὶς οἶδεν, οὐδὲ οἱ ἄγγελοι τῶν οὐρανῶν οὐδὲ ὁ υἱός, εἰ μὴ ὁ πατὴρ μόνος’ (Matt.24:36). The text challenges the reader, not to dwell in the ‘time’ but to enter in a process of understanding and awareness (24:33).

## **1.2 Statement of problem**

A critical attention given to the Parousia among Christians in Ghana generally revealed that many people do not have an in depth understanding of Jesus’ eschatological discourse in Matthew chapter 24, is it not the reason that makes this present day prophets keep predicting the day of the end time? Is it also not true that some people do believe in such predictions? Have not people left their jobs all in the name of end time prophecies? Has it not been established that a prophet has collected some monies from unsuspecting people to give them visa to Heaven on the last day? All these ascertain the fact that an informed understanding of the Parousia has not been reached yet, due to lack of proper understanding of the eschatological discourse in the New Testament of the bible such as the book of Revelation, Mark 13: 1-37, Luke 21:5-36 and Matthew 24:1-44 leading to the following:

- Wrong interpretation of the eschatological discourse in the New Testament;
- Retardation on economic growth;
- Unnecessary anxiety in society

The focus of this research is to reach an informed understanding of Jesus’ eschatological discourse in Matthew 24: 1-44 and then use it to alleviate the belief and practices of predictions concerning the end time. The outcome is expected to help Christians in Ghana generally to be able to discern whether end time prophecies have theological bearing from the bible, especially from the New Testament.

### 1.3 Research Questions

The research is guided by the following questions:

- What is the meaning of Jesus' eschatological discourse in Mathew 24:1-44?
- How relevant will the eschatological discourse in Matthew 24:1-44 be to the contemporary Ghanaian Christianity?
- What does the discourse tell Christians in Ghana today?

### 1.4 Literature Review

There has been a lot of debates among scholars concerning some thornier issues found in the eschatological discourse of the New Testament mostly that of the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24:1-44. Below are some of the mainly debated themes among scholars about the Olivet Discourse:

#### 1.4.1 The identity of the 'Son' and the 'sayings'

A lot of concerns have been raised about the Son of Man sayings in the Olivet Discourse; and chiefly among them is the fact that Jesus promised his followers that the Son of Man would appear on the clouds before the generation passed away (Matthew 24:29-35) and 'the Son not knowing the day or the hour of the parousia' (Matthew 24:36).<sup>7</sup> These sayings of Jesus spark the debate of whether the 'Son' in the Olivet Discourse is interpreted as the historical Jesus, the eschatological Christ or as an Aramaic idiom representing the totality of Humanity, thus there has not been any consensus among scholars about the uniqueness of the 'son' and his sayings.

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<sup>7</sup> Murray Beasley, *Jesus and Last Days: The Interpretation of the Olivet Discourse* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1993), pg 1-55.

For instance, Maurice Casey postulated that Aramaic was almost the main language spoken by Jesus in his era, and that the Aramaic term ‘bar (e) nash (a) could not have been used with the meaning ‘the son of man’ at the time of Jesus.<sup>8</sup> When an Aramaic noun is indefinite, it is written in the absolute state, example ‘enash’ (a man) however to make the noun definite, Aramaic adds an aleph which is transliterated as ‘a’ to the end of the noun, example enash (a) ‘the man’. Nevertheless, by the fourth century AD the difference between these two states had broken down, so both bar enash (a) and bar enash mean ‘a son of man.’ There was no difference in meaning. The bracket around the aleph at the end of the phrase means that it is removable, thus it can be written with or without the aleph.

This makes it very complicated to state with any certainty whether or not the emphatic bar (e) nasha could have meant ‘the son of man’ and been used to refer to a particular son of man, like that of Daniel 7:13.

He asserted that bar (e) nash (a) in Aramaic was simply an ordinary general term for ‘humankind’, and further argues that a speaker can also use it to refer to himself; or to some other people.<sup>9</sup> Hence the context in which the term is used determines whether it was being used to describe humanity in general or being used to refer to a particular person. Thus the context of the term makes it clearer who was in mind.

According to him, the term in Aramaic does not occur in its definite state with the meaning ‘the son of man’ thus by referring to any particular person. However, when this Aramaic phrase of Jesus was translated into Greek, the translators faced a problem of whether to make it definite ‘ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου’ (the son of man) or ‘υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου’ (a son of man), and since the Greek has no such Aramaic equivalent, it was best for the translators to use the

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<sup>8</sup> Maurice Casey, ‘In which Language Did Jesus Teach?’ *Expository Times* 2007, 108: 326-8.

<sup>9</sup> Maurice Casey, *The Solution to The ‘Son of Man’ Problem* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 67-81.

definite to make reference to Jesus clearer in the gospel. Casey's assertion implies that the phrase 'the son of man' is a translation from Aramaic with no reference to any particular person, however, its context determines whether it is being used to address a particular person or not.

Contrary to the views of Casey, Andrew Perriman argues that the Aramaic term meaning 'the Son of man' as used by Jesus was in reference to the son of man in Daniel (ἑθεώρουν ἐν ὄράματι τῆς νυκτὸς καὶ ἰδοὺ μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενος ἦν καὶ ἕως τοῦ παλαιοῦ τῶν ἡμερῶν ἔφθασεν καὶ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ προσηνέχθη) Dan. 7:13<sup>10</sup>. He argues further that the New Testament, particularly the writings of Paul and the book of Revelation, look towards the Parousia of the Lord. He interprets the Parousia to mean the fall of the Roman Empire and the elevation of Christ to the position of universal authority above Caesar, to him; this had already taken place, hence the second coming concerning the son of man in Mt. 24:27-9 is a past event, and not about the future. Likewise Perriman, Tom Wright asserts that it is possible for Jesus to use the Aramaic term bar (e) Nash(a) to refer to a particular son of man preferably the one use in Daniel 7:13.<sup>11</sup>

He argues that the language of apocalyptic in the first century AD did not refer to the end of space –time universe in Jewish writings, rather it is a complex metaphor- system which referred to events within history which were of such importance and magnitude that in contemporary terms, they can be referred to as 'cataclysmic' or earth-shattering. This apocalyptic language was used because it could spell out the theological significance of such events.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Andrew Perriman, *The Coming of the Son of Man* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), 50-66.

<sup>11</sup> Tom Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), 517-8.

<sup>12</sup> Tom Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992), 280-338.

He thus argued that the historical Jesus never predicted the end of the space- time universe in his apocalyptic son of man sayings. His sayings in Mark 13:4-27 and parallels is not as it has traditionally been thought about the second coming, rather Jesus uses the picture of the son of man in Daniel 7:9-14 to make a statement about the defeat of enemies of the true people of God and the vindication of the true people of God themselves. The defeat was that of the Greek tyrant Antiochus IV Epiphanes who oppressed the Jews that were devout and faithful to Yahweh and the Torah.

‘When the one like a son of man enters heaven is to receive vindication from the Ancient of Days’ (Dan.7:13), means the liberation of Jews faithful to Yahweh from the oppression of Antiochus. Jesus reuses the motif of Daniel 7:13 to depict the event in which his followers would be rescued and the enemies punished. Wright argues from the context of the son of man saying in Mark 13:24-27 and parallels (the prediction of the destruction of the temple and the disciples’ question as to when this would take place) that Jesus and his followers would be vindicated at the time of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem.<sup>13</sup> He therefore asserted that this event did take place in AD 70, within the time frame of a generation specified in Mark13:30.

Albert Schweitzer, argued that Jesus as an eschatological prophet like other Jews of his time expecting a period of tribulation prior to the arrival of the Messiah and the Kingdom of God. Jesus believed that at the coming of the kingdom he would be revealed as the Messiah which Schweitzer claims is both a supernatural figure and one that Jesus equated with the son of man of Daniel 7:13. Jesus predicted to his disciples in Matthew 10:23 that their mission to the Israelites would not end before the son of man would appear. This prediction according to Albert did not come to pass. The delay in the pre-messianic tribulation and the coming of

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<sup>13</sup> Tom Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*. 339-67.

the son of man led Jesus to view that God would spare believers the tribulation if he Jesus took it on himself. Considering the phenomenon of the death of John the Baptist, Jesus had concluded that he would suffer similar fate at the hands of the authorities, indicating that he took this tribulation on himself and clashed with the authorities and the subsequent death, hoping that would force God into bringing about the longed for salvation of the covenant people, and this hope also failed to come to pass.<sup>14</sup>

However, the early Christians were of the conviction that Jesus had been raised from the dead because some of their number claimed to have visions of a risen Jesus. They believed he was in Heaven from where he would return in glory as the messiah and establish the kingdom of God, for example Stephen saw Jesus in heaven as the son of man at the right hand of God (Acts 7: 55-56).<sup>15</sup> Even though Albert described Jesus as an eschatological prophet who mistakenly predicted an imminent arrival of both the son of man and the kingdom of God, he admitted that his Jesus of history was not amenable to the modern church. This eschatological prophet disappears back into the historical mists when he came.

He comes to us as One unknown... and sets us to the tasks which he has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they are wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience who He is.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to rede*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed (London: SCM, 1954), 348-95.

<sup>15</sup> Albert Schweitzer, *The Kingdom of God and primitive Christianity* (London: A & C Black, 1968), 131-9.

<sup>16</sup> Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: a Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: SCM, 1981),104.

He concluded that those who know Jesus not as the historical person but as the Christ who is spiritually risen within people who strived for transformation in the world experience the spirit.

The implication of his assertion is that, the identity of the son of man or the son of man sayings can only be comprehended based upon how he revealed himself to the individuals, meaning it is only through an encounter with the spirit of Jesus that a person can really know the true identity of the son of man as mentioned in the gospel.

As Casey was of the opinion that the best way for the bilingual translators to translate the Aramaic term 'bar (e) Nash (a) into Greek was to make it emphatic or definite (the son of man), Andrew Angel also was of different view. He argued that Casey's assertion was unnecessary because there was a Greek equivalent to the Aramaic term in 'huios anthropou' (a son of man). It can be proven from various texts from the time of Jesus. Example Testament of Joseph 2.5; Epistle of Barnabas 12.10; Joseph and Asenenth 18.9. According to him, the above texts provide evidence that 'huios anthropou' (a son of man) has its equivalent in Aramaic, hence the bilingual translators from the Aramaic to Greek concerning the son and the son of man sayings in the gospel have a choice to translate the term as indefinite or emphatic accordingly. Angel therefore agreed with Tom Wright on the assertion that the translators were using an Aramaic traditions bar (e) Nash (a) in the emphatic state to refer to a particular son of man.<sup>17</sup> To them it is possible that Jesus used an Aramaic emphatic state to refer to the one like a son of man of Daniel 7:13.

Ulrich Luz, commenting on the use of the Phrase 'The Son...' as in v.36 explains that it is a Christological expression or title given to Jesus; and must be viewed in two main

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<sup>17</sup> Andrew R. Angel, *Chaos and the Son of Man: The Hebrew Chaokampf Tradition in the period 515 BCE to 200 CE*. (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 184-8.

dimensions, thus the horizontal or the earthly Son which describes Jesus' way through history in the land of Palestine as the one born of human, rejected, blasphemed, the one with power over sin, killed, buried and risen. The other is the vertical dimension in which God reveals Jesus as his Son (1:22-23, 2:15, 3:17, 11:27, 16:17 etc).<sup>18</sup> Further, Luz explains that the use of the 'Son' for Jesus by Matthew is a common denominator for Jesus' Christological title. Matthean concept about the Son is solely horizontal denoting the human nature of Christ as it is with any ordinary being, thus Jesus has both the divine and the human nature hence his answer in v.36 that not even the Son knows about that day can be interpreted to mean that he answers the question according to his human nature to emphasize the point that the day or the hour of the end time must not be known by any human being except the Divine authority.

#### **1.4.2 The use of the phrase 'this generation'**

The reference to the phrase 'this generation' in Mt.24: 34 with its parallels in the gospels as far as the Olivet Discourse is concerned is the most difficult expression to interpret in the complicated eschatological discourse. As the expression, 'this generation,' the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the age are mentioned in the same passage whiles Jesus' disciples obviously did not experience the fall of Jerusalem as well as the end of the age, some critical scholars presuppose that the synoptic contains an erroneous , unfulfilled prophecy. The debate then came among scholars of whether the blame for the unfulfilled prophecy or the 'mistake' be put on Jesus (the sayings are considered not authentic) or on the gospel writers (the sayings are attributed to him).

Some contemporary evangelicals often acknowledge without trying to either solve it or decide whether Jesus or the gospel writer is to be blamed.<sup>19</sup> Joseph's assertion indicates that

<sup>18</sup> Luz Ulrich, *Studies in Matthew* (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2005), pg. 97-112.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 1353.

there is problem with the expression ‘this generation’ as used in the Olivet Discourse since Jesus’ disciples or the contemporaries did not witness or experience the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the world. Thus either the prediction by Jesus fails or the expression did not belong to him. This he called on scholars to find out. According to him, the phrase ‘this generation’ is the most difficult expression to interpret in the entire complicated Olivet Discourse.<sup>20</sup>

Commentators such as Robert Maddox asserted that the expression ‘this generation’ as in Matthew 24:34 refers to Jesus’ contemporaries and any other interpretation is artificial.<sup>21</sup> Thus to him, the entire discourse is limited to Jesus’ contemporaries era, implying that his predictions were all to be fulfilled in the life time of his audience. However, F.D. Bruner by dwelling on the expression ‘all these things’ in the same verse 24:34, explained that the predictions in the discourse also include the future, unparalleled tribulation and probably Jesus’ second coming or the Parousia. The preceding paragraphs on the Parousia (24:29-31) prepares the reader for a reference to Jesus’ return, and not for the fall of the temple.

Bruner further argues that, the central theme of the whole discourse is that ‘no one knows of the day or the hour of the Parousia, neither the angels of heaven nor the Son’ (24:36), therefore Jesus could not on the one hand asserts that his contemporary generation would see the fulfillment of all his predictions and on the other hand asserts just two verses later that no man, not even himself, could know the time of the fulfillment of the prophecies. He buttress his point with Matthew 24:1-14 (‘but the beginning of the birth pangs,’ the end is

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> R. Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke-Acts* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1982) 111-115.

not yet,' this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world'), according to him, these statements by Jesus is not emphasizing an immediate end of the age.

Bruner's understanding of the discourse implies that all predictions are focused on the future leading to the second coming or the end of the age, hence the expression 'this generation as in 24:34 cannot be limited to his contemporaries, but was rather used to explain something different from a chronological life span of his audience.'<sup>22</sup> Some other scholars also explained the expression 'this generation' to represent Israel as a race, usually taken as a promise that God will preserve Israel to the end.<sup>23</sup> Israel will remain wicked till the end at which time it will be judged on the final day.<sup>24</sup> These claim indicate that the expression 'this generation' is used metaphorically to represent the nation Israel, meaning that the statement in 24:34 is solely to be limited to Israel as a race, and not any other group on the surface of the earth.

In contrast to this view point above, J.F. Walvoord contends that the assertion of Schweitzer and Lenski on the expression 'this generation' is problematic, according to him; Jesus speaks of a leafing fig tree to represent the eminence of summer (harvest) and by analogy the nearness of the vindication and the judgment at the second coming of Jesus or the end time. The fig tree is not a cipher for Israel in this context, hence 'this generation' in Matthew speaks of a wicked kind of people who reject Jesus and face the eschatological judgment, and not all Israel.

For instance, Jesus' disciples were mostly Israelites and in the Olivet discourse the expression 'this generation' goes beyond the unbelieving Israel to include the unbelieving of all the nations on the surface of the earth. 'This generation' in the discourse includes both the Jews and the gentiles as well, thus the discourse is an external prolepsis, indicating that

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<sup>22</sup> F.D. Bruner, *The Churchbook. A historical 9Theological Commentary Matthew 13-28*(Waco: Word, 1990) 877.

<sup>23</sup> R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1943) 953.

<sup>24</sup> E. Schweizer, *The Good News According to St. Matthew* (Atlanta: John Knox, 19975) 458.

it narrates in advance that which will take place after the great commission , where the mission expands beyond Israel to all the other nations Matthew 28: 18-20).<sup>25</sup> Walvoord's assertion implies that the Olivet discourse is a prolepsis to the great commission as in Matthew 28:18-20 where the disciples were charged to proselytize the whole world; hence Jesus cannot limit the expression 'this generation' to only the Jews, therefore it is used for all people who reject Jesus Christ and his teachings.

Another scholar, Leon Morris also agrees with Walvoord by explaining that 'this generation' in Matthew describes unbelieving, rejecting humanity, unresponsive to God and oblivious to the possibility of facing his judgment; 'this generation' that oppose the coming kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus Christ stands in solidarity with those who reject and oppose God and his kingdom to the very end.

'Right up to the time when all these things happen, there will be people of the same character as those who rejected Jesus while he lived on earth' Morris further argues that while Jesus was addressing evil contemporaries in Matthew 11:16, 12:39, 41-42, 16:4, 17:17, and in 23:36, his reference to the expression 'this generation' expands beyond his own contemporaries to include persecutors and murderers of the righteous from Abel to Zechariah and to the heralds of the gospel in the indefinite future.

The context of the Olivet discourse indicates that the group described as 'this generation' sees all the events (evil in society) (24:34) of 24:4-31, hence 'this generation' represent the persecutors of Christ till the Parousia. Matthew deliberately juxtaposed the phrase 'this generation' with his account of the days of Noah in 24:37-39 in order to echo the notorious generation of the flood (Gen. 7:1). The flood generation is a type of 'this generation' that sees the end signs, as the flood itself typifies the judgment that will occur at the Parousia.

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<sup>25</sup> J.F. Walvoord, *Matthew; Thy kingdom Come* (Chicago: Moody, 1974) 191-192.

‘This generation’ in 24:34 represents a long line of unbelieving, unresponsive people from the time of Noah to the end of the age.<sup>26</sup> Morris’ assertion points out that the expression ‘this generation’ symbolizes those who rebel against God from the time of the flood in the era of Noah to the era of the gospel brought about by Jesus Christ till the end of the age or the Parousia.

Also Neil D. Nelson explains that ‘this generation’ does not refer to all people from AD 30 to AD 70 because they did not witness the events of A.D.70 and also Jesus stated that neither he nor any of his followers know about the hour of the Parousia (24:34). Furthermore, ‘this generation’ does not speak of Israel as a race. In the Olivet discourse, the opponents of Jesus’ disciples include the gentiles as well as the Jews, together they comprise ‘this generation’ of 24:34.<sup>27</sup>

Another commentator, Lovestam also pointed out that the primarily pejorative force of ‘this generation’ is a combination with descriptive adjectives, and has been recognized by many commentators. The moral and ethical use of ‘dor’ and ‘haddor hazzeh’ in the OT stands behind Jesus’ use of the term in Matthew. His use of the phrase has deliberate connections to the two most notorious generations (of the flood and that of wilderness wanderings) in the OT. Adjectives such as evil, perverse, adulterous and faithless (Matthew 11:39; 45; 19:6; 17:17) come from the song of Moses (Deut. 32:5; 20). Matthew seems to have juxtaposed ‘this generation’ with his account of the days of Noah (Matthew 24:37-39), which is an explicit type of the coming of the Son of Man. This is probably the echo of Gen.7:1 ‘then the Lord said to Noah, ‘enter the ark’ (Matthew 24:38, until the day when

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<sup>26</sup> L. Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 612-613.

<sup>27</sup> Neil D. Nelson, ‘this generation of Matthew 24:34: A literally Critical perspective’ *Jets* 38/3 (September 1996,) 369-385).

Noah entered the ark’), ‘you and your household, for I have found you righteous before me in this generation’.

The godly therefore does not belong to the expression ‘this generation’ rather an adjective to describe the wicked and opposers of the gospel brought about by Jesus. Just as Noah was a contemporary of the ‘dor’ of the flood and yet did not belong to it, and Moses, Joshua etc were contemporaries of the ‘dor’ of the wilderness without belonging to it, it is assumed that not all people in the NT also belong to the expression ‘this generation’.<sup>28</sup> Loves Tam’s understanding of the discourse indicates that the expression ‘this generation’ in Matthew 24:34 is not applicable to all people at a particular time, but rather to the lawbreakers and wicked in society. Example, the truant at the time of Noah, that of the wilderness, Sodom and Gomorrah and at the time of the Parousia.

### **1.4.3 The Rapture**

With regards to what has been known as ‘rapture’ among Christians, it is not yet clear to premillenarians as to whether the rapture of the church occurs before or after the end time tribulation; and the debate continues amongst them, however among other eschatological points of view such as those of post millenarians and amillenarians asserted that the rapture is part of the second coming of Christ and therefore is posttribulational. Both the amillenarians and post millenarians agreed without question to post tribulation rapture because they interpret prophecies of the event leading up to the second coming non- literally, whereas the premillenarians interpret the prophecies literally.

Among the premillenarians, the issue of pretribulationism (an eschatological system within premillennialism which teaches that Jesus Christ will rapture away the church before the

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<sup>28</sup> E. Lovestam, ‘The he genea haute Eschatology in Mk 13, 30 parr.,’ L’ Apocalypse Johannique et l’ Apocayptique dans le Nouveau Testament(ed.J. Lambrecht, Leauven University of Leuven, 1980)403-413.

future seven –year tribulation begins) continues to be a debate, the difference of opinion stem largely from the question as to whether end time prophecies are to be interpreted literally, especially as they distinguish Israel’s future from that of the church of Christ. Both pretribulationists and post tribulationists are confronted with the fact that scripture does not expressly state either view, rather pretribulationists find what approximates a direct teaching of their view in 2 Thessalonians 2 where the lawless one is said to be revealed only after the restrainer is removed. The traditional interpretation of the restrainer among the preterists is the Holy Spirit who indwells the church, thus it is the Holy Spirit (and by implication the church) who must be removed before the lawless one can be revealed. If the lawless one is the end time ruler, he would be revealed at least seven years before the second coming of Christ. Taking into consideration this interpretation of 2 Thessalonians 2, then the rapture occurs prior to the tribulation.<sup>29</sup> In contrast, post tribulationists dispute this interpretation and interpret the passage in a manner that does not yield a pretribulational sequence of end time events.<sup>30</sup> However, the posttribulationists have not been precise on any particular text from the bible to support their claim that the rapture of the church occurs at the time of Christ’s second coming to set up his kingdom as did the pretribulationists by the use of 2 Thessalonians 2 to support their claim.

Posttribulationists are also embarrassed by the fact that the most detailed account of the second coming of Christ found in revelation 19-20, nowhere mentions the rapture in connection with the Parousia and there is no legitimate place to insert the events of 1 Thessalonians 4. Posttribulationists try to use Matthew 24 to support their view, however midtribulationists also claim that the rapture will occur three and a half years before the

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<sup>29</sup> D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Thessalonian Epistles* (Chicago: Moody, 1971) 313-314; Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958) 259-63; John F. Walvoord, ‘Is the Tribulation before the Rapture in 2 Thessalonians,’ *BSac* 134(1977) 107-13.

<sup>30</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973) 122-28.

second coming of Christ. The Matthew 24 has therefore become a strategic crux interpretum in the debate between the two views. The discussion of Matthew 24 becomes quite determinative in any conclusion as to where the rapture fits into the prophetic predictions.<sup>31</sup>

There is also a general agreement between some conservative interpreters concerning the gathering of the elects in Matthew 24:27-31 about the second coming of the Son of Man. Some premillenarians limit the 'elects' to the Jewish people because Christ was addressing the apostles in this passage. Others view the 'elects' as the saved, whether OT or NT saints. Premillenarians, whether pretribulational or post tribulational, recognized the fact that there will be a gathering of all saints at the time of the second coming of Christ in order that they may all participate in the millennial kingdom.

The main question raised by premilenarians, whether pretribulationalists or post tribulationalists is whether this event includes the rapture of the church. Even if the church is ruptured earlier in the sequence of events, it nevertheless would be included in the gathering. The two essentials of the rapture of the church are the resurrection of the dead in Christ and translation of living Christians, as brought out clearly in central passages such as 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-58. The prophecy in Matthew, however says nothing of either resurrection or translation but rather refers only to the gathering of the elect.

It might be assumed that the elect so gathered have been either translated or resurrected, but it is not indicated when this occurs, also the passage cannot properly be used by either the pretribulationalists or the posttribulationists as positive proof of their position.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> George E. Ladd, *The blessed Hope* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956) 144-45.

<sup>32</sup> Paul D. Feinberg, 'An exegetical Study of Daniel 9:24-27,' *Tradition and Testament: Essays in Honor of Charles Lee Feinberg* (ed. John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg; Chicago: Moody, 1981) 189-220; Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977) 115-40.

In response to Feinberg's assertion, posttribulationists teach that Jesus describes the tribulation up through Matthew 24:29 and that post tribulation rapture is depicted in verse 30-31. This is in contrast to the view of the pretribulationists who believe Christ presents the second coming here without a reference to rapture. According to posttribulationists, the rapture is described again in 24: 40-42, where the Lord speaks of two men in the field, with the one taken and the other left; and two women at the mill, with one taken and the other left.

As the descriptions there follow the tribulation discussion, posttribulationists insist that this passage must describe a posttribulational rapture. In order for the posttribulational view to find support in the Olivet Discourse, they need to demonstrate that Jesus is explaining the future of the church, and not the future of Israel. Otherwise the discourse could give no information about the rapture. Thus they argue that the disciples in this passage represent the church, not believing Israel. As a posttribulationist, Douglas Moo says, 'thus the crucial question becomes: whom do the disciples represent in this passage-Israel or the church?'<sup>33</sup>

No one doubts,' writes Moo, 'that the disciples in most contexts of the gospel stand for Christians of all ages- or else why do we take Jesus' teaching as our own instruction? Moreover since the church is mentioned in Matthew 16:18 and 18:15-18, the bulk of Christ's teaching in the gospels is directly applicable to the church.'<sup>34</sup>

Pretribulationists, however point out that posttribulationists have missed the point of the debate. The issue is not about to whom the discourse is applicable. Of course, this passage, like all of scripture, is applicable to the church. Matthew expected no doubt that his book would be used as a teaching manual for the church (Matthew 28: 19-20). All Christians are

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<sup>33</sup> Douglas J. Moo, 'The case for the Post tribulation Rapture Position,' *in the rapture, pre-Mid,-or Post-Tribulational?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 192.

<sup>34</sup> Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* 131.

expected to draw their teachings and lessons from the passage for their own living. The issue which needs consideration now is, ‘what is Jesus talking about?’ or precisely about whom is Jesus teaching? And the answer to this question found in the context of the passage is ‘believing’ Israel.

### **A. The Larger Context**

The larger context is the book of Matthew, it is absolutely impossible to ignore the Jewish essence of the content of Matthew, as said by Leo Morris, ‘There is ‘Jewishness’ about the gospel.’<sup>35</sup> OT theology saturates the apologetic of the book. First, Matthew proves that Christ was the rightful heir to the promises of the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants (Matthew 1:1). Only Jesus could be the Messiah. Secondly, Matthew wrote to present Christ as King of Israel in exact fulfillment of OT prophecies. Third, he wanted to describe Christ’s presentation of the Messianic Kingdom in fulfillment of the OT prophets. According to Tasker, ‘The apologetic aim of the evangelist can be summed up in the sentence ‘Jesus is the Messiah, and in Him Jewish prophecy is fulfilled.’<sup>36</sup> Of course Matthew also wrote to show why Christ introduced the church. It was because the Jews at that time, following their religious leaders rejected the Messiah. Therefore, Matthew also wrote and explained how Christ introduced the concept of a new entity: ‘I will build my church’ (Matthew 16:18). Thus in the end, the entire gospel of Christ is to be taken to the whole world. But the entire book is a study of the presentation of the kingdom to the nation of Israel and Israel’s refusal to accept it. If there is any theme to be given to the book, then it must be found in Matthew 21:5 ‘Behold your king is coming to you.’ So though the Olivet discourse, as well as the whole book of Matthew, is for the church, it is about the Messiah, His presentation of his

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<sup>35</sup> Leo Morris, *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) 115.

<sup>36</sup> R.V.G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. R.V.G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961) 18.

kingdom to Israel, Israel's rejection of his kingdom and upcoming judgment, Christ second coming and future Messianic kingdom. As Thiessen said, 'Matthew wrote to encourage and confirm the persecuted Jewish Christians in their faith, to confute their opponents, and to prove to both that the Gospel was not a contradiction of the teaching of the Old Testament, but rather a fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham and to David.'<sup>37</sup>

## **B. The immediate context**

The immediate context is the disciple's question. The whole of the Olivet discourse is based on three questions by the disciples. So an investigation of the questions the disciples asked tells whether Christ is describing the future of the church or of Israel as a nation. The setting for the Olivet Discourse is the disciple's consternation over the Lord's denunciation of the Jerusalem temple. Thus they pointed to the magnificence of the temple buildings (Matthew 24:1). But Jesus replied that all would be destroyed (24:2). The disciples then asked two questions, clearly about the future of Israel (24:3):

1. When will the temple be destroyed?
2. What will be the sign of the second coming and the end of the age?

According to OT theology, these two events- the destruction of the temple, the coming of the Messiah, and the beginning of the kingdom age went together. In the end times an attack on Jerusalem and the temple would come; Christ would return and fight for Israel; the current age would end and the Messianic kingdom would be initiated (Zechariah 14:1-11). In reality the disciples thought the destruction of the temple, the second coming and the end of the age are all single event.

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<sup>37</sup> Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Introduction to New Testament* ( Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1943) 137.

However, the point is that the disciples were not asking anything about the church or the rapture. They knew next to nothing about either one. They knew only about Israel, the temple, Jerusalem, the coming of the messiah to earth, and the kingdom. Thus as to whom the disciple's represent is contrived by posttribulationists.

Actually, the disciples could represent the church on some occasion and Israel on other occasion.<sup>38</sup> Even as this is so, the main issue is the immediate context. What did the disciples ask about? And the answer is, they asked about the main events prophesied in the OT for the future of Israel. And Christ answered those questions in his discourse. The position of the pretribulationists is that rapture is not found in the Olivet discourse (Matthew 24-25), which is in contrary to the position of the posttribulationists.

### **C. Pre-Wrath Rapture**

The pre wrath rapture concept is a system recently devised by Marvin Rosenthal and Robert Van Kampem.<sup>39</sup> According to this view, the rapture takes place about three-fourths of the way through the seven-year tribulation. The tribulation in this view is only the first three and half years of Daniel's seventieth week. God's wrath is actually not poured out on the earth until about the last one-fourth of the seven –year period. The troubles on the earth in the first three-fourths of this period are not God's wrath, but are brought about by Satan and man himself.<sup>40</sup> Since God does not pour out His wrath until after the rapture, the system is known as 'pre-wrath.'

The pre-wrath system uses, Matthew 24:22 to buttress its view. 'And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened'

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<sup>38</sup> For example, they could represent the Israel in the commission in Matthew 10, and then the church in Matthew 28: 19-20.

<sup>39</sup> Robert D. Van Kampen, *The Rapture Question Answered* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1997).

<sup>40</sup> This implies that the earthquakes described in Matthew 24:7 are the result of the power of Satan or man.

To sum up, then, God will cut the Great Tribulation; that is bringing it to a conclusion before the seventieth week is concluded. The Great Tribulation will be followed by cosmic disturbance, which will indicate that the Day of the Lord is about to commence. At that time God's glory will be manifested... First, the Rapture of the church will occur; that will then be followed by the Lord's judgment of the wicked as He begins His physical return to earth (Rosenthal).<sup>41</sup>

According to Gerhard Delling, there are several problems with pre-wrath understanding of this section of the Olivet Discourse. First as shown above, the passage does not deal with the rapture of the church at all. It is rather a discussion on the future of Israel from the view point of believing Jews. Second, 'shortened' does not teach what Rosenthal says it does. 'Shortened' (ἐκολοβώθησαν) 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural, aorist, indicative passive, from (κολοβω), is correctly translated 'shortened.' But the real question asks from what to what is the tribulation shortened? First it is shorter than what Satan's forces- the Antichrist and his associates want. Thus He has made it shorter than it would normally have been in terms of the purpose and power of the oppressors.<sup>42</sup> It is also shorter than what the wicked world deserves. If God were to pour out perfect judgment, no one would survive. But God is merciful and thus limits the great tribulation to only '1260' days. It will not go on indefinitely.

'So Jesus is teaching that the decree of God, made in eternity past, had already determined that the great tribulation would be just 'three and a half' years and not some longer period of time. This interpretation is verified by nothing than what the Scriptures say about the length of the Great Tribulation.' Says Benware.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Marvin Rosenthal, *The Pre –Wrath Rapture of the Church* (Nashville: Nelson, 1990)112-113.

<sup>42</sup> Gerhard Delling, 'Koloboo,' *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. By Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) 823-24.

<sup>43</sup> Paul Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy* (Chicago: Moody, 1995) 230.

One more serious flaw in the pre-wrath interpretation of Matthew 24:22 is that it fails to logically explain properly the reason why the tribulation has been cut short or shortened. The reason given in the scripture is that if it had not been cut short, no flesh would be saved. The point of the scripture is that when the great tribulation is over, something easier and better comes on the scene. In the Pre-Wrath scheme, however, something more horrible occurs-the Day of the Lord. If no flesh would have survived a continuation of the great tribulation through the full forty-two months, surely no flesh would survive if the great tribulation were to be cut short and followed by the awesome Day of the Lord.

Moreover, Matthew 24:21 says that the great tribulation will be the worst time ever, So how can it be replaced by the Day of the Lord which is more horrible in that it consists in God's wrath on the world? In fact, the great tribulation (Matthew 24: 21) and the Day of the Lord (Dan 12:1; Jer. 30:7) are both said to be the worst time ever, so they must be the same time period or at least overlap one another.<sup>44</sup>

#### **1.4.4 Preterism**

Preterism teaches that the predictions or prophecy in the Olivet Discourse by Jesus have all been fulfilled.

Mild Preterism holds that Tribulation was fulfilled within the first three hundred years of Christianity.... Moderate Preterism... sees the Tribulation and bulk of prophecy as fulfilled in events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70; but they still hold to a future Second Coming, a physical resurrection of the dead, and an end to temporary history, and the establishing of the consummate new heaven and new earth. Extreme or consistent (as they like to call

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<sup>44</sup> Paul S. Karleen, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church: Is it Biblical?* (Langhorne, Pa: BF Press, 1991); Renald E. Showers, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture View* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001) 93-151.

themselves) preterism believes that the Second Coming, and thus the resurrection of believers, is past. For all practical purposes all bible prophecy has been fulfilled, and we are beyond the millennium and even now in the new heaven and the new earth (Thomas Ice).<sup>45</sup>

The Preterists buttress their view by the use of verse 34 of Matthew 24: ‘Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.’ Preterism argues that ‘this generation’ means the generation that was alive when Jesus was on the earth, and so everything has been fulfilled. Again, some other preterists such as David Garland<sup>46</sup> and R.C. Sproul assert that all the events predicted by Jesus in the discourse have all been fulfilled in AD 70 event when the Temple was destroyed. The preterists once again buttress this contention with Jesus’ use of the term ‘this generation’ in v.34. They argue that the use of ‘this generation’ by Jesus means he was referring to his contemporaries indicating that all his predictions must take place in the life of his audience. Therefore his second coming has already taken place symbolically at the destruction of the Temple in AD 70. Thus preterists are no longer waiting for any second coming of Jesus.

However, on the contrary, Mark Bailey and Tom Constable defuse this claim and argued that ‘the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory’ (24:30)<sup>47</sup> is not symbolic as said per the views of the preterists but rather a literal, visible coming of the Lord in his full glory and power. On the issue of ‘this generation’ as mentioned in v.34 Mark and Constable asserted that it does not refer to the life span of the human race but rather was used to described a certain class of people precisely the faithless, evil, perverse and adulterous. According to them such a phrase was also used in the book of Deut. 32:5,

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<sup>45</sup> Thomas Ice, ‘Introduction’ to *The Great Tribulation, Past or Future?* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999) 7.

<sup>46</sup> David E. Garland, *Reading Matthew* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), 240-41, 244-49; R.C. Sproul, *The Last Days according to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), 66, 158.

<sup>47</sup> The sign of the Son of Man will appear...

20 to describe the unfaithful, therefore must not be taken as being referring to Jesus' contemporary audience. They conclude that the aim of Jesus' eschatological discourse is the second coming which is certain, however its timing has not been told, and therefore preparedness is the call to action in the whole discourse.<sup>48</sup>

David L. Turner, in an attempt to solve the problem between the preterists and the futurists view on the use of the phrase 'this generation' in v. 34, he explains that the phrase cannot merely be referred to as a certain class of people, Israel as a nation or even to those who will be alive at the end of the age, according to him Jesus' use of the phrase does not support such an idea, with this submission he asserts that the use of the phrase 'this generation' refers to Jesus' contemporaries and not about any future group of people. Matthew 24:34 is one of six texts in Matthew which couple 'generation' with the demonstrative pronoun (11:16, 12:41, 42, 45, 23:36, 24:34). He uses these texts to indicate that 'this generation' in 24:34 means Jesus' contemporaries. On the other hand, he extends the discourse by proposing that if indeed the phrase 'this generation' refers to Jesus' contemporaries, and Jesus pronounces that they will not die before the great tribulation, then Jesus was wrong and that is unthinkable to say that Jesus was wrong with his prediction. He concludes by saying that 'this generation' which Jesus refers to are his contemporaries who will live to witness the destruction of the temple in AD 70; therefore 'all these' must be limited to the destruction of the Temple not including the end of the age.<sup>49</sup> Turner is of the view that the phrase 'this generation' as it is used in v. 34 must not be generalized for the whole of the eschatological discourse in Matthew 24 but rather must be limited to the question about the destruction of the temple so that it will not appear as though Jesus' prediction has been false because all his contemporaries are dead and yet the end has not come till this present hour. Toussaint

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<sup>48</sup> Mark Bailey and Tom Constable, *The New Testament Explorer* (Dallas: Word, 1999) 51.

<sup>49</sup> David L. Turner, 'The Structure and Sequence of Matthew 24:1-44: Interaction with Evangelical Treatments,' *Grace Theological Journal* 10 (Spring 1989):3-27.

dwells on the issue of the abomination and the great tribulation. According to him there are several events and references in Matthew 24:15-28 which are not fulfilled or do not fit into AD 70 happenings.

Preterists have missed the point on the argument because there are several events in Matthew 24 that have not taken place yet. Thus they forced to spiritualize those events. All forms of preterism, some more than others, have to rely on figurative interpretation. John Noe, for example, defends non-literal of prophecy as follows: ‘The popular stream of end sayers have assumed that the Bible’s apocalyptic language must be interpreted literally and physically, and that since no one has witnessed a cataclysmic, earth-ending event of this nature, its time must lie in the future.’<sup>50</sup> The result of the compromise of the hermeneutical integrity thus results in bizarre interpretations of the Olivet discourse.

Preterists take much of the Olivet Discourse figuratively. Matthew 24:27 reads, ‘for as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.’ Actually, this implies that Christ’s coming will not be a secret to only some specific people, but will rather be public and grandiose or visible to all people on the surface of the earth. However, moderate Preterists such as Gentry asserts that the lightning is a picture of ‘Roman armies marching toward Jerusalem from an easterly direction.’<sup>51</sup>

In verse 30 of Matthew 24, the Lord teaches that at the second coming, ‘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. But Gentry insists that ‘this is not a physical, visible coming, but a judgment coming upon Jerusalem.’<sup>52</sup> In this figurative sense, the prophetic events of the Olivet Discourse were all fulfilled in A.D. 70 when the Romans captured and destroyed

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 51.

<sup>51</sup> Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Great Tribulation, Past or Future?* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999) 54.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 60.

Jerusalem. Thus according to the Preterists, there is no second coming of Christ as all prophecy or predictions have been already fulfilled. They use Matthew 24:34 (this generation will certainly not pass away before all these things take place) to support their claims that all of Jesus' contemporaries are all dead and gone hence all predictions have also been fulfilled, and for that matter the Parousia is a past event.

Pretribulationists and futurists disagree with the view of the Preterists on the interpretation of Matthew 24:34. For the Preterists, the generation that was alive when Christ presented the Olivet Discourse must remain alive until everything in the discourse was fulfilled. Thus the second coming occurred while that generation was alive. Noe writes, 'Make no mistake about it, A.D. 70 was the Lord's promised and personal return!'<sup>53</sup> This means all the predictions end at A.D. 70. On the other hand, Pretribulationists and futurists argue that none of the OT prophets' predictions of the coming of the Messiah in power and glory (Zechariah 12-14), however, harmonizes with the events of A.D. 70. The OT prophets taught that when the armies surrounded Jerusalem, the Messiah would come and fight for Israel. Israel at the second coming will be victorious. But in A.D. 70, Israel was defeated and devastated, and times of the gentiles were ushered in. Something is therefore awry with the extreme preterists interpretation of 'this generation.'

According to the pretribulationists, 'this generation' would not pass away until all these things take place means 'race' or 'nation' or 'family.' Thus the Lord would be saying the nation of Israel would not pass away until all of the things spoken of in the Olivet discourse are fulfilled. Some commentators also argue that 'this generation' is used in a negative sense, a pejorative sense meaning 'wicked generation.'<sup>54</sup> This interpretation is based on the way

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<sup>53</sup> John Noe, *Beyond End Times* (Bradford Pa: International Preterists Association, 1999) 196.

<sup>54</sup> Neil D. Nelson, 'This generation' in Matthew 24:34: A literary Critical Perspective,' *JETS* 38/3 (September 1996) 369-85.

‘this generation’ is often used throughout the Gospels, example the wicked generation that refused the kingship to Christ.

It is certainly true that the wicked will be on the surface of the earth until after the tribulation and second coming. The best interpretation of ‘this generation’ is that the generation who sees the events of the great tribulation will not pass away before the second coming occurs. The disciples asked for a sign of the second coming (24:3). Jesus surprisingly began the discourse with the events of the great tribulation, therefore the generation that sees the events of the great tribulation will know that the second coming is near as it is explained by Darrel Bock that, ‘Once the beginning of the end arrives with the cosmic signs..., the Son of Man will return before that generation passes away. It is arguing that the end will occur within one generation; the same group that sees the start of the end will see the end.’<sup>55</sup> Thus Preterism’s claim that the generation alive at the time of Christ had to be alive when all of the Olivet Discourse was fulfilled is not legitimate. Preterism thus fails in this passage of scripture because of its figurative hermeneutics and wrong interpretation of ‘this generation.’<sup>56</sup> The position of the Pretribulationists is that the Olivet Discourse with all of its predictions is literal hence preterist cannot take it to be a figurative event, thus the second coming is yet to come.

#### **1.4.5 Whom does the fig three represent?**

A lot of commentators, including some Pretribulationists believe they have discovered hints about the time of the rapture in the parable of the fig tree:

Now learn from this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these

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<sup>55</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke* The IVP New Testament Series, ed. Grant R. Osborne (Downer Grove: Intervarsity, 1994) 343-44.

<sup>56</sup> Mike Stallard, ‘ A Review of R.C. Sproul’s *The Last Days According to Jesus: An Analysis of Moderate Preterism, Part 1,*’ *The Conservative Journal* 6/17 (March 2002): 45-71.

things, know that it is near- at the door! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place (Matthew 24:32-34). Some scholars believe that the fig tree represent Israel. Thus when Israel became a nation in 1948, the time table for a generation began, and the tribulation and second coming events must take place before that generation died out. Counting back seven years from the end of the tribulation and the second coming means that the rapture would have occurred at least seven years before that generation passed away. So if one could know for sure how long a generation is, he could know about when the rapture would take place.

The fig tree however does not illustrate Israel becoming a nation in 1948. The fig tree is simply an illustration from nature. The disciples ask, what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age? And the answer is, the events of the great tribulation. This is illustrated by a cycle of tree. When leaves appear on a tree that is a sign that summer is near. Similarly, when the events of the great tribulation unfold, believers can know that the second coming is near.

There are two major evidences for the interpretation, first when Jesus makes His point from the fig tree illustration, He says, ‘When you see all these things, know that it is near at the door! The Lord is not talking about single event such as Israel becoming a nation in 1948. He speaks of all of the events of the tribulation being signs of the second coming.

Secondly, in the parallel passage in Luke, Luke records Jesus adding the phrase, ‘and all the trees’ (Luke 21:19). If the fig tree blossoming were a reference to the founding of Israel, what would the blossoming of other trees illustrate? Again, the understanding of the illustration is that the Lord is simply giving an illustration from nature. Some Pretribulationists (and others) have found the rapture in Matthew 24: 40-42, and a hint about

the time of the rapture by interpreting the fig tree (24: 32-34) as a prophecy of the establishment of the nation of Israel in 1948.

However, the one taken and one left in the illustrations in 24: 40-42 point to the separation of humanity into two classes at the end of the tribulation. Unbelievers will be ‘taken’ into judgment and believers will be left to enter the millennial kingdom. It is not a passage about the rapture. And the fig tree is not about Israel, but illustrates how the events of the tribulation will be signs of the soon arrival of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>57</sup>

#### **1.4.6 Whether the Parousia is Literal or not**

Conservative scholars who accept a literal second coming of Christ are usually united in their interpretation that Matthew 24 in general refers to the second coming of Christ simply because the passage itself is very explicit. The events described will climax in Christ’s second coming as stated by himself, ‘they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory’ (Matthew 24:30).

The perplexity then arises in interpreting what Christ said about the events leading up to the second coming. In an attempt to solve this confusion surrounding the literal coming of Christ, G. Campbell Morgan divides the Olivet discourse into three main parts. He considers Matthew 24:5-35 to be solely talking about Israel. He relates Matthew 24:36-25:30 to the church ‘as the spiritual Israel of God.’ He interprets Matthew 25:31-46 as a judgment that Christ pronounced on the nations. He holds that Matthew 24:6-22 was fulfilled in the fall of Jerusalem.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> James F. Stitzinger, ‘The Rapture in Twenty centuries of biblical interpretation’ *TMSJ* 13/2 (Fall 2002) 149-171.

<sup>58</sup> G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (New York: Revell, 1929) 284.

#### 1.4.7 Should Matthew 24:29 be interpreted metaphorically?

‘But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of heaven will be shaken.’- Matthew 24:29.

##### A. Powers of the Heavens

The final phrase of verse 29 says, ‘the powers of the heavens will be shaken.’ The phrase ‘powers of the heaven’ is used in all the three accounts of the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24:29; Mark 13:25; Luke 21:26). This phrase most likely has the idea of ‘the sun, moon, and stars, spoken of in summary fashion.’ Leo Morris says, ‘The word for heaven is singular in the reference to the stars, but plural where the powers are spoken of.’<sup>59</sup> Thus Jesus describes the astronomical bodies being shaken as the earth is in an earthquake.’<sup>60</sup> The phrase ‘powers of heavens’ is never used of angelic beings in the bible, nor does the context support such an understanding.

Since the first three phrases relate to the entities that fill the sky, this final expression is a summary of the collective. The ‘powers of the heavens’ also appear to include God’s decree of stability by which these celestial objects currently function with regularity.

All the forces of energy, here called powers of the heavens, which hold everything in space constant, will be in dysfunction. The heavenly bodies will careen helter-skelter through space, and all navigation, whether stellar, solar, magnetic, gyroscopic, will be futile because all stable reference points and uniform natural forces will have ceased to exist or else become unreliable.<sup>61</sup> John MacArthur.

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<sup>59</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992).

<sup>60</sup> Stanley D. Toussaint, *Behold the king: A study of Matthew* (Portland, OR; Multnomah, 1980).

<sup>61</sup> John MacArthur, *Matthew 24-28, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1989).

## **B. A Heavenly shaking**

According to Thomas Ice, the verb ‘shaken’ is used about 15 times in the Greek New Testament. The verb is sometimes used as a metaphor, as in 2 Thessalonians 2:2 ‘that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure.’ However, most of the time it refers to a physical shaking, as in Acts 16:26 ‘suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken.’ To him a physical shaking of the heavens is what Jesus intends in this context, however, Preterists like Ken Gentry does not believe that the phrase reference a physical shaking.

Consequently, we may legitimately apply Matthew 24:29 to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Christ draws upon this imagery from Old Testament judgment passages that sound as they are world ending events. And in a sense it is ‘the end of the world’ for those nations God judges. So it is with Israel in AD 70.<sup>62</sup> Gentry.

Most commentators recognize that the shaking of the heavens in this passage is an allusion from Haggai 2:6 which says, ‘For thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land.’ Hebrews 12 tells us the meaning of this passage:

And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, ‘Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven.’ And this expression, ‘Yet once more’ denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, in order that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be

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<sup>62</sup> Kenneth L. Gentry in Thomas Ice and Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Great Tribulation: Past or Future?* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999).

shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe (Heb. 12:26-28).

In this fifth warning passage, the writer of Hebrews contrasts the first shaking of the earth, a physical one, at the exodus with a future shaking, which will include the heavens as well. He too has in mind Haggai 2:6. The future shaking will include the heavens as well. Since the first shaking at the Exodus was physical then it follows that the second shaking will also be physical one, just as Christ describes in his prophetic sermon in Matthew 24. R.C.H. Lenski, who supports the future physical shaking of the heavens, says:

The whole sidereal world shall collapse... . This is made plain by the last ‘the powers of the heavens shall be shaken or dislocated. All that holds the heavenly bodies in their orbits and enables sun and moon to light the earth will give way. This convulsion in the heavens, previous to the Messiah’s descent therefore, is not as yet to be regarded as the end of the world, but only as a prelude to it,<sup>63</sup> as H.A.W. Meyer also indicated that the earth is not destroyed as yet by the celestial commotion.<sup>64</sup>

### **C. Signs in the heavens**

Matthew and Mark do not record Christ’s statements about the human response to these great events, but Luke does. It’s Luke only who mentions the moral signs of men’s anguish spite of the treachery and pretensions of that day<sup>65</sup> in what is clearly the same context that we find in Matthew and Mark, Jesus says,

‘And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the

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<sup>63</sup> R.C.H Lenski, *The interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel* (Columbus, OH: The Wartburg Press, 1943), 947.

<sup>64</sup> Heinrich Meyer, *Critical and exegetical Handbook to the Gospel of Matthew*. 2 vols (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1879).

<sup>65</sup> William Kelly, *An Exposition of the Gospel of Luke* (Oak Park, IL: Bible Truth Publishers, 1971).

expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken' (Luke 21:25-26).

Robert Stein says, the signs associated with the Son of Man's coming are cosmic, whereas those associated with Jerusalem's fall are terrestrial, thus Luke kept the two events distinct.<sup>66</sup> Christ sees two different events in Luke's account. One in the first century (21: 20-24) and the other, still to come in the future (21:25-28).

#### **1.4.8 Whether the discourse is in chronological order**

There has been a debate among scholars of whether the Olivet discourse is in a chronological order or has been arranged according to the themes or topic. A renowned scholar, R.T. France has asserted that, the eschatological discourse in Matthew 24:1-44 can be divided into two main categories comprising the 'time' of the destruction of the Temple and the signs concerning the end of the age. He asserted that the two (the time of the destruction of the temple and the signs of the end time) should not be chronologically connected.<sup>67</sup> The division was based upon Jesus' disciples' three fold questions 'Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of your coming<sup>68</sup>, and the end of the age.' 24:4-35 is concerned with the destruction of the Temple thereby answering the question 'when' with a clear time scale summed up in v. 34 and that the second question about the Parousia comes into the frame only with the new beginning in v. 36, this division is as that of Garland<sup>69</sup> which is in contrast with the issues about the destruction of the temple. France argued that the 'cosmic' language of 24:29 is drawn directly from OT prophetic passages where it functions not to predict the physical dissolution of the universe but as symbolic

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<sup>66</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Luke, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992).

<sup>67</sup> R.T. France, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2007), pg. 889-942.

<sup>68</sup> The 'coming' in this context refers to the Parousia or the return of Jesus into the world.

<sup>69</sup> D.E. Garland, *Reading Matthew* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 234-45.

representation of catastrophic political changes within history and 24:30 is closely modeled on that of Dan. 7:13-14 where the 'coming of the Son of Man' speaks of vindication and enthronement. According to him, similar language was used by Jesus in chapter 26:64. France says, Jesus answered the first set of the question by the disciples with series of indicators leading up to the climax of the destruction of the Temple whereas for the second question he gave no sign or predictions about it as concerning the first question. Thus to R.T. France, the Olivet discourse is not written chronologically, but rather in a topical manner.

Likewise, R.T. France, Craig S. Keener explains that the eschatological discourse in Matthew is in two major sections where the first part deals with the time of the destruction of the Temple while the other is concerned with the end of the age or the end time. According to him, OT prophets grouped events by their topics rather than the chronological order, this same methodology was employed by Jesus in the eschatological discourse in Matthew 24 where he addresses what are grammatically two main separate questions in v.3 (Tell us when all these will be and what will happen to show that it is the time for your coming and the end of the age).

He points out that all the indicators specified by Jesus in the discourse has nothing to do with the end time but rather about the destruction of the Temple which is associated with the question 'when.' Concerning the issue about the end time which is the second part of the discourse, he asserted that Jesus' answer in v. 36 is to re-echo the fact that even though God has made crucial things known to his people, he always keeps certain mysteries secret, Deut.29:29, Ezra.4:52. He asserted that watchfulness is the call to action in Jesus' answer to his disciples and not about knowing the exact time or hour in which the end will come.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1993), pg. 112-115.

Considering the views of both R.T. France and Craig S. Keener, it can be said that they both share similar sentiment about Jesus eschatological discourse in Matthew 24 that the discourse is not in any chronological order, but rather according to topics.

Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green and Marianne Thompson, these scholars unlike R.T. France and Craig S. Keener, asserted that the indications or the predictions given by Jesus in his eschatological discourse in Matthew 24 are all concerning the end time and that instead of Jesus to give his disciples specific sign concerning the end of the age, he gave a number of them which made it so difficult for the disciples to be able to predict the time of the end of the age. According to them Jesus' answer in v. 36 should have ended the discourse concerning the end time, however he went ahead and counseled the disciples about their preparedness concerning the end time<sup>71</sup>. With this, they asserted that Jesus' main focus about the discourse is preparedness or preparation towards the end of the age and not about telling the exact hour or time in which the end time will come. Thus they believe the discourse is not in two separate parts, but is written in chronological order.

### **1.5 Methodology**

Exegesis is the determination of the meaning in its historical and literary context.<sup>72</sup> According to John H. Hays, one needs to have literary competence and ability of genre recognition when studying the various texts of the bible.<sup>73</sup> In general, the term 'methodology' is so broad in nature and does not have any singular form; it may involve all approaches to the texts such as the redaction, composition, historical -grammatical, literary criticism and other associated forms.

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<sup>71</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green, Marianne Meye Thompson *Introducing the New Testament: its Literature and Theology* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), pg. 114-115).

<sup>72</sup> Roy B. Zuck, *Atheology of the Minor Prophets* (Colorado: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1991), 20.

<sup>73</sup> John H. Hays *Exegesis: A beginner's Hand Book* (London: SCM Press, 1988), 84.

Exegesis cannot be done without the term ‘hermeneutics’. It studies the locus of meaning and principles of biblical interpretation. Hermeneutics in the broad sense is bipolar: Exegesis and interpretation. Exegesis is the process of examining a text to ascertain what its first readers would have understood it to mean. The Varied set of activities which the hermeneutist performs upon a text in order to make a meaningful inference is exegesis.

Interpretation is the task of explaining or drawing out the implications of that understanding for contemporary readers and hearers. The combination of exegesis and interpretation with an examination of the hermeneutist presupposition repertoire is referred to as hermeneutics.

The term hermeneutics and interpretation are sometimes however used interchangeably to refer to the process of determining the meaning and significance of a text.<sup>74</sup> Other scholars such as Carl Braaten describes hermeneutics as ‘the science of reflecting on how a word or an event in the past time and culture may be understood and become existentially meaningful in our present situation.’<sup>75</sup> According to Gadamer and Ricoeur, interpretation of texts does not exhaust the responsibility of the hermeneutical enterprise. Hermeneutics assumes the responsibility to move beyond the scientific explication of the text’s language to search for ultimate truth that is incarnate in the language of the text.<sup>76</sup> Thus the language of the text is the most important task of hermeneutics. The common ground shared by most scholars on the definition of ‘hermeneutics’ is the literary meaning. Whether reference is to explanation, exegesis, or understanding, the construction of literary meaning is absolutely central to hermeneutics.

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<sup>74</sup> Randolph W. Tate, *Biblical interpretation: An integrated Approach* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991) 50-58.

<sup>75</sup> Carl Braaten, *History and Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966) pg 131.

<sup>76</sup> Hans Georg Gadamer, *Thith and Method* (New York: Seabury, 1975). Paul Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Ram, 1980).

However, where exactly is meaning to be found, and is to be actualized? In present scholarship, there are three different groups of theories regarding the locus and actualization of meaning: Author-centered (with attention directed to the world of the author), text-centered (the focus is on the textual world), and reader-centered (the focus is on the readers' world).<sup>77</sup>

### **1.5.1 Author Centered Approach to meaning**

Prior to the advent of new criticism in the 1940s, hermeneutical interest converged on the author and the author's world. Meaning was assumed to lie in the author's intention, which was formulated in terms of the social, political, cultural, and ideological matrix of the author.

Without an immersion into the author's world and the occasion which prompted the text, one could not attain meaning with any acceptable degree of plausibility. The text is seen as a shell with many layers. If the layers were appropriately peeled away, the scholar could discover the core and its original setting. This is the locus of meaning. What circumstances prompted the author to write? What sources were used? What was the geographical location of the author and the ecclesiastical tradition of that location? What was the history of the text's development? These are some of the questions that are associated with the historical-critical method. Thus the author's intention alone without considering the situation in which the author writes will not be enough to do proper exegesis and interpretation of texts to contemporary readers and hearers.

### **1.5.2 Text- centered Approach to meaning**

Since the 1950s, a reversal in the way interpreters approach the text has occurred. With the modern emphasis on the autonomy of the text and the role of the reader in the production of meaning, scholars have dislodged the text from its historical mooring and set it adrift in a

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<sup>77</sup> Duncan Ferguson, *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1986) pg 6.

sea of relativity, where there as many meanings of the text as there are waves of the sea. Rosenberg's assessment of David Gunn's belief in the text autonomy, asserts that, the political (and by implication, the historical, social, and theological) dimensions of the text are made to be:

An accidental bonus in its unfolding as art, just as the historical investigations of the story made its artistic brilliance an incidental bonus in its unfolding as history. This persistent blind spot shared by the two disciplines (historical and literary criticism)- the absence of a sense of necessary connection between the story's historical knowledge and its literary mode- is curious and interesting.<sup>78</sup>

Textual autonomy is the springboard for text- centered theories of meaning. This autonomy could not be stated more clearly than Abram's claim that the author's 'intention is irrelevant to the literary critic, because meaning and value reside within the text of the finished, free standing, and public work of literature itself.'<sup>79</sup> The renewed interest in the text itself instead of the world behind the text is referred to as new criticism and Structuralism. New criticism describes a trend in the meaning theory prominent especially in the 1940s and 50s. According to new criticism, the author's intention and world are not important considerations for interpretation because the literary work itself is sufficient. The text is a literary entity which can stand on its own.

Interpretation is limited to the text, meaning that the role of the author should not be given any prominence; rather the reader must give much attention to the various linguistic and literary relationships within the text. The author of the text is not the original creator, but simply uses certain literary devices already existing within contemporary culture.

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<sup>78</sup> Joel Rosenberg, *King and Kin: Political Allegory in the Hebrew Bible* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1986) pg 108. M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary 12m* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1981) pg 83.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

### 1.5.3 Reader-Centered Approaches to Meaning

Different readers interpret a text differently. The reasons are, however, associated with what might be called the reader's repertoire. The reader brings to the text a vast world of experience presuppositions, methodologies, interests and competencies. The reader must actualize the meaning that is only potential in the text. Most reader oriented theories hold that a text means nothing until someone means something by it. More radical proponents of reader response criticism go further to say that the reader creates the meaning of the text.

Some others such as McKnight hold that meaning is produced by the mutual interaction between the text and reader.<sup>80</sup> According to this view, the reader engages the text as the text engages the reader. Meaning then is an invention by the reader in collaboration with the text rather than the intention of the author. The reader is constrained by the text, but is not divested of interests and presuppositions. The text is re- contextualized through the multicolored lenses of the reader.

### 1.5.4 An integrated approach to meaning

Text-centered approaches, in claiming textual autonomy, downplay the boundaries imposed by the world of the author upon the text; meanwhile reader-centered approaches generally find meaning in the interaction between the worlds of the text and the reader. The best one could do is to pair the two worlds- the reader's and the text's or the author's and the text's.

Meanings result from a conversation between the world of the text and the world of the reader, a conversation informed by the world of the author. In oral discourse, a speaker seeks to communicate some information to a hearer in such a way that it will be understandable. To accomplish this goal, the speaker makes primary use of language, a language which is generally shared by both parties. However, there is another language which is also engaged,

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<sup>80</sup> V. McKnight, *The Bible and the Reader* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2008).

consisting of voice inflection, eye contact, physical gestures, etc. If for any reason the hearer fails to comprehend all or part of the message, then he or she can request the speaker to repeat, elaborate or modify the oral expression until the hearer's understanding matches the speaker's intent.

In written discourse, an author intends to convey meaning through the text to a reader. Enlisting vehicles such as sound, voice inflection, gestures; with oral dialogue, however, it is not possible. Consequently, the authors must arm themselves with a whole arsenal of literary devices through which they attempt to transfer the message in the intellect to the written page. These literary devices are the woof and warp by which the text communicates to the reader. Further, it might have been assumed that the author has a particular audience in mind, one at least familiar with the author's language and world. Otherwise to speak of communication is absurd.

The assumption here is that in the biblical texts, the subjective intention and discourse meaning overlap; that is, what the author intends and what the text says interact but are not identical. While the author is not available for questioning, some aspects of the author's world are. This assumption leaves sufficient room for the role of the reader in the production of meaning, consequently, three realities converge:

Author, text and reader. The locus of meaning is not to be found exclusively in either world or in a marriage of any two of the worlds, but in the interplay between all three worlds. Meaning resides in the conversation between the text and the reader with the world behind the text informing that conversation. Interpretation is impaired when any world is given preeminence at the expense of neglecting the other two.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Tate, *Biblical interpretation*, pg. 58.

A critical analysis of the submissions above implies that author- centered approaches alone to biblical exegesis will not be enough to bring out the real meaning which is hidden in the text, simply because the authors' intention cannot be fully comprehended in this contemporary times since they are no longer around to be questioned about certain controversial issues in the text, This means that the world of the text, is also needed for a proper exegetical work, which leads us to text-centered approaches. Even though the world of the text can help in getting closer to what inform the author to write the text in the way it has been written, the text or the world of the text cannot write itself, and only an author can do so.

Thus the author's genre, theology and other literary arsenals can either bring out the true meaning hidden in the text or adulterate it. On the other hand, the reader who is to decode or apply the meaning of the text to his or contemporaries must take into consideration the world of the text, the author and his own world so that the understanding from the text through an exegetical work can properly be apply to contemporary users of the text. As Clarence Walhout has said, exegesis without interpretation is similar to discovering a cure for the common cold and then not publicizing it. Exegesis without interpretation cannot bring about any change to society.<sup>82</sup>

As exegesis without interpretation does not affect or bring any positive change to society, the focus of this research is on both. To be able to achieve this, the researcher finds it very imperative in his methodology to make use of all the three approaches mentioned above in order to have an inform understanding about the world of the text, the author's intent and then the contemporary world of the reader. When the three approaches are properly

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<sup>8282</sup> Clarence Walhout, 'Texts and actions,' in *The Responsibility of Hermeneutics* IM (Grand Rapids: Berdmam,1985) pg. 56.

integrated, the meaning of the text which was written some millenniums ago will still be relevant to modern readers.

Apart from this, the researcher interviews some members of Machaira Community church, and their understanding of the eschatological discourse in Matthew 24; the focus is mainly on Prophet Peter Anamoah, the founder and leader of the Machaira Community Church in Accra. His understanding of the eschatological discourse in Matthew 24:1-44 is therefore compared with the exegetical work in this research. The understanding from this work helps the contemporary Ghanaian Christians to take an informed decision about end time prophecies by some men and women of God in this present age.

### **1.6 Organization of chapters**

The work is organized into five chapters. Chapter one deals with the introductory issues comprising of the background to the study, statement of the problem, research questions, literature review, methodology and organization of the chapters.

Chapter two focuses on the apocalyptic background study of the Olivet discourse.

Chapter three contains the delimitations, structure and exegetical analysis of Matthew 24:1-44, and also analyzing some thornier issues such as:

1. The identity of the Son of Man with some of his sayings
2. The abomination that causes desolation
3. The issue of 'this generation'

Chapter four comprises, the analysis of Machaira Community Church's reading of Matt.24:1-44, with the founder, Prophet Peter Anamoah being the main focus; and the relevance of the exegetical work on Matthew 24: 1-44 to Christianity in Ghana. Chapter five involves the conclusion and recommendations.

## CHAPTER TWO

### APOCALYPTIC BACKGROUND OF THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

#### 2.1 Introduction

The main purpose of chapter two is to bring out the apocalyptic background of the Olivet Discourse; starting from the authorship of Matthew's gospel, date and purpose of writing since there has been a lot of debates on it; also the historical background of the Jewish people from the time of Malachi and certain eventualities that thwarted their way of worship till the time of Jesus and then the context of the Olivet discourse,

#### 2.2 Authorship

Mostly, it is asserted that, the gospel of Matthew is commonly designated as Matthew's or belonging to Matthew, just as it is with the other three canonical gospels. Considering Paul's Epistle to the Romans where the opening lines of the agreed text designates both the author and the original recipients, there is nothing so or comparable in the gospels of Matthew.

Nevertheless, there is no evidence that the gospel of Matthew circulated without an appropriate designation; which however is 'Κατα Ματθαιου' literally translated as 'according to Matthew.' Until recently, most scholars tacitly assumed that Matthew's gospel first circulated anonymously and that the present title 'Κατα Ματθαιου' was attached to it somewhere around AD 125. There is little evidence to support this date as the decisive turning point; it is little more than an educated guess, based only on the presupposition that the gospel was originally entirely anonymous and on the fact that by about 140 A.D. and perhaps earlier, the traditional attribution was known without significant variation. However, this assertion has been vigorously challenged by Martin Henkel.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Martin Hengel, *Studies in the gospel of Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972).

He examines the practice of book distribution in the ancient world, where titles were necessary to identify a work to which any reference was made. In this context, he studies the manner in which second-century authors refer to the gospel, calling to mind, among other things Tertullian's criticism of Marcion for publishing his own gospel (a highly truncated version of Luke) without the author's name. Tertullian contends that 'a work ought not to be recognized, which holds not its head erect... which gives no promise of credibility from the fullness of its title and just profession of its author.'<sup>84</sup> Hengel therefore argues that, as soon as two or more gospels were publicly read in any one church- a phenomenon that certainly occurred, he thinks, not later than A.D. 100- it would have been necessary to distinguish between them by some such device as a title.

The unanimity of the attributions in the second-century cannot be explained by anything other than the assumption that the title was part of the work from the beginning. It is inconceivable, he argues, that gospel could circulate anonymously for up to sixty years, and then in the second century suddenly display unanimous attribution to the author. If it had originally been anonymous, then surely there would have been some variation in second century attribution, he then concludes that the gospel was never even formally anonymous.

Hengel's interpretation assumes that 'Κατα Ματθαιου' (according to Matthew) is an attribution of authorship, however, the phrase 'according to' also serves other purposes. For example, in the titles 'Gospel According to the Hebrews' and 'Gospel According to the Egyptians' the prepositional expression does not indicate authorship. According to Plummer, it indicates conformity to a type, and need not mean more than 'drawn up according to the teaching of.'<sup>85</sup> Plummer and others acknowledge that by the time of Papias,

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<sup>84</sup> Tertullian, *Against Marcion*. 4.2.

<sup>85</sup> Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew* (London: Robert Scot, 1909).

‘Κατα’ (according to) is understood to indicate authorship, but they insist that the expression does not necessarily bear that weight. Hengel agrees that ‘Kata’ plus the accusative is not itself a necessary indication of authorship and indeed is only rarely used in that way in contemporary Greek literature.

However, he draws attention to a telling analogy. In the Greek fathers, the one Old Testament is referred to as ‘according to the seventy’ or ‘according to Aquila’ or ‘according to Symmachus,’ where the prepositional expression is used to introduce the person or group thought to be responsible for producing the version concerned. In the same way, the one gospel early circulated in four distinct forms, ‘according to Matthew’ ‘according to Mark’ ‘according to Luke’ and ‘according to John’ where the prepositional expression introduces the person understood to be the author.

In short, the argument that Matthew was understood to be the author of the first gospel long before Papias wrote his difficult words affirming such connection seems very strong, even if not unassailable. Before considering Papias disputed words, it is important to recognize that the credibility of Papias himself is widely questioned. Although Ireneus, writing in the second half of the second-century, insists that both Papias and Polycarp knew the apostle John personally, the fourth century church historian Eusebius disputes the claim in the case of Papias. Largely on this ground, modern scholarship tends to date Papias to A.D. 140 or later; but if Ireneus is right and Eusebius is wrong, then there is no reason Papias could not have written twenty or more years earlier, and with excellent access to accurate information. It is far more likely that Ireneus is correct in his assessment of Papias than that of Eusebius.

Nevertheless, whatever the date and knowledge of Papias, his works or writings are available in quotations preserved by Eusebius.<sup>86</sup> For instance, from his exegetical book titled ‘Logion Kyriakon Exegesis (exegesis of the dominical Logia) survived into the Middle Ages in some libraries in Europe, but are no longer extant. It is from this work that Eusebius quotes Papias’ two surviving comments on the authorship of the gospel. Thus ‘Matthew synetaxeto’ (Matthew’s compilation, composition or an orderly arrangement); and ‘τα λογια’ (‘the sayings’ of Matthew) in ‘Hebraidi dialektō’ (the Hebrew [Arabic] language).<sup>87</sup>

There is no doubt that the early church understood this to mean that Matthew first wrote his gospel in Hebrew (or Aramaic; the same Greek word was used to refer to both cognate languages) and that it was translated by others. But there are serious problems with this view. Although a few modern scholars argue that Matthew’s entire gospel was first written in Aramaic,<sup>88</sup> substantial linguistic evidence is against them. In the first place, the many quotations from the Old Testament do not reflect a single text form. Some are unambiguously Septuagintal; others apparently translations from a Semitic original; still others are so eccentric as to defy easy classification. Had the gospel first been written in Aramaic, one might have expected that the Old Testament quotations would be either the translators own rendering of the Aramaic or standard quotations from acceptable bible of the early church, the LXX. The mix of text forms suggests an author writing in Greek but knowledgeable in Semitic languages and therefore able to vary his form. Second, assuming

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<sup>86</sup> C. Stewart Petrie, ‘The Authorship of ‘The Gospel According to Matthew’: A reconsideration of the external evidence,’ *NTS* 14 (1967-68): 15-32; France, *Matthew-Evangelist and Teacher*, pp. 53-56; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on his Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) . pp. 609. Gundry points out that Eusebius had earlier associated Papias with Ignatius who died not later than A. D. 110. All these scholars are against Eusebius assertion concerning Papias.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> C.F. Burney, *The Poetry of Our Lord* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925); J.W. Wenham, ‘Gospel Origins,’ *TrinJ* 7 (1978): 112-34).

that Matthew depends on Mark, the detail verbal connections between Matthew and Mark make it extremely unlikely that Matthew was first written in Aramaic.

Of course, those who do not accept the priority of Mark or who propose that an Aramaic edition of Matthew preceded the publication of Mark, which then served as the heart of the Greek Matthew, will perceive no problem here. Finally, the Greek text of Matthew does not read like translation Greek. There are Semitisms and more frequently Semitic enhancements,<sup>89</sup> but these are largely restricted to the sayings of Jesus, and (arguably) they are introduced for effect by an author who is demonstrably capable of writing idiomatic Hellenistic Greek.

In Mark 2:14 and Luke 5:27, the man whom Jesus calls from his role as tax collector is identified as Levi. In what is transparently the same story, Matthew 9:9-13 identifies the man as Matthew. All three Synoptic Gospels in their respective lists of the apostles (Matt. 10:2-4; Mark 3: 13-18; Luke 6: 13-16) named a 'Matthew,' and Matthew 10:3 identifies this Matthew as the tax collector. The reasonable assumption is that Matthew and Levi is one and the same person. But other suggestions are lacking. Pesch,<sup>90</sup> followed by Bear,<sup>91</sup> has argued that the calling of the tax-collector concerned one Levi, but that the unknown evangelist, choosing to identify this otherwise unknown disciple with an apostle, substituted the name of a relatively obscure apostle, Matthew, whom he then dubbed a tax collector.

On the other hand, Albright and Mann suggest that 'Matthew' is the personal name and that 'Levi' refers to his tribe. Thus the original designation was 'Matthew the Levite' but that at

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<sup>89</sup> In modern linguistic theory, the term 'Semitism' is rightly applied only to phenomena in the Greek New Testament where sense can be made of an expression only by appealing to a Semitic underlay. 'Semitic enhancement' refers to literary phenomena that do occur elsewhere in purely Greek texts but whose frequency of occurrence in some New Testament book is most easily explained by observing that the construction or expression is common in one or more of the Semitic languages.

<sup>90</sup> R. Pesch, 'Levi-Matthaus (Mc 2:14; Mt 9:9 10:3): Ein Beitrag Zur Lösung eines alten Problems,' *ZNW* 59 (1968): 40-56.

<sup>91</sup> F.W. Bear, *The Gospel According Matthew* (Oxford: Blackwell,1981), pp. 224-25.

some early point in the tradition the designation was confused and became the common personal name Levi.<sup>92</sup> The theory has its attractions. It explains why the author has such a detailed command of the Old Testament. As for the likelihood that a Levite would find employment as a disreputable tax collector, Albright and Mann argue that there were far more Levites than were needed to run the temple complex and that many therefore had to seek employment elsewhere. By taking on this task, Matthew the Levites forfeited the esteem of his tribe and race, the most strict of whom view tax collectors as not only as traitors but as immoral and rapacious (since the tax-farming system ensured that a fair bit of corruption was bound up with the job).

But the linguistic transformation of 'Levite' to 'Levi' is not very plausible, and no text preserves the designation 'Matthew the Levites.' On the whole, the most economical explanation still seems the best: 'Matthew' and 'Levi' are alternative Semitic names for one person- a phenomenon found in Simon/Cephas (= Peter).<sup>93</sup> The assumption that Matthew was a tax collector (essentially a minor customs official collecting tariff on goods in transit) and was the author of this gospel makes sense of a number of details.<sup>94</sup> Not all the evidence cited is equally convincing. A number of peculiarly Matthean periscopes do depict financial transactions (Matthew 17:24-27; 18:23-35; 20:1-16; 26:15; 27:3-10; 28:11-15), but none of them betrays an insider's knowledge of the custom system. Certainly, a customs official in Matthew's position would have had to be fluent in both Aramaic and Greek, and such fluency must be important when the gospel was first crossing racial barriers: Indeed, it squares with the notion of a gospel written in Greek that nevertheless could draw on Semitic sources. C.F.D. Moule suggests that Matt.13:52 is a subtle self reference by the author: the

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<sup>92</sup> W.F. Albright and C.S. Mann, *Matthew* AB 26 (New York: Doubleday, 1981), pp. clxxvii-clxxviii, clxxxiii-clxxxiv.

<sup>93</sup> W. L. Lane, *The Gospel According Mark*, NICNT ((Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 100-101.

<sup>94</sup> Gundry, *Matthew* pp. 620-1.

‘scribe’ (teacher of the Law) who becomes a disciple should not be understood as a reference to a rabbinic scribe but to a ‘scribe’ in the secular sense, that is a well educated writer.<sup>95</sup>

Goodspeed goes further, yet, after compiling impressive evidence that shorthand was widely practiced in the Roman world, he suggests that Matthew’s training and occupation would have equipped him to be a kind of note taker or secretary for the group of disciples, even during Jesus’ ministry<sup>96</sup>.

Still in defense of Matthew’s authorship of the gospel, Antonio disagrees with kummel who asserts that apostolic authorship or Matthew’s authorship is completely impossible because the gospel is systematic and non biographical. According to Antonio, this assertion is a double non sequitur, because a topical ordered (systematic) account can yield biographical information as easily as a strictly chronological account,<sup>97</sup> also it is surely a false step to assume that apostles would for some reason prove incapable of choosing anything other than a chronological form. The most powerful reason today for denying even the possibility of apostolic authorship is bound up with an entire array of antecedent judgments about the development of the gospel tradition; about the shape of the history of the church in the first century, about the evidence of redactional changes, and much more. The conclusion drawn from these prior judgments is that Matthew is too late and too theologically developed to be assigned to any of the first witness.

Nevertheless, Carson is of different opinion, thus to him, there must be a recognition that the theology developed in the gospel is often judged on the basis of Mathew’s Christology. A high Christology developed very early, as so called Christ-hymns in the Pauline corpus (Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-20) testify, and it has been shown that Matthew is quite careful to

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<sup>95</sup> C.F.D., ‘St. Matthew’s Gospel: Some neglected Features,’ *SE2* ((1964): 90-99; Moule, pp. 94-995.

<sup>96</sup> E.J. Goodspeed, *Matthew: Apostle and Evangelist* (Philadelphia: J.C. Winston, 1959).

<sup>97</sup> Antonia Fraser, *Cromwell: Our Chief of Men* (St. Albans: Panther, 1975), pp. 455.

distinguish, at point after point, what the first disciples understood during the time of Jesus' ministry and what he himself knows to be the case some decades later.<sup>98</sup> Such evidence might almost better be taken to support apostolic authorship.

From the time of the influential work of Kilpatrick,<sup>99</sup> many commentators have held that the gospel of Matthew is not the work of an individual author but the product of a Christian community. Whoever wrote it was simply putting down the materials, liturgical and otherwise, that were circulating in his church. Doubtless this unknown writer ordered the material in various ways, but the book as a whole is best seen as the product of community thought and catechesis, rather than the theological and literary contribution of a single author. Kilpatrick further argues that the community deliberately and pseudonymously assigned the work to Matthew in order to ensure its wider acceptance in the Christian church.

Stendahl, by agreeing with Kilpatrick further extended the argument by asserting that the conception of individual authorship must be relegated to an entirely subsidiary role. He believes the group within the community that produced Matthew is not some church as a whole but a school, a group within the community devoted to study and instruction, and particularly interested in the way the ancient Hebrew Scriptures are to be related to Christian life and thought.<sup>100</sup>

### Summary

As the debate about the authorship of Matthew's gospel continues without any consensus, this research finds it prudent to assume that whether Matthew himself wrote it or it had been attributed to him, the expression 'Κατα Ματθαιου' used by the early church to refer to the

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<sup>98</sup> D.A. Carson, 'Christological Ambiguities in the Gospel of Matthew,' in *Christ the Lord*, Fs. Donald Guthrie, ed. Harold Rowdon (Leicester: IVP, 1982), PP. 97-114.

<sup>99</sup> John P. Meir, *The Vision Matthew: Christ, Church, and Morality in the first Gospel* (New York: Paulist, 1979), pp. 17-23.

<sup>100</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, pp. 436-40.

gospel implies that, they believe the content or the ideas in the gospel belong to Matthew. Hence the larger content belongs to Matthew.

### 2.3 Date

Some commentators hold that Matthew was written during the period of A.D. 80-100, and that Matthew borrowed from Mark who was written during the period A.D. 55 to 70, hence a date of Matthew before A.D. 80 seems impracticable, however some scholars also continue upholding the unanimous opinion of the early church that Matthew was written first.<sup>101</sup> Assuming that Markan priority prevails or takes precedence over that of Matthew, there is still an ample time for Matthew to be published before A.D. 70, when Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed, however some others also aver that the anachronisms in Matthew point to a date of writing after A.D. 70. The most commonly cited are the reference to the destruction of a city and the reference to the church. In the parable of the wedding feast, it was told that the king 'sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city' (Matt. 22:7). This must be seen as an oblique reference to destruction of Jerusalem at the end of the Jewish war (A.D. 66-70), and the mention of the burning suggests knowledge of what had already happen at the time of writing. The utterance is cast as a prophecy but depends on historical knowledge.

This judgment, it is thought, is confirmed by the fact that such sweeping destruction of an entire city seems wildly disproportionate to the offense-namely, lame excuses for turning down a wedding invitation. But quite apart from the question as to whether Jesus could predict the future, most scholars who think that Mark was written before A.D. 70 concede that he predicts the fall of Jerusalem (Mark 13:14; Matt. 24:15). They argue that if Mark wrote about A.D. 65, he was so close to the events that he could see how political

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<sup>101</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, pp. 436-40.

circumstances were shaping up. But on this reasoning, Matthew even if he borrowed from Mark, could have done the same thing in A.D. 66. More to the point, the language of Matthew 22:7, including the reference to the burning of the city, is the standard language of both OT and the Roman world describing punitive military expeditions against rebellious cities. Granted that Jesus foresaw the destruction of Jerusalem (as did many prophets before him), the language he used does not in any detail depend on specific knowledge as to how things actually turned out in A.D. 70.<sup>102</sup>

In fact, Robinson goes far, and argued that the synoptic prophecies about the fall of Jerusalem, including Matthew 22:7, are so restrained that they must be written before A.D. 70.<sup>103</sup> Otherwise, it must be assumed that the prophecies had all been fulfilled before the writing of Matthew's gospel which varies from A.D. 80-100. The punishment mentioned in the parable above seems extravagant if the offense was nothing more than the social gaffe of turning down the wedding invitation of petty monarch. But there is reason to think this offense is more serious: In the first century world, it smacks of rebellion against one's Lord. More importantly many of Jesus' parables begin with the commonplace and then introduce elements that destroy the listeners' world of expectations.

The monarch represented by the king in the parable is God himself; the wedding is the wedding of God's own Son. To refuse his invitation-indeed, his command- is dangerous rebellion that invites catastrophic retribution. Explicit references to 'church' (Matt. 16:18; 18:17-18.) are often taken to betray an interest in church order that developed only later. But these texts say nothing about church order. Bishops and deacons are not mentioned (though Phil. 1:1, written before A.D.70 does). The church envisaged is simply the messianic

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<sup>102</sup> K.H. Rengstorf, 'Die Stadt der Morder (Mt. 22),' in *Judentum Urchristentum, Kirche, Fs. J. Jeremias*, ed. Walter Eltester (Berlin: Topelmann, 1960), pp. 106-29.

<sup>103</sup> J.A.T. Robison, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), chap. 2.

community. The discipline pictured in Matthew 18 is cast in broad principles applicable even in the earliest stages of Christianity. Tensions between Jews and Christians must have been high when this book was written, and the most plausible date for such tensions, it is argued, is either just before or after the Council of Jamnia (c. A.D. 85), which allegedly introduced the so called Birkath ha-Minim into the Jewish synagogue liturgy. This was a clause in the Eighteen Benedictions which were recited three times a day by all pious Jews. In the version found in the Cairo Geniza,<sup>104</sup> it reads, ‘Let Nazarenes (= Christians) and Minim (=heretics) be perish in a moment; let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and let them not be written with righteous.’

This had the effect (it is argued) of expelling Christians from the synagogues was the climax of mutual antipathy between Jews and Christians in the first century. But mutual suspicions between Jews and Christians have much longer roots, as both Acts and epistle of Paul testify. Such antipathy must have varied enormously from place to place and from time to time, It appears then that argument for relatively late date of Matthew depends on a network of antecedent judgments, each of which can be questioned in turn. Theological developments that many scholars think must have taken at least two generations of believers may well have occurred more rapidly (after all, Romans was written within twenty-five years of resurrection).<sup>105</sup>

And some of the arguments, such as the contention that the prophecy of Matthew 22:7 is in reality a prophecy after the fact can be tuned on their head to argue for a date before A.D. 70. Indeed, five other arguments point in the same direction.

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<sup>104</sup> Probably this version was in use in Palestine at the end of the first century.

<sup>105</sup> See Moule who argues that the period before A.D. 70 is ‘the most plausible dating’ of Matthew’s gospel (p. 242).

1. The question of date is marginally bound up with the question of authorship. If the apostle Matthew is judged, on balance, to be an evangelist, a date before A.D. 70 is more plausible.
2. The early church fathers are unanimous in assigning Matthew an early date, because this tied to Matthean priority, a view discounted by most scholars today; patristic evidence is given little weight in the contemporary debate. But the two issues do not have to be tied together. Whether Mark was written shortly after Peter's death, in the mid-sixties, as Ireneus claims,<sup>106</sup> or while Peter was alive, Clement of Alexandria assumes, there is time for Matthew to write before A.D. 70.<sup>107</sup>
3. Some sayings of Jesus might be taken to indicate that the temple was still standing when Matthew wrote (Matt. 5:23-24; 12:5-7; 23:16-22; 26:60-961). It might be objected that Matthew is simply being historically accurate: These things were said during Jesus' days, regardless of whether the temple was still standing when Matthew wrote. But one must at least inquire why Matthew would include so many utterances cast in terms no longer relevant to his readers. The story about the payment of the temple tax (17:24-27) is stronger evidence yet. Before A.D. 70, the episode, whatever else it meant, would be taken as a gesture reinforcing solidarity with Israel. After A.D. 70 when the tax still had to be paid by the Jews but was collected on behalf of the temple of Jupiter in Rome,<sup>108</sup> the same episode might suggest solidarity with idolatry. Even if for other reasons Matthew had wanted to preserve this periscope, it is hard to see how, if he was writing after A.D. 70, he could have permitted such an implication without comment.

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<sup>106</sup> Robinson, *Redating* pp. 107-15.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> E.M. Smallwood, *The Jews Under Roman Rule* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), pp. 371-76.

4. While many assign Matthew to the period A.D. 70-100, there is few primary sources from that period, so it is difficult to check the claims, By contrast, Gundry has compiled a list of passages in Matthew that, he thinks, suggest a date before A.D. 70, on the basis of features known to have existed during that period.<sup>109</sup> Not all of his suggestions are equally convincing, but many carry considerable weight (e.g. insertion of the Sabbath day alongside winter as an undesirable time to flee from Jerusalem (24:20); baptism before teaching (28:19) etc.
5. Arguing for a date earlier than A.D. 90, Kilpatrick draws attention to the fact that although the apostolic fathers demonstrate their knowledge of many epistles from the Pauline corpus, in Matthew there is no undisputed instance of dependence on Paul.<sup>110</sup> Indeed, Kilpatrick argues that some passages in Matthew would not have been written as they are if certain passages in Paul were known (Matt. 28, with respect to the list of resurrection appearances in 1 Cor. 15). Kilpatrick concludes that a church unaffected by Paulinism and apparently unacquainted with Paul's epistles cannot possibly be dated after A.D.90. If Matthew was written before A.D. 70, this complete independence from Paul would be still easier to understand. None of the arguments presented is conclusive. Other arguments tend to be even less decisive, owing to additional imponderables. For example, Gundry specifies a date not later than A.D. 63, but this depends on his view that Luke borrowed from Matthew and that Luke-Acts was published while Paul was alive. The preponderance of evidence suggests that Matthew was published before A.D. 70, most probably during the sixties.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Gundry, *Matthew*, pp. 602-6.

<sup>110</sup> Kilpatrick, *Origins*, pp.129-30.

<sup>111</sup> D.A. Carson, J. Douglas Moo, Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984).

## **2.4. Destination**

The usual assumption is that the evangelist wrote this gospel to meet the needs of believers in his own area. There is a prima facie realism to this assumption if we hold that Matthew was working in centers of large Jewish population, whether in Palestine or Syria, since the book betrays so many Jewish features; it is not easy to imagine that the author had a predominantly Gentile audience in mind. But it is not possible to suggest that Matthew wrote his gospel with certain kinds of readers in mind, rather than their geographic location.

## **2.5 Purpose**

Scholars have not yet agreed upon any particular purpose of Matthew's gospel especially the one concerning that of the Olivet Discourse; whether the discourse is directly about only the Jews and their temple or for the entire followers across the world. The challenge increases when it has been realized that Matthew like any other gospel writer is committed to describing what happened during the ministry and passion of the historical Jesus, while nevertheless addressing issues that are contemporary to his own ministry. This leads some commentators to try to infer what kind of situation might prompt Matthew to include this or that periscope, and to present it as he does.

Because Matthew devotes so much space to Old Testament quotations, example Matt. 24:15 (So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the Prophet Daniel- let the reader understand) some have suggested that he wrote his gospel to teach Christians how to read their bibles (then the Old Testament). Others appeal to the same evidence infer that he was trying to evangelize the Jews. Or he wrote to train Christians to sharpen their apologetics as they wrestled with the Pharisaic Judaism of their day. As Matthew devotes many passages to Jesus' teaching on the law, some commentators have thought he was aiming to confute incipient antinomianism, wrote his work to train leaders for new converts. These and many more suggestions have been put

forward as the purpose of Matthew gospel. Still others find contradictory strands in Matthew- for example, between Jewish exclusivism and worldwide mission, or between recognition of the place of law and assumption that the law has been fulfilled in Christ- and conclude that no unitary purpose is possible.

In spite of the divisions of opinion concerning Matthew's purpose of his gospel, one can easily or possibly infer the following purposes based upon the widely recognized themes of the gospel.

- Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Son of David, the Son of God, the Son of Man, Immanuel, the one to whom the Old Testament points.
- Many Jews, especially Jewish leaders, sinfully failed to recognize Jesus, and by implication, are in great danger if they continue in that stance after the resurrection.
- The promised eschatological kingdom has already dawned, inaugurated by the life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus.
- The Messianic reign is continuing in the world, as believers, both Jews and Gentiles, submit to the authority of Jesus, overcome temptation, endure persecution, wholeheartedly embrace Jesus' teaching, and thus demonstrate that they constitute the true locus of the people of God and true witness to the world of the 'gospel of the kingdom'
- The Messianic reign is not only the fulfillment of Old testament hopes but the foretaste of the consummated kingdom that will dawn when Jesus the Messiah personally returns.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> C.M. Martini, 'La problematique generale du texte de Matthieu,' in *L' evangelic selon Matthieu: Redaction et Theologie*, BETL 29, ed. M. Didier (Gembloux: Duculot, 1972), p. 21-36.

## 2.6 The history of the Jewish people from Malachi – the era of Roman rule

The last quarter of the fifth century BC to the first century A.D. seems as the period of the culmination of or the sequel to the Old Testament era, during which a lot of books (pseudepigrapha) were written in the name of some ancient Jewish heroes such as Enoch, Moses, Levi and Abraham. However, the Jews in general never accepted any of these books as authentic with the assertion that after Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets, prophecy ceased to exist in Israel and would arise again only in connection with the events surrounding the arrival of the Messiah and his kingdom. An estimated date for the writing of Malachi is 433 BC and Josephus claimed that no scriptures were written after the reign of Artaxerxes who died in 424 BC<sup>113</sup>.

Therefore, the intertestamental period begins where the Old Testament leaves off, with various repatriated Jews having returned from exile to Israel, rebuilding the temple, and seeking once again to serve their God in their land. The study of this intertestamental period is very important in studying the background of the Olivet Discourse, because politically and socioeconomically key developments had occurred, an understanding of which is essential to a correct interpretation of the Jews in the time of Jesus. Religiously, Judaism was transformed into a set of beliefs and practices often quite different from Old Testament religion. Certain events (exiles) which occurred during the intertestamental period prepared the way for the first century world to be more receptive to the message of the gospel than in many other periods of history.

From the perspective of other historians, this is no point at which to begin a new era. Nothing earth-shattering happened with the death of Artaxerxes. Life continued much as it had during the time of Nehemiah, Haggai and Malachi. The Persian rulers with varying degrees of

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<sup>113</sup> P.A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 160.

consistency continued the policy inaugurated under the Cyrus in 539 BC of allowing Jews in exile to return to their homeland, worship their God freely, and obey the laws of Moses. The Jews of course did not reestablish a kingship but began to look to future days when they could do so. An increased in preoccupation with the law was based on the convictions that their past exiles were punishment for disobedience and that God would grant them complete freedom when they achieved a substantial measure of obedience to his word.

Three important developments did take place, however during the Persian period, which sowed the seeds for the transformation of Judaism by the first century; the Jews established synagogues and began the practice of the oral law. Thus the Jews began to congregate in local places of worship mostly using biblical texts such as 1Sam 15:22 (To obey is better than sacrifice) and substituted prayers of repentance and good works as the means of atonement for sin.<sup>114</sup> Because they sought to apply the Torah (Law) to every area of life, a body of oral tradition-interpretation and application-began to develop around the written Law of Moses to explain how to implement its commandments in new times and places.<sup>115</sup> Both the synagogue and the oral Law featured prominently in Jesus' interaction with Judaism centuries later. The third development was the establishment of Aramaic as the main language for business and international relations throughout many parts of the Persian Empire, including Israel. A cognate language to biblical Hebrew, Aramaic became and remained the native tongue for everyday use among Jews in Palestine well into the first

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<sup>114</sup> Distinct buildings may not have been utilized for several more centuries, but 'the origin of the 'synagogue' as a public assembly including Torah reading rituals is bound to the administrative structure of the land of Israel and goes back to the Persian period, more specifically to the reign of Artaxexes I.

<sup>115</sup> B. D. Sommer, 'Unity and plurality in Jewish Canons: The case of the Oral and written Torahs,' in *One Scripture or Many? Canon from Biblical, Theological, and Philosophical perspectives*, ed. C. Helmer and C. Landmesser (Oxford and New York: OuP, 2004), 108-50.

century. Indeed, by the time of Christ, many Jews were not probably fluent in Hebrew, as it had become a language largely limited to the reading of scriptures.<sup>116</sup>

### **2.6.1 Hellenistic Period (331-167 BC)**

The first major new era of Middle Eastern history after the end of the Old Testament period began with the defeat of the Persians by the Greeks. Winds of change were heralded by the defeat of Athens by Philip II of Macedon in 338 BC. This small kingdom in the north of what today is Greece had expansionist designs.

The Greek historian-philosopher Socrates challenged Philip with his famous declaration: ‘Once you have made the Persians subject to your rule, there is nothing left for you but to be become a god.’<sup>117</sup> Philip was assassinated two years later; however, it fell to his son Alexander to strive for those goals. He was born in 356 BC, taught by Aristotle, and inspired by Achilles the warrior, Alexander has been considered by many as the greatest military ruler ever in only thirteen years (336-323), he conquered and controlled virtually all of the former Persian Empire, plus some territories not previously under its control. His rule extended from Greece to India and from southern Russia to northern Africa.<sup>118</sup>

### **2.6.2 Israel under the rule of Alexander (331-323 BC)**

Israel came under Greek rule in 331 BC as Alexander’s armies swept eastward. Like most of the peoples conquered, the Jews were given the same relative freedoms of worship and government as under the Persians, so long as they remained loyal subjects of Greece.

Alexander apparently hoped to unite the eastern and western parts of his empire and create a new hybrid of cultures, religions, and peoples, with all, thus Israel has been permeated by

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<sup>116</sup>J.M. Watt, ‘The Current Landscape of diglossia Studies: The diglossic Continuum in first-century Palestine,’ in *Diglossia and Other Topics in New Testament Linguistics*, ed. S.E. Porter (Sheffield: SaP, 2000), 225-44.

<sup>117</sup> Helmut Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 1 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1995), 8.

<sup>118</sup> R.L. Fox, *Alexander the Great* (Boston: Little, 2000).

Hellenistic<sup>119</sup> culture and influence. The voluntary dispersion of many of the Jews continued, as under Persia, since greater economic gain was to be had in many parts of the empire outside Israel. The largest Jewish community not in Palestine developed in one of Alexander's newly founded cities in Egypt, which he named for himself as Alexandria. This city became an important Christian center by the second century A.D. Jews under the influence particularly of the mid-first-century writer Philo,<sup>120</sup> as well as Christians, especially following the late-second-century theologian Origen, developed in Alexandria an allegorical form of exegesis that sought to harmonize the best of Greek philosophy with Jewish or Christian religion.

In Greece, Alexander and his army had come from Greek cities with a history of democratic ideas. As he marched eastward, he encountered people who used to acclaiming or even worshiping their rulers as gods and saviors, most notably the Egyptians with pharaohs. At first, he was shocked by the inclination of his new subjects to grant him similar acclaim, but eventually, he accepted it and came to demand it, to the horror and disgust of many of his own countrymen. Alexander's morals also decayed toward the end of his life which ended prematurely just before his thirty-third birthday when after a heavy bout of drinking, he caught a fever, possibly malaria, and died.

Numerous results of Alexander's conquests lasted well into the Roman period and the time of the rise of Christianity. First, Greek rule brought improved standards of living and administrative efficiency in an empire that came to be urban rather than rural centered. This shift facilitated mass communication and news including the gospel could be spread rapidly by focusing on the major cities in each territory. Second, Hellenization spread as the result of imperialism. Greek culture and influence could be found everywhere. For Jews, this

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<sup>119</sup> Greek-from Hellas, the Greek word for Greece.

<sup>120</sup> C.D. Yonge, *The Works of Philo* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 19993).

provided significant enticements to disobey their law. All the subjugated peoples were exposed to the breadth of Greek religion and philosophy. Major libraries (especially in Alexandria) and Universities (especially in Tarsus) were founded. Jews divided among themselves as to whether or not it was acceptable to study, learn from, and incorporate into their lifestyles Hellenistic elements. Second Maccabees 4:10-17 describes some of the temptations of Hellenism in the late 170s BC. Greek forms of dress, with idolatrous associations attached to them; male athletic competition in the Greek gymnasias, often in the nude, contrary to Jewish scruples; and an interest in sports, with worship and sacrifice neglected. Other pressures on the Jews to compromise their ways that began early under Hellenistic influence included attendance at or participation in the religiously explicit Greek theater and the availability and attractiveness of eating non kosher food.

The tensions of this era may perhaps be compared to the mutual pressure Western secularism and Islamic fundamentalism exert on people in various Arab countries today. Thirdly, no doubt the most pervasive result of Alexander's conquests was the spread of the Greek language itself. Almost everyone who had to do business with the Greek soldiers and merchants who came to be located in every urban center had to learn to speak a little Greek. A simplified form of Attic (Athenian) Greek developed which is now known as the Hellenistic Greek. It was less flowery and semantically precise than its classical predecessors. The Greek of New Testament times became known as 'koinic' (common) and reflected what Romans called the lingua franca (Lat. 'common language'). Thus even through the first century, many Jews in Palestine may well have been at least marginally tri-Lingual, with some knowledge of Hebrew (probably limited in use to religious literature), Aramaic

as their common vernacular, and Greek as the language of business, commerce and relations with the military and political authorities.<sup>121</sup>

The extent of the spread of the Greek language is perhaps best illustrated by the need of Diaspora Jews (outside Israel) to translate the Hebrew Bible into Greek as early as the mid-third century BC because of the disuse into which the Hebrew was falling. This translation of what is referred to as the Old Testament became known in Roman times as the Septuagint, from the Latin word ‘seventy.’ Traditions developed that seventy (seventy two) scholars were commissioned to produce this translation, the importance of the Septuagint for New Testament studies, though, can scarcely be overestimated.<sup>122</sup> In most cases, the Septuagint or the LXX is often the version quoted in the New Testament, even when the Greek rendering varies from the Hebrew in some significant way.

The Septuagint was clearly ‘the Bible’ for most first-century diaspora Jews. An important area of scholarship that is only beginning to receive the attention it deserves involves the relationship among the different versions of the Septuagint and the ancient copies of the Hebrew Old Testament.<sup>123</sup> Until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the oldest known Hebrew versions were copies of the Masoretic text (MT) from the ninth and tenth centuries after Christ, while portions of the Septuagint were half a millennium older. Occasionally, most of the Old Testament books and corpus from the pre-Christian times differ from that of the MT But support the LXX. Thus the LXX may well translate the Hebrew more accurately than the MT, This might probably be the reason for its use in the era of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>121</sup> S.E. Porter, *The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research: Previous discussion and New Proposals* (Sheffield: SaP, 2000), 126-80.

<sup>122</sup> K.H. Jobs and M. Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint* (Grand Rapids: Paternoster, 2000).

<sup>123</sup> M. Hengel, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture: Its Prehistory and the problem of its Canon* (London: T&T Clark, 2002; Grand Rapids: 2004).

### 2.6.3 Egyptian Rule under the Ptolemies (323-198 BC)

When Alexander died, he left no living heir to his kingdom, so a power struggle for succession ensued among his generals. From 323-301 BC, the outcome of this struggle was uncertain; this time frame is known as the period of the Diadochoi (successors).<sup>124</sup> Initially, the empire was divided into four parts; then into three. Finally, two dynasties controlling most of the land that Alexander had previously held were established by Seleucus and Ptolemy. The northern half based in Syria, came under Seleucid control, and its rulers generally took the names either of Seleucids or Antiochus. The southern half, based in Egypt, was Ptolemaic, and its leaders consistently adopted the title of Ptolemy. Because Israel was precariously perched in the only stretch of fertile ground exactly between these two powers, it was consistently vulnerable to expansionist designs on the part of either.

From 311 BC on, Israel was securely in the hands of the Ptolemies. The Ptolemaic period seems to have been one of relative peace and freedom for Jews, with a fairly good standard of living, but sources of information about this time are scarce. One source that has survived is the collection of Zenon papyri that describe the development in the first half of the third century BC of the institution of tax-farmers-local people including the Jews, co-opted into collecting taxes as go-betweens for the Hellenistic authorities.

This practice continued into Roman and New Testament times, fueling the Jewish hatred for tax collectors as found in the gospels. During the second half of the third century, a rivalry also grew up between the households of men named Onias and Tobias. The Oniads were high priestly families who objected to the growing Hellenism of Jewish life; the Tobiads were wealthy supporters of the Ptolemies and were more disposed to Greek culture, and the

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<sup>124</sup> P.D. Wegner, *A Student's Guide to textual Criticism of the Bible: Its History, Methods and Results* ((Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), 163-203.

tension between the two continued for several centuries.<sup>125</sup> The most famous and powerful ruler during this century was Ptolemy III (246-222 BC),<sup>126</sup> who promoted scientific investigation. Some of his astronomers even proposed that the earth was spherical, rather than flat, and computed its circumference with relative accuracy. But this information was not widely believed until the discoveries of Galileo in the early 1600s.

#### **2.6.4 Syrian Rule under the Seleucids (198-167 BC)**

In 198 BC, the Seleucid ruler Antiochus III conquered and occupied Israel, shifting the balance of power from south to north. For the next several decades, Jews were subjected to Syria rather than Egypt. Antiochus III who ruled from 222-187 and Seleucus IV (187-175) continued the Ptolemaic policy of limited freedom and self government for Israel, but they also wished to keep on friendly terms with the growing power to their west-Rome. A peace treaty by Antiochus in 188 BC promised Rome substantial annual tribute, forcing the Seleucids to impose increasingly heavier taxation on their subjects.

Antiochus IV Came to power in 175 BC. He began significantly to alter the previously cordial relationship between the Seleucids and the Jews in Israel. At first, his motives seemed strictly economic. He severely increased taxation to try to keep the up with the payments to Rome, but actively promoted Hellenization to the extent of proclaiming himself a god-Antiochus Epiphanes (from Greek 'manifest). Polybius commented that his detractors rather referred to him as Epimanes (a madman). Relationships progressively deteriorated between Antiochus and the faithful Jews who objected to the growing Hellenism. These Jews were increasingly called the Hasidim (Hebrew for 'pious ones'). Conflict then seemed inevitable when a man named Jason, the brother of the rightful heir to the high priesthood

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<sup>125</sup> B. Noghri, 'The Motivations of the Maccabees and Judean rhetoric of ancestral tradition,' in *Ancient Judaism in its Hellenistic Context*, ed. C.Bakhos (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), 85-111.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

(Onias III), paid a large amount of bribe to Antiochus to receive an appointment to that office. The problem worsened when Menelaus, a Benjamite and thus not lawfully a priest at all, in turn outbid Jason and was installed as the high priest shortly afterwards.

After a military campaign by Antiochus in Egypt, a false rumor spread throughout Jerusalem that Antiochus had been killed in Egypt, leading to public rejoicing and celebration. This prompted Antiochus, on his way back to Syria, entered the temple sanctuary in Jerusalem and carried off the treasures and the monies; also massacred forty thousand Jews in one day. After Antiochus' next Egyptian expedition, he again looted Jerusalem, set fire to parts of the city, and slaughtered many all on the Sabbath, a time when a Jew would not resist. In addition, he made virtually all of Judaism's distinctiveness illegal and transgressed its holiest laws by renaming the Jerusalem temple for Zeus Olympius, setting up a pagan altar there on which swine were sacrificed (the most unclean of animals in Jewish eyes), prohibiting circumcision and Sabbath observance, banning and burning copies of the Torah, and ordering sacrifices to pagan gods at various altars around the country.<sup>127</sup>

Because Daniel 11:1-30 predicted in detail the political events from the time of the Persian Empire to Antiochus IV (though not mentioning him by name), many Jews understandably took verses 31-35 as Daniel's famous 'abomination of desolation' to refer to Antiochus's desecration of the temple. First Maccabees 1:54 specifically relates this to the events on 15 Chislev (roughly December) in 167 BC when 'they erected a desolating sacrilege upon the altar of burnt offering,' although its specific nature is not described. Jesus later reapplied this imagery to the destruction of the temple by Rome in A.D. 70 (Matt. 24:15), and some interpreters take the imagery of Rev. 11: 2 to refer to a similar desolation at the end of human history just prior to Christ's return.

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<sup>127</sup> S. Weitzman, 'Plotting Antiochus's persecution.' *JBL* 123 ((2004): 219-34.

### 2.6.5 The Maccabean Revolt and the Hasmonian Dynasty (167-63)

An aged priest, Mattathias, was ordered to sacrifice on one of the unlawful alters Antiochus had erected in a small town in northwest Judea called Modein. He refused, and when a fellow Jew came forward to obey the king's orders, Mattathias slew both his countryman and the soldier overseeing the sacrifice. Soon the priest and his five sons fled to the Judean hill country and organized a band of rebel Jews. They repeatedly defeat the Syrian armies through the tactics of guerrilla warfare, including nighttime attacks from their mountain hideouts and willingness to defend themselves and fight on the Sabbath.

Mattathias died in 166, BC, but his son Judas, nicknamed (Maccabeus from Greek 'Hammerer'), continued leading the attacks. The Syrian commander, Lysias was unable to devote his whole attention to the Jewish insurgents because of internal divisions among the Seleucids and attacks from the Partisans to the northeast, so the Maccabees continued to win victories despite being outnumbered by as many as six to one (1Macc. 4: 28-29). By 25 Chislev in 164 BC, Judas succeeded in regaining the temple precincts and 'purifying' the sanctuary.

This crucial stage in the liberation of Israel from foreign rule is still celebrated today by Jews each December as Hanukkah (the feast of 'dedication').<sup>128</sup> John 10:22 introduces one account of Jesus' teaching in the temple at precisely this festival. Although, Judas did not remove the Syrian army from the fortress in Jerusalem, a temporary peace was negotiated. Fortunately for the Jews, Antiochus IV died in 164, and his successor, Antiochus V, was prepared to treat the Jews more favorably; however, Judas and his brothers continue fighting the Syrian troops until the Seleucid presence was entirely removed from Israel in 142 BC. This ushered in roughly eighty years of independence, still heralded as a golden age of

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<sup>128</sup> D. J. Harrinton, *The Maccabean Revolt: Anatomy of a Biblical Revolution* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1988).

Jewish nationalism. After Rome ended this period in 63 BC, Jews would never again live in Israel as a free, entirely self governing people until the reestablishment of the nation after World War II.

The Maccabean revolt, like the events that led up to it, intensified Jew-Gentile hatred to a degree not typically found in Old Testament times. This enmity, with its accompanying Jewish nationalism, is an important phenomenon for understanding New Testament events. For example, Paul's speech to the Jerusalem crowd in ACTS 22:3-21. He was almost beaten to death because of the false alarm that he had brought Greeks into the temple. When he spoke to the crowd in Aramaic, they quieted down and heard his defense. They could patiently wait and listen to his claims about Jesus of Nazareth and to the story of his dramatic conversion. What they could not tolerate was his account of the Lord's commission: 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles' (22:21). With this, 'they raised their voices and shouted, 'rid the earth of him! He is not fit to live!' (V.22).

The era of Jewish independence also reinstated long dormant hopes of a restored kingship. Increasingly, certain strands of Judaism couched these in Messianic language. When the Romans later overran Israel, the author of the Pseudepigraphal Psalms of Solomon expressed this hope by echoing words from the canonical Psalms:

Behold, O Lord, and raise up for them their king, the son of David, at the appointed time which, O God, you did choose, that he may reign over Israel, your servant.

And gird him with strength, that he may shatter unrighteous rulers, and may cleanse Jerusalem from the Gentiles that trample her down in destruction. Wisely and righteously let him expel sinners from the inheritance, and destroy the sinner's pride as a potter's vessel, with a rod of iron may break in pieces all their resources. Let

him destroy the lawless Gentiles by the word of his mouth. (Ps. Solomon 17: 21-24).<sup>129</sup>

Prior to the first century A.D., these hopes reached a fever pitch in certain circles and spawned a variety of revolutionary movements. Judas Maccabeus died around 160 BC and was succeeded by his brothers Jonathan (160-143) and Simon (143-34 BC). While the Syrians still controlled part of Israel, they appointed Jonathan high priest, even though everyone recognized that he was not the legitimate successor to the office. The move was generally accepted as a stop gap measure in light of the extraordinary circumstances. When Jonathan died and Simon succeeded him as military and political leader, ridding the nation of the final vestiges of Syrian presence, the Jews and their priests decided that Simon should be their leader and high priest forever, until a trustworthy prophet should arise (1Macc. 14:41), thus the Hasmonean dynasty.

After the death of Simon, his son John Hyrcanus (134-104 BC) succeeded him. He swayed from the original Maccabees ideology and concentrated more on territorial expansion and forced conversions, most notably of the Idumeans, living south of Judea, from whom Herod the Great would later emerge.<sup>130</sup> He also set the stage for the increased antagonism between Jews and Samaritans (descendants of foreigners who settled in Israel after the Assyrian invasion in 722 BC and with whom the Jews had unlawfully intermarried). That carried over into New Testament times. They considered themselves believers in the God of Israel but limited their scriptures to the Pentateuch, they also looked for a Messiah, called a Taheb (restorer), who was arguably somewhat more of a teacher and a little less of a warrior-king than in the expectations of the Psalms of Solomon.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> R.P. Martin, *New Testament Foundations*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 110-11.

<sup>130</sup> J. Sievers, *The Hasmoneans and Their Supporters from Mattathias to the Death of John Hyrcanus*

<sup>131</sup> I. Hjelm, *The Samaritans and Early Judaism: A literary Analysis* (Sheffield: SaP, 2000).

The Hasidim, who had supported the Maccabean revolt on religious grounds, now reemerged to protest the corruption of the original ideals and the growing Hellenism; probably it was from this group that the Pharisees emerged,<sup>132</sup> calling the Jews back to faithful obedience to their law. After an aborted one year rule of Hyrcanus's son Aristabulus (103 BC), the second son, Alexander Jannaeus, began a lengthy reign (103-76 BC), in which he virtually obliterated the Maccabean ideals. After the death of Jannaeus, his wife Alexandra (76-67 BC) who was much more supportive of the Jewish law, and was well liked. After her demise a power struggle ensued between her sons, Hyrcanus II and Aristabulus II. These two rivals appealed for assistance from Rome, and in 63 BC, the Romans under leadership of General Pompey invaded Jerusalem and profane the temple by entering the Holy of Holies, and put an end to the century of Jewish independence.

#### **2.6.6 The Roman era (63 BC)**

When Pompey entered Jerusalem, Aristabulus II decided to resist but was defeated.<sup>133</sup> As Pompey realized that Hyrcanus II was loyal to Rome, he installed him as the priest, and an Idumean by the name Antipater was given the local political leadership; thus Rome had established a 'client kings' at the provincial or the regional levels, Antipater ruled from 63-43 BC in the era of the Roman Emperor Julius Caesar. Because of Antipater's help to the imperial troops in Alexandria, Julius reduced Israel's taxes, gave her permission to rebuild Jerusalem's walls and fortify other cities, and supplied Judaism with unique freedoms of religion. This was the origin Judaism as 'religio licita' (Lat. 'Legal Religion), which later exempted it from the requirement of sacrificing to those emperors who to believe themselves as gods.

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<sup>132</sup> J. Geiger, 'The Hasmoneans and Hellenistic Succession,' *JJS* 53 (2000): 1-17.

<sup>133</sup> E. Regeev, 'How did the temple Mount fall to Pompey?' *JJS* 48 (1997): 276-89.

From 42-40 BC, another struggle ensued, this time between Herod, the son of Antipater and Antigonus, son of Aristabulus II who was the rightful heir to the Hasmonean throne. From 40-37 BC Antigonus gained upper hand, but by 37 BC Herod had finally triumphed. He ruled as client king over Israel for thirty-three years, however the high priesthood remained a separate institution; its occupants were Roman appointees. He ruled Israel from 37-4 BC, and was given the title 'Great'. His reign was marked by massive building projects out of heavy taxations such as rebuilding of the city of Samaria and renaming it 'Sabaste' (from the Gk. Equivalent of 'augustus'), the fortress at Herodion and Masada.

Herod's success was due to his loyalty to Augustus or Rome, indeed he pursued an active policy of Hellenization and Romanization in Israel, but more subtly than his predecessors, all the while insisting that he was a genuine and obedient convert to Judaism.<sup>134</sup> Though he was never well liked by the masses of the Jews, he gained a lot of developmental projects for the Israelites. The most remarkable one was the building of the magnificent temple for the Jews. It was in this temple that Jesus taught the Jews; and when he came out pronounced judgment upon it. Jesus' pronouncement and the disciple's question (Matt. 24:3) about the time of the destruction spark the whole of the Olivet Discourse in Matt. 24-25. Thus the issues about the temple brought about the whole of the eschatological discourse by Jesus.

### **2.7. The context and the theological settings of the Olivet Discourse**

The Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24, 25) comes almost at the end of Jesus' ministry, only a few days before the institution of the Lord's Supper and His betrayal (Matthew 26:2). In this discourse Jesus talks about the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the 'age' (Greek: *αιων*). That is the conclusion of the old covenant order, the time when the kingdom of God was to be taken from Israel and given to the multi-national church (Mt. 21:43). He

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<sup>134</sup> P. Southern, *Augustus* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

also spoke about the second coming and final judgment (Mt. 24:36-51; 25:31-46). The central propositions of Jesus throughout his discussion of judgment upon Israel and his bodily second coming to judge the whole world are perseverance, faithfulness, readiness and watchfulness. He warns the disciples that only those who endure to the end will be saved (24:13), also commanding them to be ready ((24:44), to “watch” (25:13). In the parable of the ten virgins only those who had made proper preparations and are ready at the bridegroom’s advent are permitted to go to the wedding. The rest are excluded (Mt. 25:1-13), the rest are cast into outer darkness (25:30). According to Jesus, on the final judgment day of the whole world, only those who were faithful and did good works toward Christ by serving and loving him and his people are given eternal life while the otherwise will go away into everlasting punishment (Mt. 25:46). A careful study of the gospels by the four evangelists in their presentation of life and ministry of Jesus reveals lack of perseverance, faithfulness, watchfulness and readiness on the part of the covenant nation (Israel). Jesus’ prophecy in Matthew 24 against Israel is God’s response to the nation’s rejection, hatred, blasphemy and murder of the Messiah and their similar treatment of Christ’s disciples after the ascension. Because the covenant nation or the Jewish people had the oracle of God through the prophets (Rom. 3:2) they had much responsibility to believe in, love and serve the Son of God. Thus rejecting Jesus would be the final straw in their rebellion.

In the gospel of Luke, Jesus prophesies, “If you had known, even you especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you , surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation” (Luke 19:41-44).

The Jews could commit no greater crime than murdering the Prince of life (Jesus), and at his trial all the people unanimously cried out that, “Let his blood be on us and on our children” (Mt. 27:25). On the way to the cross, Jesus said, (Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For indeed, days are coming in which they will say, blessed are the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed. Then they will begin to say to the mountains, fall on us and to the hills, cover us.” (Luke 23:28-30).

The four gospels properly documented the covenant nations rejection, hatred and persecution of Christ. For example, when the political and religious leaders were informed by the wise men from the East about the birth of the Messiah, King Herod attempted killing Him. When John the Baptist appeared on the scene both he and his message were totally rejected by the scribes and the Pharisees and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John refers to them as “brood of vipers’ (Mt. 3:7-8, 11:18, 21:25). After Jesus sent out the twelve on a preaching mission, he discussed the great judgment that would come upon those cities that rejected his word, he said, “Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment than for that city” (Mt. 10: 16). He also warned the disciples of the coming persecution. “Now brother will deliver brother up to death and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death” (Mt.10:21, 22-23, 34-42).

He emphasizes the fact that a rejection of the preaching of the Son of God Himself accompanied by amazing, authenticating miracles merits a much greater punishment. “But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the Day of Judgment than for you.” (Mt. 11:24). The hatred and rejection of Jesus is also very profound in the gospel of John. “He came to his own and they did not receive him.” (Jn.1:11). The Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons using the power of Satan (Matthew 12:24). This Jesus

said was blasphemy against the Holy Spirit which would not be forgiven by God (Matthew 12:31-32). The official policy of the religious leaders was to excommunicate anyone who confesses Jesus as the Messiah (Jn. 9:22, 12:42). After Lazarus was raised from the dead, the response of the Jewish leaders was a conspiracy to murder Christ (Jn. 11:3). When the Jewish people were given choice between setting free the sinless Son of God and a thieving murderer (Barabbas) they choose Barabbas (Matthew 27:15-17), and as Jesus was hung on the cross in pain and agony they mocked, reviled and blasphemed against him by the people and the religious leaders (Mt. 27: 39-44). As the ministry of Jesus on earth nears its end, he increasingly reveals the coming covenantal curse upon the Jewish nation (Israel), and seeing a fig tree by the road, he came to it and found nothing on it but leaves, he then said, “ Let no fruit grow on you ever again,” Immediately the fig tree withered away (Mt. 21:19). The cursing and withering of the fig tree due to none productivity was a symbolic of the prophetic prediction of the coming destruction upon those who will not be found viable in the house of God when Jesus returns the second time (Lk.13:8-9). The Parables in Matthew 21 and 22 are a prelude to the scathing condemnation of the Jewish leaders as in Matthew 23. This chapter is so important because it sets forth the immediate context of the Olivet Discourse. It also foretells in detail the destruction of Jerusalem (Mt. 23:35,38) and the time of the coming judgment (“this generation” 23:36).The question that the disciples asked in Matthew 24:3 comes as a result of Jesus’ statements in Matthew 23:32-24:2.

Below are some issues that are to be taken into consideration concerning the apocalyptic discourse in the New Testament using the Matthean Background:

- The teachings and the parables given in chapters 21 and 22 are made explicit and elucidated. Like the unfaithful son, the scribes and Pharisees ‘say, and do not do’ (Mt. 23:3, 21:30). Likewise the wicked vinedressers and the people who killed the servants who

announced the wedding feast, the scribes and the Pharisees persecuted and murdered the prophets (Mt. 23:29-35). Like those in the parables who were judged and excluded from the kingdom, the scribes and the Pharisees will be destroyed ((Mt. 23:35).

- Jesus sets forth the extent of the Jewish leadership’s covenant –breaking and lawlessness in fashion of a prophetic covenant lawsuit. Christ documents their sins in the form of eight woes (eight indicating that their sins and wickedness would lead to a new beginning, a new age, a new kingdom universal in scope). The scribes and the Pharisees were hypocrites (Mt. 23:13, 14, 15, 23, 25, 27) who through their false teachings “shut up Heaven” (Mt. 23:13) and made their converts “sons of hell” (Mt. 23:15). They had perverted the doctrine of salvation to the extent that they were teaching damnable heresy and thus has completely lost the preeminent mark of the true church. Jesus said their father was the devil (Jn. 8:44) and their synagogues were of Satan (Rev. 3:9). They made up human traditions in order to circumvent the Law of Moses (Mt. 23:16), and also neglecting the weightier matters of the law to focus on trifles (Mt. 23:23-24).

For this reason, Jesus explains the severity of the coming judgment (woe to you the scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous and say if we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets). Therefore, you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up then the measure of your father’s guilt, serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? Therefore, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: Some of them you will kill and crucify, and some you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous bloodshed on the earth, from the blood

of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, I say to you, “all these things will come upon this generation (Mt.23: 29-36).

Their testimony sealed their own prosecution. Their intimate knowledge of scriptures and their own history also indicates that they have committed high level of sins. Jesus does not mean that scribes and Pharisees of his days were responsible for the murders committed by their fore-fathers centuries before that time. But the guilt of wickedness is increased by the accumulation of previous instances and warnings. Each generation that condemns the wickedness of its predecessors, and yet repeats the wickedness, is guiltier than its predecessors, and has more to answer.<sup>135</sup> Further, Jesus takes the Jewish leaders’ statement regarding their persecution fathers and turns it against them as an admission that they ethically are of the same ‘cloth’. The Nation of Israel had been storing up guilt for generations. However, it was the murder of Christ and the persecution of his people that put the final nail in the ‘coffin’. The leaders have blasphemed the Holy Spirit and killed the Son of God. Therefore, the coming destruction deserved to be and will be more terrible than anything that the world had ever witnessed.<sup>136</sup> A careful analysis of the apocalyptic discourse in the New Testament through the book of Matthew reveals that the gospel takes great care in documenting the unfaithfulness and wickedness of the Jewish leadership and nation. It has also been realized that much of Matthew chapter 21 and 22 and almost all of chapter 23 is concerned with the wickedness of the Jewish people in rejecting Christ and persecuting his prophets (both past and future).

Jesus also carefully explains that the behavior of the Jewish people especially towards the Messiah and his followers has filled up the cup of God’s wrath, that total destruction and

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<sup>135</sup> Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 323.

<sup>136</sup> Charles Wanamaker, *Commentary of 1 and 11 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 116.

permanent removal of covenant privileges is coming. The great and most anxious question one needs to ask is ‘when’ will this total destruction of the Jewish people as well as the entire universe come?<sup>137</sup> This question of when will this destruction or the end of all things on the surface of the earth, or in other words the time of the second coming of Jesus as they asked him in Matthew 24:3, largely forms the basis of Jesus’ eschatological teachings in the whole of chapter 24.

### **Conclusion**

When the Jews were repatriated to rebuild their homeland upon the orders of Artaxerxes, it seems probable that they tried to worship Yahweh according to the Torah so as not to fall into servitude again since they believe that their exile was as result of disobedience to the oracles of God. They set up synagogues to oversee proper sacrifices to God, in order to apply the Torah to every aspect of their lives; certain oral-traditions with their interpretations were added to the law by their leaders where such additions have no bearings on the Torah. This was one of Jesus’ reasons for condemning the scribes in the whole of chapter 23.

Again, the Jews went under different empires with their respective cultures, traditions and gods. For example, during the spread of Greek culture under Alexander the Great, the Jewish’ strict way of observing the Torah has been adulterated. Thus practices that are detestable to the teachings of the Torah such as taking part in the Greek gymnasias in the nude and other activities which caused them to lose interest in the proper worship of Yahweh.

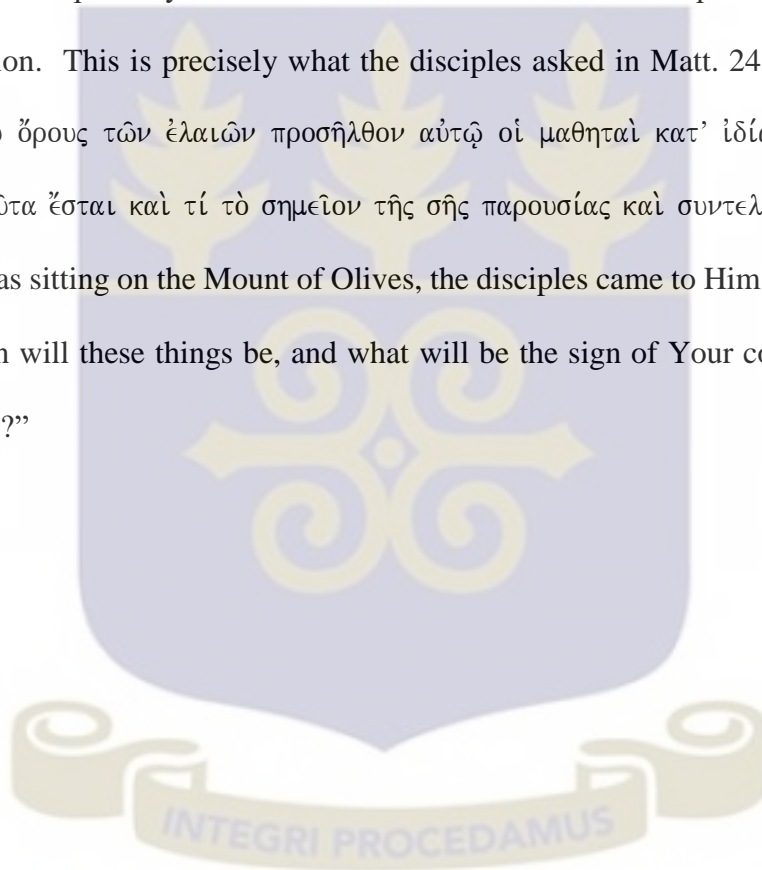
It is clear that Matthew has systematically recorded the apostasy and the perversion of the people in 21-23. Jesus explains that the wickedness of the people from the time of Abel and

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<sup>137</sup> James Morison, *A practical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Minneapolis: Klock and Klock, 1981), 451.

to his own era where he together with his disciples were rejected as well as the teachings and the warnings.

According to Jesus, the evil deeds of the people is filled up to the cup of God's wrath that total destruction and permanent removal of covenant privileges is inevitable hence pronouncement of judgment upon them. Taking into consideration the situation in which Jesus made the pronouncement about the destruction and the judgment, the most anxious question one could possibly ask is 'when' will the destruction take place, and the signs of its manifestation. This is precisely what the disciples asked in Matt. 24:3 (Καθημένου δὲ αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τοῦ ὄρους τῶν ἐλαιῶν προσήλθον αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ κατ' ἰδίαν λέγοντες· εἰπέ ἡμῖν, πότε ταῦτα ἔσται καὶ τί τὸ σημεῖον τῆς σῆς παρουσίας καὶ συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος). 'And as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"



## CHAPTER THREE

### EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF MATT. 24:1-44

#### 3.1 Introduction

The chapter three involves an in-depth exegetical analysis of Matt. 24:1-44 to bring out the understanding of the discourse to the contemporary Ghanaian Christians.

#### 3.2 Delimitation

Matt. 23: 37-39 (v.37 Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. V. 38 Look, your house is left to you desolate. V. 39 For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’). This pronouncement by Jesus in 23: 37-39 necessitated the disciples’ question in 24: 3, therefore it can be said that the discourse actually begins from 23: 37-39. Also upon all the predictions and warnings in the discourse in chapter 24, it can be concluded that the discourse ends at v. 42 where Jesus entreated his listeners to keep watch.

#### 3.3 Structure

**(24:1-3) two questions A & B**

**A (24: 4-6) Destruction of Jerusalem**

**B (24:7-14) Second Coming**

**A’ (24:15-22) Destruction of Jerusalem**

**B’ (24:23-44) Second Coming**

**Exegesis**

### 3.3.1 The pronouncement and the question of its fulfillment 24:1-3

The connective “and or also” (Greek Καί) joins what follows to Jesus’ preceding denunciation of the generation of Jews that rejected Him and the Divine Judgment that would follow (23:36-39). However, the ‘apocalyptic’ or the eschatological discourse that He proceeded to give was not merely an extension of the address in chapter 23.<sup>138</sup> This implies that even though there is some continuity on the subject matter from chapter 23, it cannot be justified that the content of chapter 24 is solely the continuity of chapter 23 because the setting, audience and major themes changed. Therefore it can be said that despite the use of the conjunction in the opening chapter of 24, chapter 23 can be said to be solely dealing with the Jews while chapter 24 extends beyond the nation of Israel to include other tribes. ‘All these things’ which Jesus pointed out to the disciples were the building which they had drawn His attention to. Jesus predicted the destruction of the Great Temple complex that Herod the Great had begun building about 20 B.C. which was not completed until A.D. 64.<sup>139</sup> The temple was made of huge stones such that only deliberate force could dismantle or dislodge them from one another according to the way they had been laid.

The fulfillment of Jesus’ prediction concerning the destruction of the temple came in A.D. 70 just six years after its completion when the Roman Soldiers deliberately destroyed the temple, prying off stones one by one and casting them into the valley.<sup>140</sup> Thus the description about the manner in which the Romans destroyed the temple falls exactly in line with Jesus’ prediction of how the temple would be destroyed where no stone would be left on another.

The disciples’ question in 24:3 ‘Καθημένου δὲ αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τοῦ ὄρους τῶν ἐλαιῶν προσήλθον αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ κατ’ ἰδίαν λέγοντες· εἰπὲ ἡμῖν, πότε ταῦτα ἔσται καὶ τί τὸ σημεῖον τῆς

<sup>138</sup> John F. Walvoord, “Christ’s Olivet Discourse on the End of the Age.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 316 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974): 195-205.

Flavius Josephus, *The works of Flavius Josephus* (London: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988).

<sup>140</sup> Ibid

σῆς παρουσίας καὶ συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος' (And as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"). The importance of determining precisely and exactly what the disciples asked cannot be over stated, the structure of the Olivet discourse is based on the components of their question. Mark and Luke both abbreviate the question asked by the disciples, nevertheless there are two main clear parts to the question in their account:

- When will the temple be destroyed?
- What will be the sign that indicates its destruction is imminent?

In Matthew's account, the question request for a sign for two events: the coming (παρουσία) of Jesus and the end of the age (συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος). It is difficult to determine how the disciples phrase their complete question, nevertheless, the way Matthew, Mark and Luke condense the question implies two conclusions.

First, from the fact that Matthew refers to 'the end of the age' it seems clear that the disciples associated the destruction of the temple with the end of the age. Second, from the construction in the Greek (τῆς σῆς παρουσίας καὶ συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος ), namely a single article for two nouns connected by 'καί,' the disciples probably considered 'your coming' and 'the end of the age' as essentially the same event. In the mind of the disciples, the destruction of the temple, the coming of Jesus, and the end of the age are coincident and constitute a single complex of events. Therefore, the sign they requested would, in their minds, be a sign for all the events.<sup>141</sup>

We should most probably regard the disciples as thinking of the destruction of the temple and the coming as coincident, and the sign, in their esteem, would be the sign of all the

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<sup>141</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974) p. 196.

events specified in Matthew 24:3--destruction of the temple, the coming and the consummation of the age.<sup>142</sup> Asking this sort of question, it means the disciples were very optimistic about the second advent of Jesus Christ that was why they wanted to know the signs that would precede His coming.

The central understanding of this research work is that Jesus intentionally and explicitly distinguished between the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 and his coming at the end of the age. If this assertion is right, then the Olivet discourse as structured by Jesus is in two parts: The destruction of the temple with its sign and the coming of Christ at the end of the age with its sign. The first question 'when' deals with the destruction of the temple, and the second one 'what' deals with Jesus' second bodily coming as well as the end of the age. This phrase 'end of the age' means the final judgment of humanity at the second coming of Christ where the righteous are expected to enjoy eternal glory with Christ while the wicked or the unbelievers will suffer eternal damnation. The Old Testament predicted that several eschatological events would take place prior to the end of the age. First, the destruction of Jerusalem and second, the Messiah would come and end the present age. (Zech. 14:12, Mt. 24:2). This is evidence from the scriptures that there is only one coming of Christ in Matt. 24:27-31 and Mark 13:24-27, namely, the Παρουσία referred to by the disciples of Christ is the bodily return of Jesus in to the world the second time in a glorious manner.

Thus Vv.1-3 was concerned about the time Jerusalem or the temple would be destroyed and the sign which would show that the second coming of Christ is at hand.

### **3.3.2 A (Jesus' warning about the destruction 24:4-6)**

Jesus began the Olivet Discourse by warning His disciples about the possibility of meeting them on wrongful concluding events at His second coming. According to the text, the

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<sup>142</sup> John Murray, 'The Interadventual Period and the Advent: Matthew 24 and 25' *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 2: *Selected Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), p. 387.

destruction of Jerusalem, and other similar catastrophes would not indicate that the end of the age or the second coming of Christ is near.<sup>143</sup> The appearance of false Messiah's should not confuse the disciples into believing that He had arrived. The presence of wars and rumors of wars should likewise not to mislead them into concluding that the end has come. This implies that catastrophes and future wars are inevitable events which would come as and when it must occur; therefore the disciples must take cognizance of the fact that such occurrences are not prerequisite for the end of the age. Jesus probably inferring from the disciples' question that they put the destruction of the temple and that of the second coming as well the end of the age as one event, he uses vv. 4-6 as the opening of the discourse to explain to them that the two are distinct events and when the destruction is experienced, it must not be interpreted to mean that the second coming too must follow immediately.

### **3.3.3 B (The Second Coming 24:7-14)**

Vv. 7-14 is the continuation or an emphasis on certain events which would take place, and yet not the sign of the end of the age. For example, wars, earthquakes and some other catastrophes as mentioned in Vv. 4-6 would occur. This time not limited to the nation of Israel alone but throughout the world where nations would rise against nations, Kingdoms against kingdoms. The Jews believe that a seven year-period of time will immediately precede the Messiah's second coming to rule over the universe. For instance, it was written in the Babylonian Talmud that, 'Our Rabbis taught that in the seven year cycle at the end of which the Son of David will come'.<sup>144</sup> This idea became entrenched that they strictly believed in an increasingly sufferings such as from wars, earthquakes, famines and many other catastrophes before the coming of Christ. This might probably be the reason why Jesus

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<sup>143</sup> Jack Dean Kings, *Matthew as Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).

<sup>144</sup> *The Babylonian Talmud*, p. 654.

admonished them not to let such eventualities mislead them into believing that the end is near or has come.

The Phrase, 'birth pains' has its origin from the Old Testament passages that described the period of distresses preceding the messianic age namely the Tribulation (Isa. 13:8,26:17, Jer. 4:31 etc).<sup>145</sup> This is a prominent feature of Jewish eschatology as represented by the rabbinic literature was the time of trouble preceding the coming of the Messiah.

The beginning of the birth pangs which Jesus spoke about corresponds with the beginning of the Tribulation which Prophet Daniel spoke about (Dan. 9:25-27). Some scholars or interpreters believe Vv. 4-8 described the first half of the Tribulation and Vv. 9-14 the second half of the Tribulation. As this research work agrees with this assertion, some other scholars also believe Vv. 4-14 described the beginning of the Tribulation, and that Vv. 15-22, the middle of it, and Vv. 23-44 the end of it.<sup>146</sup> A comparison of Christ's description of the beginning of the birth pangs in Matthew 24:5-7 with the first four seals of Revelation 6:1-8 indicates that the beginning of the birth pangs and the first four seals are the same.

The first four seals of Revelation 6:

- False Messiahs who will mislead many (Mt.24:5) and First seal: Rider on a white horse, false Messiah (Rev. 6:2).
- Wars, rumors of wars, nation rising against nation (Mt.24:6-7) and Second Seal: Rider on a red horse takes away peace from the earth and replaced it with wars (Rev. 6:3-4).
- Famines (Mt. 24:7) and the Third Seal, Rider on black horse holds balances, represents famine. (Rev. 6:5-7).

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<sup>145</sup> Stanley D. Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew*. (Portland: Mulnomah Press, 1980).

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

- Death through famine, pestilences and earthquakes (Mt. 24:7) and the Fourth Seal, Rider on pale horse, represent death through famine, pestilence and wild beasts (Rev. 6:7-8).

Interestingly, immediately after His description of the beginning of the birth pangs, Christ referred to the killing of those associated with Him (Mt. 24:9), which is parallel to the fifth Seals which talks about the martyrdom of people because of their testimony concerning Jesus Christ (Rev. 6: 9-11).<sup>147</sup> The sixth Seal seems also to fall within this period. Mt. 24:9-13 in the context, ‘all these things’ (Rev. 6:8) described in this verse will happen during the period of ‘birth pains,’ namely the Tribulation where the disciples will experience persecution and martyrdom. The ‘you’ extends beyond Jesus’ immediate disciples, and includes disciples living in the future when these things will happen. Jesus was again speaking beyond His immediate audience. This persecution will lead many of the disciples astray from the faith and even to the point of hating one another. The deceiving influence of false prophets as well as the persecution of the disciples will cause a lot to turn away from the faith. Their love for Jesus will grow cold. Though the term ‘disciple’ is a broader one than ‘believer’ it seems Jesus meant some believers would be deceived, turn from the faith and even hate other believers. Another characteristic issue of the Tribulation period is that during those years, the good News (the gospel) concerning the coming of the messianic kingdom will reach the ears of many people apart from the Jews on the surface of the earth. This is the message the first disciples of Jesus preached, saying that people should repent and get ready for the inauguration of the messianic kingdom by believing in the king: Jesus. Undoubtedly some people will believe and some others will not.

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<sup>147</sup> Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew*.

For those who will accept the message, the glory of the kingdom awaits them and those who will not accept will face an eternal damnation from the king Himself. The v. 14 which says that the gospel would reach every part of the world before the coming of the Lord does not imply that until everyone receives the gospel, the Lord will not come. Thus the Lord's coming does not depend upon such notions. Thus verses 4-14 as in brief outline a forecast of interadventual history.<sup>148</sup> The first part of the Olivet Discourse carried the disciples all the way from their present time to the end of the age. However, Jesus had not yet mentioned any legitimate sign of any event, and therefore, the next part of his answer must go back in time. This technique in prophetic discourse is not unusual. Concerning the transition from Matt. 24:14 to 24:15, Murray writes as follows:

This section [verses 15 and following] cannot be a continuation, because verse 14 had brought us up to the end. It must be, to some extent, recapitulation. Our Lord forecasts to the disciples certain additional features of the period that had been delineated in verses 4-14, and gives the warning and exhortations appropriate to the events involved. Here we have a principle that must be applied in the interpretation of prophecy. Delineation of the eschatological drama is not always continuously progressive; it is often recapitulatory. But recapitulation is not repetition.<sup>149</sup>

But where does the recapitulation begin? This question brings into focus the pivotal point on which the correct interpretation of the Olivet discourse hangs. After warning the disciples of events that will characterize the inter-advent period, but which do not constitute legitimate signs, Jesus then proceeds to give them a sign. On this, all interpreters agree. However, Matthew and Mark differ from Luke in the wording of what they report next:

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<sup>148</sup> Murray, 'The Inter-adventual Period and the Advent: Matthew 24 and 25,' p. 388.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 388.

- Luke: ‘When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city...’
- Matthew/Mark: ‘So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel – let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains...’

Almost all interpreters have agreed that ‘Jerusalem surrounded by armies’ in Luke’s summary of the discourse is the sign that points to the imminent destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in .A.D. 70. Although we regard each account in itself as the inerrant word of God, yet all three accounts are obviously fragmentary. It has been suggested that Luke’s reason for omitting this particular section which Matthew and Mark include may be accounted for by the fact that Luke had already given, in his Perean section (Luke 17:31 and context), some of the same substance of teaching. Why Matthew and Mark omit the section on Jerusalem surrounded with armies and the scattering of the people during the ‘times of Gentiles’ we may only conjecture.<sup>150</sup>

If the end of Gentile domination of Jerusalem referred to in Luke 21:24 is part of the complex of events surrounding the second coming and the end of the age, then it is easy to see the transition from the part of the discourse recorded by Matthew and Mark. Quite likely therefore, Matt. 24: 15-28 and Mark 13:14-23 follow Luke 21:24. Now that Jesus has brought the disciples to the end of the age, he gives them a sign that signals its nearness<sup>151</sup>.

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<sup>150</sup> Buswell, *A systematic Theology of the Christian Region*, II: 371.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid

### 3.3.4 A' (The destruction of Jerusalem 24:15-22)

The 'abomination of desolation' is a term Daniel used in Daniel 8:13, 9:27, 11:31, and 12:11. In Daniel 11:31, the prophet referred to Antiochus Epiphanes as an abomination that caused desolation. Antiochus proved to be this abomination when he erected an altar to Zeus over the brazen altars in Jerusalem, and proceeded to offer swine on it. Abomination is described as something which is really detestable to God in the Bible, and that He rejects.<sup>152</sup> In the contexts of Daniel's references, it designates an idol set up in the temple. Jesus urged the reader of Daniel's references to the abomination of desolation particularly the ones dealing with a future abomination of desolation (Dan. 9:27), to understand their true meaning. He further stressed the importance and validity of these prophecies by referring to Daniel as 'the Prophet'. Matthew's inclusion of the phrases 'the abomination of desolation,' which Luke omitted, and the 'holy place' which both Mark and Luke omitted were appropriate in view of his Jewish audience.

Daniel 9:24-27 predicted that from the time someone issued a decree allowing the Jews to rebuild Jerusalem until the coming of Israel's Messiah, 69 weeks of literary 'sevens' of years would elapse. This 483-year period began when Artaxerxes issued his decree, and it ended when Jesus entered Jerusalem in the Triumphal Entry (Mt. 21:8-11). Because Israel refused to accept Jesus as her king, the events that Daniel prophesied to happen in the seventieth week (the remaining seven years in his 70 week prophecy) would not follow immediately. What Daniel predicted would happen in those seven years was unique national distress for Israel (Dan. 12:1) which would commence when a wicked ruler signs a covenant with Israel (Dan. 9:27). After three and half years, the ruler would break the covenant and terminate worship in the temple, he ended temple worship by setting up an abominable idol there (Rev.

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<sup>152</sup> Buswell, *A systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, II: 371.

13:14-15). Some interpreters have concluded that the prophecy about the seventieth week should not be taken literally or consider it as still a future event; they believe the abomination of desolation refers to the Zealots' conduct in the temple before the Romans destroyed it in A.D. 70.<sup>153</sup> This view seems doubtful since the Zealots' did not introduce idolatry into the temple. Another view is that when the Romans brought their standard bearing the image of Caesar into the temple, and offered sacrifices to their gods, they set up the abomination that Daniel predicted. Thus the prophecy concerning the abomination by Daniel which Jesus made reference to had taken place in A.D. 70 during the era of the Roman's invasion.

### **3.3.4 B' (The Second Coming of the King 24:23-44)**

Jesus continued and explained to his disciples that His coming would terminate the Tribulation. The use of 'then' in Vv. 23-24 means 'at that time' namely at the end of the Tribulation. He warned the disciples about people, who would claim that the Messiah had returned toward the end of the Tribulation, before His actual time of coming. People professing to be the Messiah (false Christs) and others claiming to be prophets (false prophets) would arise and mislead many people because of their ability to perform impressive miracles. Evidently, Satan will enable them to perform these 'great signs and wonders'. While false Christs and prophets have always been in evidence, they will be especially prominent at the end of the age in Satan's final attempt to turn people from having faith in Christ.<sup>154</sup> 'If possible' means the false prophets will hope to mislead the elect living in the Tribulation, Jesus admonished His disciples to be careful about the activities of these false Messiahs and prophets so as not to be misled. In this discourse, Jesus was not only referring to His contemporary disciples, but also future believers of the gospel.

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<sup>153</sup> C.E.B. Cranfield, "The Cup Metaphor in Mark." *Expository Times* 59 (1947): 137-38.

<sup>154</sup> Walvoord, *Matthew*.

He explained that His coming would be obvious to all, rather than obscure. Thus everyone would be able to recognize the Lord when He appears, and not that only some special people would see or witness Him before announcing to others. The statement, ‘and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with power and great glory,’ is enough for one to believe that the παρουσία is a literal phenomenon.

### **3.3.5 The Parable of Noah’s Day**

This parable elucidates verse 36 as the introductory ‘for’ indicates. The previous parable stressed the signs leading to His second coming, but this one stresses the responses to those signs and their consequences. Life will be progressing as usual when the king returns to judge. Similarly life was progressing as usual in Noah’s day, just before God broke in on humankind with judgment. Despite upheavals, people will continue their normal pursuits. Ignorance and disregard of the Bible will be wide spread then.

The special point of the analogy is not that the generation that was swept away by the Flood during the days of Noah was exceptionally wicked, but that it was so absorbed in its worldly pursuits that it paid no attention to solemn or sound warnings.<sup>155</sup> Thus believers need to maintain constant vigilance, because the daily grind, including distress and persecution will turn to lull them into complacency. Thus it is highly possible for people to refuse solemn warnings especially from experts such as meteorologists concerning future storms or catastrophe.

### **3.3.6 The Parable of one taken and one left behind**

Jesus, having explained the importance of the signs leading up to His return and the responses to those signs explained the respective consequences of the two responses. The parable of one taken one left means that on the judgment day when Christ returns to judge

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<sup>155</sup> Plummer, *Matthew*, p. 340.

the living and the dead, everyone will be responsible for his or her actions towards Christ. Thus that person's relationship with Christ will have no effect on the other. No one's action towards Christ will save his or her relative on the judgment day when Jesus appears. As Jesus rightly predicted in Rev. 22:12 (Behold, I am coming soon! I will bring my rewards with me to give to each one according to what he has done). This is an attestation that on Christ's second coming, salvation will no longer be communal phenomenon as it was in the Old Testament that, per one person's righteousness, others could also be part of the relief or salvation that the Lord brought unto to them. For example, through Noah's righteous act, his family was saved from the flood that swept the world in their era. Thus favor of God upon Noah because of his righteousness, brought salvation to his family. According to the scriptures, no one was found righteous except him. This implies that none of his family members deserve the salvation since they equally sin just as did the others. However, because of Noah they were saved (Gen. 6-9). As the Jewish people have this in mind, Jesus uses such parable to explain that at his return, it will not be so but rather each person will be rewarded according to the way he or she lives the Christian life here on the surface of this earth.

This calls for endurance on the part of believers so as not to allow anyone to mislead them into believing that, the favor upon any of his close relation will enable him or her to receive the salvation which will be brought when Christ appears in the world the second time.

### **3.4 Terminologies**

#### **3.4.1. 'This generation'**

The term 'generation' literary means the life span of humanity at a particular time. And with the prefix or the demonstrative pronoun 'this' which connotes immediate or present to some extent implies that the expression 'this generation' as used in 24:34 might probably be referring to Jesus' contemporaries. However, the content of the Olivet Discourse especially

in 24:1-44 makes it very difficult for a person to ascertain whether the expression ‘this generation’ was used by Jesus to refer to his contemporaries or anything else. As mentioned earlier, a commentator Joseph Fitzmyer has stressed that the expression ‘this generation’ is the most difficult phrase to interpret in the complicated eschatological discourse.

Currently there has not been any consensus among scholars concerning the interpretation of the expression ‘this generation’ in the Olivet Discourse. For example, Robert Maddox contends that the term ‘generation’ refers to the life span of humanity at a particular time hence the phrase ‘this generation’ solely refers to Jesus’ contemporaries and any other interpretation is artificial and for that matter, all the predictions in the discourse must be fulfilled in the life time of Jesus’ contemporaries.

F.D. Bruner, by dwelling on the expression ‘all these things’ in the same paragraph 24:34 explains that the predictions in the discourse also include the future, and probably Jesus’ second coming or the parousia. He argues that the central theme of the whole discourse is that ‘no one knows of the day or the hour of the second coming, neither the Son nor the angels of heaven (24:34), therefore Jesus could not on the other hand asserts that his contemporary generation would see the fulfillment of all his predictions in v.34 and just two verses later declaring that no one, not even the Son knows of the day or the hour of the fulfillment of all things.

He again buttresses his point with Matt. 24:1-14 (but the beginning of birth pangs, the end is not yet, ‘this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come’) to him, this statement by Jesus is not emphasizing an immediate end to all things only about the Jewish people, but rather that of the entire world. Thus the phrase ‘this generation’ could not necessarily be referring to Jesus’ contemporaries.

Both Schweitzer and Lenski assert that the phrase ‘this generation’ is used metaphorically to represent Israel as a race while Walvoord, Leon Morris and Lovstam contend that the expression ‘this generation’ in 24:34 speaks of a wicked kind of people who reject Jesus and face the eschatological judgment, and not Israel as a race. To these scholars, the Olivet Discourse is a prolepsis to the great commission as in Matthew 28:18-20 where the disciples were charged to proselytize the whole world; hence the expression ‘this generation’ cannot be limited to Jesus’ Jewish contemporaries only but should be extended to all kind of wicked people who had rejected him with his teachings.

Even though, the term ‘generation’ is defined in general term as a life span of humanity at a particular time frame, this definition cannot support the context in which the phrase ‘this generation’ has been used in 24: 34 due to the nature of the discourse and some of the predictions by Jesus. Thus Robert Maddox’s assertion that the expression ‘this generation’ should be limited to Jesus’ contemporaries only to the larger extent must not be accepted on the basis that the discourse talks a lot about the ‘end’ of all things. For example, Matt. 24: 6b (such things must happen, but the ‘end’ is still to come), 24:13 (but the one who stands firm to the ‘end’ will be saved), 24:14 (And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the ‘end’ will come).

There has not been any evidence so far that, Jesus’ contemporary disciples had witnessed the ‘end’ spoken about in 24: 6, 13 and 14 hence it will be very difficult for one to conclude that ‘this generation’ refers to only Jesus’ contemporaries.

24:30 (καὶ τότε φανήσεται τὸ σημεῖον τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐν οὐρανῷ, καὶ τότε κόψονται πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ ὄψονται τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενον ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ μετὰ δυνάμεως καὶ δόξης πολλῆς), the ‘φυλαὶ’ in this verse has been translated as tribes, in the context of the whole world and not Israel alone. This implies

Schweitzer and Lenski's assertion that the phrase 'this generation' should be interpreted as the Jewish race cannot be supported. Thus Jesus' prediction in verse 30 alone by referring to all the tribes of the earth is enough for a person to infer that the Olivet Discourse is not solely about the Israelites but also all people on the surface of the earth, meaning the expression 'this generation' in verse 34 might probably be describing a certain group of people across the world with similar character patterns. Therefore it sounds very convincing when one sides with Walvoord, Lovstam and Leon Morris that the expression 'this generation' in verse 34 refers to a certain wicked class of people in the world who rejects Jesus with his teachings and face the eschatological judgment.

This contention has been widely accepted by many of the commentators such as Davies and Allison who assert that the expression 'this generation' in the context of the Olivet Discourse does not refer to a chronological duration of a life span of humanity but used in describing the character trait of the people. They explained further that the moral and ethical use of 'dor' and 'haddor hazzeh' in the OT stands behind Jesus' use of the term in Matthew. His use of the phrase has deliberate connections to the two notorious generations in the OT: The generation of the flood and that of the wilderness wanderings. Adjectives like 'evil,' 'perverse,' 'adulterous' and 'faithless' (Matt. 11:39, 45; 16:4; 17:17) come from the song of Moses (Deut.32:5, 20).<sup>156</sup>

Matthew also seems to have deliberately juxtaposed the phrase 'this generation' with his account of the days of Noah (24:37-39), which are an explicit type of the coming of the Son of Man. This is probably a purposeful echo of Gen. 7:1<sup>157</sup> 'Then the Lord said to Noah, enter the ark (cf. Matt. 24:38, 'until the day when Noah entered the ark'), you and your entire house hold, for I have found you righteous before me in this generation' (te genea taute,

<sup>156</sup> W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1991), 260-61.

<sup>157</sup> Lovstam, 'Eschatology.'

LXX). In the LXX only Gen. 7:1 and Ps 11: 8 have the exact phrase *he genea haute*, which is used six times in Matthew. Ps. 12:8 (11:8 LXX) says, ‘You, O Lord, will keep them (LXX ‘us’); you will preserve him (ie the godly man) from this generation (*haddor zu; tes geneas tantes*) forever.’

‘This generation’ is described in context as lying, boastful, proud, violent and wicked and exalting vileness. The godly do not belong to ‘this generation’ though they live among them (cf. Acts 2:40) with many other words, he warned them; and he pleaded with them, ‘save yourselves from this corrupt generation.’ (Phil.2:15) so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.’ In Gen. 7:1 Noah is described as the sole righteous individual in ‘this generation’ (*te genea taute*). He, like the godly man in Ps. 12, lived in but did not belong to ‘this generation’ (described as the wicked, violent and corrupt in Gen. 6:5-11).

Just as Noah was a contemporary of the ‘*dor*’ of the flood and yet did not belong to it and Moses, Joshua etc. Were contemporaries of the ‘*dor*’ of the wilderness without belonging to it, is assumed in the NT that there are contemporaries (Jesus, of course and others) who do not belong to ‘this generation’. This emphasizes the decisive and demarcating stress on the spiritual character in the *he genea haute* conception. *He genea haute* can from this point of view be compared to such a conception as e.g. ‘*ho aion autos*’-Lovstam

Matthew 24:36-44 presents the same separation between the godly and the wicked as one finds in Gen. 7:1 and Ps. 12. The people of Noah’s day were oblivious to God and the preaching of repentance by Noah in their pursuit of life’s pleasures. Noah was saved, and they were all swept away in judgment (Matt. 24:39). Likewise the unrepentant, faithless and

wicked that are alive when the Son of Man comes will be taken in judgment (24:30, 40-41, 50-51; 25:11-12, 30, 41-46).

A study of the use of 'he genea haute' (Matt. 11:16; 12:41, 42, 45; 23:36; 24:34) and 'genea' with other descriptive adjectives (Matt. 12:39, 45; 16:4; 17:17) used in the same sense reveals that the kind of people referred to are characterized as those who reject Jesus and his messengers and the salvific message they preach, who remain unbelieving and unrepentant, who actively oppose Jesus and his messengers through testing and persecution, and who will face eschatological judgment. The pejorative adjectives given to 'this generation' (evil, adulterous, faithless, perverse; cf. 12:39, 45; 16:4; 17:17) throughout the gospel are qualities that distinguish those who are subjects of the kingdom from those who are not. 'This generation' in Matthew is characterized in the following ways:

1. In 11:16-24 'this generation' displays the epitome of foolishness by judging Jesus to be unrighteous sinner (glutton), and by failing to repent in the face of his mighty works. They will therefore face a harsher fate on the Day of Judgment than Sodom.
2. In 12:22-45 'this generation' will again be condemned at the judgment because it failed to repent at the wisdom and miracles of Jesus and instead rejected him by attributing his exorcisms to Satan and by testing him by asking for a sign.
3. In 16:1-4 the Pharisees and Sadducees as members of 'an evil and adulterous generation' again demonstrate their rejection of Jesus by testing and asking for a sign.
4. In 17:17 Jesus was exasperated with faithless and perverse generation ensnared in the grip of Satan. He would soon leave this unbelieving generation.
5. In 23:13-36 Jesus delivers a scathing rebuke against the scribes and the Pharisees who comprise a corporate kind of evil generation with their fathers who killed the prophets and with those who would murder Jesus' messengers until the time of the

parousia. Those who comprise ‘this generation’ are hypocritical (23:3-7, 13, 15, 23, 25, 27, and 29). Self exalting (23:5-12), spiritually blind (23:16-17, 19, 24, 26), lawless (23:28) and foolish (23:17). They will kill and crucify the disciples (23:34), they lead many astray and shut them out of the kingdom (23:13-15), and are sentenced to hell (23:13-15, 33, 35-36).

The opponents of Jesus’ disciples in Matt. 24-25 share similar traits with ‘this generation’ as characterized in these preceding chapters. False prophets and Christs lead many astray (24:4-5, 11, 23-26; cf.23:13-15). ‘They’ will deliver the disciples up to tribulation and put them to death, and the disciples will be hated by all nations (24: 9). The many who apostatize and turn on the true disciples (24:11) demonstrate they are faithless (24:48-51; 25:14-25). The foolish virgins who are excluded from the marriage banquet remind one of the foolishness of ‘this generation’ (11:16-24; 23:17). The lawless and loveless scribes and Pharisees (23:28) are the precursors of the lawlessness and lovelessness of most people in the discourse (24:12).

The ‘adulterous’ nature of ‘this generation’ (12:39; 16:4) is reflected in Matthew 24-25 by false Christs and false prophets who trumpet them, and many who follow them.<sup>158</sup> From the analysis above, the reader of Matthew’s gospel can convincingly interpret ‘he genea haute’ in 24:34 as a group of people who rejects Christ or the way of truth and resorted to perversity and other malicious activities contrary to the teachings of the bible as a whole. This assertion has become obvious because the expression has been used in the scriptures mostly to put a certain group of people in a negative slang that would face an eschatological judgment for

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<sup>158</sup> Neil D. Nelson JR. ‘This Generation’ in Matt. 24:34: A literary Critical perspective *JETS* 38/3 (September 1996) 369-385.

their perversity, thus ‘he genea’ in 24:34 cannot be used in its literal sense to refer to a life span of humanity at a particular time for that matter Jesus’ contemporaries.

### 3.4.2 Identity of ‘the Son’ and his sayings

There has been many issues concerning ‘the Son of Man’ with his sayings in the Olivet Discourse, chiefly among them are the sayings in Matt. 24:36 ( Περὶ δὲ τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης καὶ ὥρας οὐδεὶς οἶδεν, οὐδὲ οἱ ἄγγελοι τῶν οὐρανῶν οὐδὲ ὁ υἱός, εἰ μὴ ὁ πατήρ μόνος.) and 24:29-35. In v. 36, Jesus says the Son does not know the day or the hour of the parousia whiles in verses 29-35, he says the signs of the Son will appear in heaven, and all the people of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. Issues about the Son in verse 36 seems that an ordinary being is being referred to whiles in verses 29-35, it seems the Son being referred to is a Divine Being who knows all things. This sparks a debate of whether the Son in verse 36 is the same as that of verse 29-35 and as a result, many commentators tried to identify the personality of the Son of Man in the Olivet Discourse without a consensus.

Maurice Casey asserted that the son in the discourse has no singular identity, the expression ‘the Son of Man is an Aramaic term to refer to humanity as a whole. A speaker can also use it to refer to himself; and when an Aramaic noun is indefinite, it is written in the absolute state, ie ‘enash’ (a man), however when the noun is in definite state Aramaic adds an aleph at the end of the noun. Example, enash (a) (the man). Nevertheless, in the fourth century AD the difference between the two states had broken down so both bar enash(a) and bar enash means ‘a son of man’ hence the context in which it is used determines whether it is in the definite or the indefinite state.

According to him, the term (the son of Man) in Aramaic was not written in a definite state to refer to a particular person, but the bilingual translators of the phrase from Aramaic into Greek had no choice to use the definite article to make reference to Jesus.

But Andrew Angel disagrees with this assertion and argues that, there was a Greek equivalent (*huios anthropou*) ‘a son of man’ to the Aramaic term *bar enash* in the era of Jesus and beyond in books such as the Testament of Joseph 2:5, Epistle of Barnabas 12:10 etc. According to him, the above texts provide evidence that ‘*huios anthropou*’ (a son of man) has its equivalent in Aramaic; hence the translators from Aramaic into Greek have the choice to either translate the expression as definite or indefinite. He therefore agrees with Tom Wright on the assertion that *bar enash* (a) was translated from the definite state to refer to a particular son of man presumably the one in Daniel 7:13.

Albert Schweitzer contends that the identity of the Son of Man in the discourse is an ineffable mystery; hence people can only identify the personality of the Son of Man based upon how he revealed himself to the individuals.

Ulrich Luz also asserts that, the expression ‘the Son of Man’ is a Christological title given to Jesus, and must be viewed in two dimensions: Thus the horizontal or the earthly son which describes Jesus’ way through history in the land of Palestine as the one born out of a woman, the one with power over sin, killed, buried and risen. The other is the vertical dimension in which God reveals Jesus as his son (Matt. 1:22-23; 2:15; 3:17; 11:27; 16:16 etc). He further explains that Jesus (the Son) has both Divine and human nature, hence his answer in 24:36 that not even the son knows about the day or the hour can be interpreted to mean that he answers the question according to his human nature to emphasize the point that the day or the hour of the end must not be known by any human being born out of the flesh and blood except the Divine authority.

A critical analysis of the stance taken by the above commentators about the identity of the son reveals that there has been an evidence of books written in the era of Jesus in Greek with the expression ‘*huios anthropou*’ (a son of man) with its equivalence in Aramaic ‘*bar enash*’

(a son of man). For example, Testament of Joseph 2:5 and Epistle of Barnabas 12:10 etc as mentioned by Andrew Angel. Since there were books written in the era of Jesus and beyond in Greek which had an equivalence on the expression 'huios anthropou' (a son of man) with its equivalence *bar enash* in Aramaic, it is very difficult for a person to side with Maurice Casey on the assertion that the translators from Aramaic into Greek had no choice than to use the definite article 'ho' for the expression 'son of man' to make it 'ho huios anthropou' (the Son of Man) to refer to Jesus.

Andrew Angel agrees with Casey on the view that the phrase 'ho huios anthropou' (the Son of Man) stands for Jesus but denied the assertion that the definite article was forced on the expression to make reference to Jesus. He argues that since there were books written in Greek which had an equivalent expression in Aramaic on the phrase under discussion, the bilingual translators had a choice to either use the definite or indefinite article for the expression, hence '*bar enash(a)*' was translated from the definite state into Greek to refer to a particular son of man. Apart from the disagreement between Casey and Angel on the use of the definite article for the expression (son of man), they both agreed that 'ho huios anthropou' refers to Jesus.

The researcher is also convinced that 'the Son of Man' refers to Jesus because several texts from New Testament prove the fact that the expression 'the Son of Man' is used to make reference to Jesus.

For example:

Matt. 8: 18-20 (v.18 Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side. V.19 And a certain scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. V.20 And Jesus saith unto him,

The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head).

Matt. 16:13-17 ( v.13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He began asking His disciples, saying, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" v.14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." V.15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" v.16 And Simon Peter answered and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." V.17 And Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven).

All these texts from the scriptures attest to the fact that ‘the Son of Man’ refers to Jesus, also it appears that Jesus attributes the title mostly to himself rather than people attributing it to him. The use of the term ‘the Son of Man’ is not only a New Testament concept; it has a pre – Christian Jewish thought of a generally well defined concept of a transcendent redeemer, spoken of as ‘the Son of Man’ whose coming to the earth as judge would be a feature of the drama of the end time.<sup>159</sup>

In dealing with the Son of Man concept in Jewish thought, the question regarding the identification of pre-Christian sources is crucial, however, 1 Enoch 37-71 (the Similitudes or the parables), IV Ezra 13, and Daniel 7 are some of the Jewish compositions which represent pre –Christian expectations regarding the Son of Man as the eschatological agent of redemption.<sup>160</sup> In reality, it is only the book of Daniel 7 out f the three sources mentioned above is demonstrably pre-Christian; IV Ezra written by a Pharisee, almost certainly stems

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<sup>159</sup> I.H. Marshal, ‘The Synoptic Son of Man Sayings in Recent Discussion,’ *New Testament Studies*, XII (4, 1966), 327-351.

<sup>160</sup> O. Cullman, *The Christology of the New Testament*, translated by S.C. Guthrie and C. A. M. Hall (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), 139-144.

from the later part of the first Christian century and *Similitude of Enoch* was probably written at the same period or even later.

According to C.H. Dodd, on his work on Old Testament ‘testimonia’ there are three passages in scripture containing the term ‘Son of Man’ and three only which can be proven to have been employed for testimonies and which can be used with any degree of confidence to elucidate the New Testament at this point: Psalm 8, Psalm 80 and Daniel 7. In Psalm 8:4-6, ‘Son of Man’ in parallelism with ‘man’ is simply a man as such, man in his weakness and insignificance, yet visited by God, and by his merciful ordinance ‘crowned with glory and honor.’ In Psalm 80:17-19 it is the nation Israel, under the similitude of human figure, humiliated into insignificance until visited by God and raised to glory. Though Psalms 8 and 80 are assuredly pre-Christian, it is only Daniel 7 which employs the title in a Messianic sense and which is therefore of significance.<sup>161</sup> Most scholars today assert that, the one like a Son of Man in Daniel 7 is a transcendent and glorified redeemer figure who is exalted above all sufferings. However, C.F.D. Moule has pertinently remarked:

But the fact remains that in Daniel 7:21, 25, the especially aggressive ‘horn’ on the beast’s head ‘made war with the saints, and prevailed over them’ and was destined to ‘wear out the saints of the Most High;’ and it is precisely with these saints of the Most High that the Son of Man is identified. It is irrelevant that this interpretation of the Son of Man vision is a secondary interpretation [as some assert]: all that concerns the present investigation is that it was in Daniel 7 as Jesus and his disciples knew it—and I know of no evidence to the contrary. But, if so, the Son of Man, in the only

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<sup>161</sup> C.H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures* (London: Nisbet, 1952), 11-117.

document known to have been available then, stands for a loyal, martyr-group who are brought to glory and vindicated through suffering.<sup>162</sup>

As Dodd said, the concept of the term 'Son of Man' has two connotations: in the sense of a literal human being or a group of people who pass through suffering into glory by the visitation of the Most High God as in Psalms 8:4-6 and 80:17-19 respectively. The other is the use of the term in the Messianic sense as found in Daniel 7:13-17. In this text, the writer uses third person singular pronoun throughout in referencing a particular Son of Man, also verse 14 includes, 'all nations and people of every language worshipped him.' This is an implication that the son of Man mentioned in Daniel 7:13-17 is not an ordinary being but rather the exalted one in the messianic sense, therefore Moule's assertion that the term is used to refer to only a loyal group of martyrs who are brought to glory and vindicated through suffering cannot be accepted.

### **3.4.3 The context of the abomination**

In Matt. 24:15 'Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand),' Jesus spoke about an abomination and made reference to the Prophet Daniel in the OT. In the book of Daniel, the key passages that mention the term 'abomination of desolation' are 9:27(And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate."

11:31 "And forces from him will arise, desecrate the sanctuary fortress, and do away with the regular sacrifice. And they will set up the abomination of desolation."

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<sup>162</sup> C.F.D. Moule, in review of H.E. Todt's *The Son of Man in the Synoptic Tradition in Theology*, LXX (550, 1956), 174.

12:11 "And from the time that the regular sacrifice is abolished, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days."

Biblical commentators have not yet reached any consensus as to which of the three main texts in the book of Daniel Jesus was referring to. The term 'abomination of desolation' is a technical term which has a precise and consistent meaning in all the three passages in the book of Daniel. The term refers to an act of abomination that renders, in this case, the temple, something unclean. However, commentators such as Walvoord assert that Daniel 11:31 can only be used as a reminder of the type of abomination of desolation which would befall Israel as predicted by Jesus in Matthew 24:15 since the prophecy in Daniel 11:31 had been fulfilled in the era of Antiochus. He further explains:

In Daniel 11:31, a prophecy was written by Daniel in the sixth century B.C. about a future Syrian ruler by name of Antiochus Epiphanes who reigned over Syria 175-164 B.C. , about 400 years after Daniel. History, of course, has recorded the reign of this man. In verse 31, Daniel prophesied about his activity: '...they shall pollute the sanctuary of strength, and shall take away the daily sacrifice, and they shall place the abomination that maketh desolate.' This would be difficult to understand if it were not for the fact that it has already been fulfilled. Anyone can go back to the history of Antiochus Epiphanes and discover what he did as recorded in the apocryphal books of 1 and 2 Maccabees. He was a great persecutor of the children of Israel and did his best to stamp out the Jewish religion and wanted to place in its stead a worship of Greek pagan gods...

One of the things he did was to stop animal sacrifices in the temple. He offered sow, an unclean animal, on the alter in a deliberate attempt to desecrate and render it unholy for Jewish worship (1Macc. 1:48). First Maccabees 1:54 specifically records

that the abomination of desolation was set up, fulfilling Daniel 11:31. In the holy of holies, Antiochus set up a statue of a Greek god... In keeping with the prophecy the daily sacrifices were stopped, the sanctuary was polluted, desolated and made an abomination.<sup>163</sup>

He therefore emphasizes that Daniel 9:27 consists of the abomination of desolation mentioned in Matthew 24:15 by Jesus. Thus in this text, the Jerusalem attacker would do at that time exactly and perhaps more than what Antiochus did in the second century B.C.<sup>164</sup> But according to Daniel 9:27, this second attacker would be destroyed three and a half years later. Daniel 12:11 provides the precise chronology of the abomination spoken of in Matt.24:15. The text says, 'And from the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days.' His assertion implies that the abomination of desolation spoken of in Matt. 24:15 involves all the three texts mentioned in the book of Daniel; 11:31 serving as the reminder about the type of catastrophe which was to befall Israel again after that of Antiochus, 9:27 was the text being referred to by Jesus while 12:11 is the culmination of all things where the righteous will inherit eternal rest from their labor and the wicked condemned as in 12:3

Kenneth Gentry extended further on Walvoord's assertion that the abomination of desolation in Matt. 24:15 finds its fulfillment in the first century destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans invasion in A. D. 70 under the leadership of Titus.

After a careful analysis of the term 'abomination' of desolation in Matt.24:15 with reference to the book of Daniel, the researcher has become convinced that Jesus was not only referring to any particular text of the three mentioned in Daniel, rather he was

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<sup>163</sup> John F. Walvoord, 'Christ's Olivet Discourse on the Time of the End: Signs of the End of the Age.'

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

referring to all the three but in a certain chronological order. Thus the researcher agrees with both Walvoord and Gentry that abomination of desolation in Matt. 24:15 refers to all three texts in Daniel but occurs in a certain Manner. Matt. 24:15 “Ὅταν οὖν ἴδητε τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως, τὸ ῥηθὲν διὰ Δανιήλ τοῦ προφήτου, ἔστω ἐν τόπῳ ἁγίῳ- ὁ ἀναγινώσκων νοείτω” it has been realized that the phrase ‘βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως’ which means detestable destruction used in 24:15 implies that the abomination of desolation goes beyond the setting up and worship of false gods in the holy of holies to a physical assault on the Israelites and the destruction of properties.

‘ἀναγινώσκων’ is a verb participle present active nominative masculine singular; it literary means to read, also ‘νοείτω’ is a verb imperative present; meaning to understand. Therefore the expression ‘ἀναγινώσκων νοείτω’ (read to understand) might probably be used by Jesus to describe the type of future abomination that awaits Israel at the time of the discourse. This ‘read to understand’ could be referring to the events of Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century B.C. when he captured Israel and set up Greek gods in the temple and used sow for sacrifices which is detestable to the Jews. Many commentators refer this expression ‘read to understand’ to Daniel 11:31; as apocryphal books such as 1Macc. 1:54 specifically stated that Daniel 11:31 had been fulfilled in the second century B.C. in the events of Antiochus. Thus Jesus uses Daniel 11:31 to remind the Israelites about the kind of devastation Antiochus brought in the second century B.C.

In Matt.24:16 ‘τότε οἱ ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ φευγέτωσαν ἐπὶ τὰ ὄρη.’ The use of the adverb ‘τότε’ (then) as the opening word for v.16 indicates that v.15 directly continued from v.16; ‘τότε’ can both be used to refer to both past or future event. However the context of verse 16 where Jesus admonished his followers to flee when they see such an abomination implies that the ‘abomination of desolation’ he actually meant as far as the discourse is concern as at that time was a future event.

In Matt.24:21, Jesus says when the time of the abomination of desolation comes, there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now... and never to be equaled again. Jesus' description of the abomination of desolation in verse 21 can possibly be found in the .A.D. 70 event when the Romans invaded Israel, the atrocities perpetrated by Titus against the Israelites as described by historians might probably be similar to great distress spoken of by Jesus in verse 21.

Jesus had predicted the fall and destruction of Jerusalem in Matt. 24:1-2 (Καὶ ἐξελθὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀπὸ τοῦ ἱεροῦ ἐπορεύετο, καὶ προσῆλθον οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ ἐπιδειξάσαι αὐτῷ τὰς οἰκοδομὰς τοῦ ἱεροῦ. v.2 ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· οὐ βλέπετε ταῦτα πάντα; ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, οὐ μὴ ἀφεθῆ ὧδε λίθος ἐπὶ λίθον ὃς οὐ καταλυθήσεται) thirty seven years before it took place in A.D. 70 even though Josephus tried hard to prevent it. The fall of Jerusalem and the burning of the temple in A.D. 70 was a catastrophe with almost unparalleled consequences for the Jews, Christians and indeed, all of subsequent history. It submerged the Jewish homeland for the next 19 centuries under foreign domination and set the stage for rampant prophetic speculation about the End Times That continues to the present day. The Jewish rebellion which ignited the war with Rome in A.D. 66 was by no means inevitable as history has that most of the governors sent to Israel by Rome were wayward rulers who always pervert justice to the detriment of the freedom of the Israelites. Besides, Deut. 17:15 says. 'You must not put a foreigner over you who is not your brother.' The worst of all was Gessius Florus, the last governor before the revolt. The first century Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus commented, 'Jewish patience persisted until Gessius Florus became procurator.'

Justifiably outraged, Jerusalemites rose in revolt lead by the Zealots (the fourth party after the Scribes, Pharisees and Essenes) and according to Josephus, they won some surprising victories against the Romans at the early stages when the war began. When Commander

Vespasian landed in Judea with his three legions, Jewish strongholds began falling one after the other to him. He was almost at the walls of Jerusalem but had to return to Rome due to the death of Nero. In A.D. 69, Vespasian transferred the command of the Jewish war to his son (Titus) who completed the destruction in A.D. 70. Titus finished the job in a matter of months despite fierce Jewish resistance. Spurning all overtures for peace, the Zealots inside Jerusalem fought amongst themselves as much as against the Romans, and whiles Titus surrounded Jerusalem with a siege wall and simply waited, Josephus wrote that the starvation in the city was so severe that dove dung went for a premium prices and at a point a poor woman even ate part of her own baby. The best of friends wrestled with each other for even the shadow of food, they put their teeth into everything, swallowing things even the filthiest animals would not touch. Finally the devoured even belts and shoes or gnawed at the leather they stripped from their shields. After furious fighting inside the city, the temple mount fell to the Romans and was razed down totally. This probably fulfils Jesus famous statement, 'Not one stone here will be left upon another' (Matt.24:2).<sup>165</sup>

A critical analysis of Josephus' description of the war and the devastation which the Jews went through in the hands of Titus might probably be the same description Jesus gave in verse 21 when he spoke of an abomination of desolation in 24:15. Also in 24:1-2, which ignites the whole of the discourse, he spoke about the destruction of the second temple, and since the temple was totally destroyed in A.D. 70 it would not be wrong when one concludes that the abomination of desolation spoken of in 24:15 had been fulfilled in A.D. 70, and the fulfillment is found in the book of Daniel 9:27 as the second text in Daniel which Jesus referred to in the Olivet discourse.

A careful analysis of the ninth chapter of the book of Daniel reveals that the fulfillment of the vision is solely about the people of Israel. This can be seen from 9:23-27. In v.23 the

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<sup>165</sup> Paul L. Maier, *The Catastrophic Fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.* (Michigan: Zondervan, 1968).

angel assured Daniel that his prayers had been answered, in v.24, the angel gave ‘seventy’ ‘sevens’ or 490 year period as the time frame within which the vision he brought to Daniel will be accomplished. Below is the segment of Jewish national history during which God will carry out the six purposes of verse 24.

- The history is restricted to seventy-seven periods or 490 years.
- The period has a specific point of beginning and ending. It commences with the decree of Artaxerxes to rebuild the city of Jerusalem.
- The earlier edicts of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes do not qualify as a starting point for this 490 year history because none of them relate to the city; they only provided for the rebuilding of the temple.
- The 490 years are divided into three segments, and the angel indicates what activities will transpire during these three parts. During the first 7 ‘weeks’ (49 years) the city and its streets etc will be rebuilt ;then the 62 ‘weeks’ (434 years) will be added to the 7 ‘weeks’ before the Messiah Arrives. The termination of these 483 years came on the day of the triumphal entry on March-April, A.D. 30 when Jesus for the first and only time presented himself officially as Israel’ Prince and Messianic King.
- At the end of the 69 ‘weeks’ (483 years) the Messiah is cut off (v.26). Instead of entering into his kingly reign, he was rejected by Israel and subsequently put to death on the cross.
- The sixth purposes which God intends to accomplish in the nation in the course of the 490 year period were deferred to the last ‘week’ during which time Jerusalem suffered from a flood of invaders. During the long interval between 69<sup>th</sup> and the 70<sup>th</sup> ‘week’, Jerusalem has been destroyed by Titus in A.D. 70.<sup>166</sup> This implies that the

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<sup>166</sup> Edward Watke Jr., *The Book of Daniel* (Augusta: Woodhaven Ct, 1992).

abomination of desolation spoken about in verse 27 is in relation with the .A.D. 70 event lead by Titus.

Considering the context in which Daniel 12:11 has been placed, one can conclude that v.11 (from the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days.) is being used as a reminder that after the event of the desolation, the next or the final event which will take place is the end time phenomenon where those who already slept in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Also in v.13 Daniel was admonished to hold on to righteousness till the end, that though he would 'rest' at the end he would rise to inherit his reward.

### **Summary**

The expression 'this generation' used in verse 34 of Matthew 24 can only be taken as an adjective in describing those who have rejected the truth and resorted into perversion of Justice. They are those according Jesus in the discourse who would suffer the eternal damnation. Concerning the identity of the Son of Man in the discourse, scholars have generally agreed that it stands for Jesus, and that this Jesus has both human and divine nature hence at a point he speaks like human and at other times he speaks like the Divine authority. For example, Matt. 24:36 Jesus says the Son does not know the day or the hour of the parousia as well as the end of the age. In this verse the Son seems like an ordinary human who does not know all the plans of the Divine authority, however, in verse 29-30, Jesus says the son would come on the clouds with great glory depicting the Divine Being. This does not mean that the son spoken of in the discourse is two separate beings.

### **3.5 Aim of the Discourse**

Jesus has structured the discourse into two main parts, thus about the destruction of Jerusalem and the second coming of the Son of Man as well as the end of the age. He explains

to the disciples not to consider these two events as single unit which will occur at the same time or hour. The essential objectives of the eschatological discourse by Jesus are: perseverance, readiness, self-control, watchfulness, faithfulness and the preaching of the gospel without regards to race till the end of the age.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE RELEVANCE OF THE WORK TO CHRISTIANITY IN GHANA

#### 4.1 Introduction

Chapter four comprises of an analysis of the Machaira Community church's reading and understanding of the Olivet discourse as in Matthew 24:1-44; (the focus is on Prophet Peter Anamoah, the founder) and then the relevance of the exegetical work on Matthew 24:1-44 to Christianity in Ghana.

#### 4.2 The Machaira Community Church

The Machaira Community Church was established around the year 2000 by Prophet Peter Anamoah. It is situated at Trade Fair in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. Like any other Charismatic church in Ghana, the Machaira church believes to have the real message of the gospel from Jesus Christ whereas majority of all other churches or denomination deviating from the truth.

The use of the name Machaira 'sod' by the church is like a mission statement to them with the understanding that the power in the mouth of the founder, Prophet Peter Anamoah is like a double edged sod which can cut with the either sides; and also his words are always 'alive' meaning all his prophecies come directly from God without failing to accomplish the task. The church members believe in every utterances of the prophet as an oracle of God, hence holding him in a very high esteem. Prophet Peter Anamoah believes most of the pastors in Ghana are not from God and that all their activities in the Christendom are far from what the scripture or Jesus wants believers to do. For that matter many pastors are leading a lot of

Christians unconsciously into hell. The Machaira Church and a few others are the only ones giving the true message of Christ to their respective members.<sup>167</sup>

### **4.3 The Prophecy**

The Man of God, Peter Anamoah is a renowned pastor in Ghana due to his numerous prophecies especially about prominent people in government, he prophesied that the late President John Evans Atta Mills would not enter into his second term as the president of Ghana, and it came to pass. The fulfillment of this prophecy earned him a lot of prominence in Ghana as many people believe he speaks the mind of God and must be trusted at all times.

In 2011, it had been reported by many of the media houses in Ghana that, Prophet Anamoah predicted that world would end on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November, 2011 which has become known as the '11' '11' prophecy in Ghana, the church ran a lot of adverts on the radio stations warning people of '11' '11' phenomenon where it has been reported that he collected monies such as Ghc 500 each from some individuals to help them enter into heaven when the end comes in November, 2011. According to Peter Anamoah, only a town (Zuarungu Tua) in the Upper East Region which would not be destroyed by God, and those who want to escape the destruction should follow him to Zuarungu Tua for their salvation.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of November, 2011 a lot of people gathered around Peter Anamoah at Zuarungu Tua upon his directives; and he offered prayers for them. The drama is that, 11<sup>th</sup> November, 2011 came and there world is still in its place without the destruction as prophesied by the Prophet Peter Anamoah.

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<sup>167</sup> Anamoah, Magnus, Interview, 15 March 2016, Accra.

#### 4.3.1 The interview with Prophet Peter Anamoah

Since the prophet's predictions failed to take place on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November, 2011 the researcher on the 28<sup>th</sup> day March, 2016 wanted to know from him why the prophecy failed to take place on the said date? According to him, his prophecy was not about the parousia but a worldwide catastrophe with only a few people surviving it just as it was in the days of Noah where only eight people survived it. Nevertheless the media had misconstrued him of predicting the end of the world; and when again asked why the catastrophe failed to occur? He said it was as result of his prayer for the people of the world that God had mercy and averted the disaster; had it not been so the world would have been destroyed.<sup>168</sup> According to Pastor Pascal of the church, prior to 11<sup>th</sup> November, 2011 a lot of people became members of their church to the extent that it was difficult for them to get the new comers places to sit in the auditorium, however after the prophecy failed to manifest as predicted by the Prophet a lot of people left for the International Central Gospel Church (ICGC) which shares wall with the Machaira Church. Pastor Pascal was once again asked whether the church in General still believes in Prophet Peter Anamoah as a true man of God who can always speak the mind of God. The answer was in the affirmative; however he said the reason why the prophecy did not occur could not be explained since all the Prophet's predictions in the past had been fulfilled.<sup>169</sup>

Pastor Pascal and some other members of the church asserted that since the prophecy of their leader concerning the end had not been fulfilled, they can only conclude that the second coming of Christ or the end of the age cannot be known to any individual except God himself. This understanding of the members about the parousia is in accordance with Jesus' response to the disciples when they wanted to know the time of the Parousia. (Matt. 24:36

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<sup>168</sup> Anamoah, Magnus, Interview, 28 March 2016, Accra.

<sup>169</sup> Pascal, Magnus, Interview, 28 March 2016 Accra.

Περὶ δὲ τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης καὶ ὥρας οὐδεὶς οἶδεν, οὐδὲ οἱ ἄγγελοι τῶν οὐρανῶν οὐδὲ ὁ υἱός, εἰ μὴ ὁ πατήρ μόνος ).

#### **4.3.2 Prophet Anamoah's understanding of the Olivet Discourse**

According to Peter Anamoah, the culmination of the eschatological discourse in Matthew 24:1-44 is vv. 30-31 where the Son of Man will come on the clouds and send his angel with the trumpet call to gather his elect from one end of heavens to the other. When the Son appears, then everything would be brought to an end. However, he says the second coming of the Son depends upon a condition given in Matt. 24:14 (καὶ κηρυχθήσεται τοῦτο τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ οἰκουμένῃ εἰς μαρτύριον πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, καὶ τότε ἔξει τὸ τέλος).

Prophet Anamoah says he is skeptical about the second coming of the Son of Man because the type of gospel which Jesus wants believers to preach throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations before the end comes is not what is being preached now by all pastors across the world; hence the world will not come to an end because Jesus' gospel will also not get to all nations as Jesus wants it.

Prophet Peter Anamoah, through an interview held on the 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2016, revealed that God commanded him to hold a mega worldwide crusade, starting from the United States of America to teach the world the real gospel which Jesus wants all people on the surface of the earth to hear and live according to it. He reiterated the world will not come to an end unless he finishes with the assignment God gave him to do; thus bringing the truth of Christ to the world. Even though, he has this vision of bringing the Jesus' type of the gospel to the world very soon for true repentance, he said those who left his church because of the failed prophecy which was supposed to occur on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November, 2011 are those who do not really understand the truth about the gospel of Jesus Christ, hence following adulterated messages from pastors who have totally deviated from the true gospel of Jesus.

The implication of Prophet Anamoah's reading of the eschatological discourse in Matthew 24:1-44 is that the second coming of Jesus as well as the end of the age depends solely upon the fulfillment of the gospel being preached to all nations, however Jesus' type of gospel is not what is being preached, and until that the end will not come.

Thus to him, the gospel must get to every part of the world as a prerequisite for the Parousia and the end of the age. However, his understanding of the 'world' is different from that which is used in the text. The Greek word used in the text is not 'kosmos' and neither is it the simple word for 'earth' in general as thought by him, but rather it is 'οἰκουμένη' which means more specifically the 'inhabited earth' and can often refer simply to the known world. In other words, the 'world' in the time of Jesus meant primarily the area surrounding the Mediterranean and lesser known areas to the east. For example, Luke 2:1 says 'in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that 'the entire world' should be registered. Acts 11:28 (Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over the entire world (this took place in the days of Claudius). The point is not that this famine extended to the entire planet earth.

This implies that the proclamation of the word in the 'world' and then the end comes as in Matthew 24:14 cannot be taken as a condition that when fulfilled then the end comes. Thus the Parousia is neither contingent on the disciples nor Christians to evangelize every last tribe on the earth, as though it is in the power of the disciples or Christians to hasten or delay the coming of the end by their obedience or lack of obedience to the command to evangelize. What Jesus meant in 24:14 is the wide spread proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom without geographical or racial restriction (Matt.28:18-20). This did take place in the era of the New Testament, example Colossians 1:5-6 (of this you have heard before in the word of truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole *world* it is bearing fruit and increasing). Romans 16:25-26 (Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my

gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been *made known to all nations*, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith.

It is therefore wrong to say that Jesus cannot return yet because the gospel has not yet been proclaimed throughout the whole world. What Jesus meant once again in 24:14 is that the gospel must be proclaimed without geographical or racial restriction.<sup>170</sup> This does also not mean that the parousia will affect only places that the gospel has been preached, rather it will affect every place on the surface of the earth, for example, Matt. 24:30 (καὶ τότε φανήσεται τὸ σημεῖον τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐν οὐρανῷ, καὶ τότε κόψονται πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ ὄψονται τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενον ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ μετὰ δυνάμεως καὶ δόξης πολλῆς). The use of the expression ‘πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς’ means that the parousia will be witnessed by every human being or tribe on the earth.

#### **4.4 Relevance of the study to contemporary Christianity**

Throughout this work, the researcher has come to the understanding that Jesus’ aim of the discourse is not to tell or predict the exact time that the end will take place but rather for his followers to be well convinced that the parousia will surely occur at the time that they might not be expecting it. Therefore the call to action or what is needed of his followers is to be on guard against those who make false predictions about the hour of the parousia; and must endure all sufferings till the end for the sake of the kingdom. They must also be ready, faithful and then preach the gospel whiles waiting for the second coming. Catastrophes and wars are not prerequisite for the second coming; also the day or the hour of the second coming had not been given in the discourse implying that no one can predict it.

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<sup>170</sup> Louis Berkhof, *The Second Coming of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

#### 5.1 Objective and methodology

The main objective of this study is to examine the meaning of the eschatological discourse in Matt. 24:1-44; and also the identity of the 'Son' with his sayings. The study seeks to find out the actual concern of Jesus in the entire discourse and what is expected of his followers. The work is therefore designed to bring forth studies that go beyond traditional discipline of research and articulate the importance of theological and biblical scholarship for academic disciplines, the church, and the public in general.

This research ends by drawing theological conclusion for contemporary Ghanaian Christians. In achieving the aim or the objective of this work, the researcher engages the integrated model theory for credible, relevant and legitimate interpretation of the texts. This method interprets the texts from three main approaches: The original author and his world, the text and its world and then the reader and his world as proposed by Randolph Tate. Thus understanding the world of the original author, that of the text itself together with the contemporary reader helps in proper interpretation of the text.

#### 5.2 Summary of research

Chapter two: The chapter two comprises the following: The authorship, date and purpose of Matthew's gospel, the background of the Jewish people from Malachi and certain experiences that thwarted their way of worship till the time of Jesus. This chapter concludes that the respective empires (Babylonian, Persian Greece and Roman) which ruled the Jews with their cultures distracted their way of worshipping Yahweh; the book of Matthew was written to encourage believers about the future hope in Jesus Christ.

Chapter three: This chapter critically examines the meaning of the discourse with its purpose and then the identity of ‘the Son of Man’

Chapter four: It assess Prophet Peter Anamoah’s reading and understanding of the eschatological discourse in Matthew 24:1-44 and compared with his previous prediction about the destruction of the world which was supposed to occur on the 11<sup>th</sup> day of November, 2011. The chapter four also comprises the relevance of the researcher’s understanding to the contemporary Christianity.

### **5.3 Summary of findings**

The eschatological discourse in Matthew 24:1-44 is mainly between Jesus and his disciples, it began when the disciples firstly draws Jesus’ attention to the magnificent temple building in verse 1; and Jesus’ prediction of its destruction in verse 2. In verse 3, the disciples asked Jesus two questions: ‘when’ the destruction would occur; the sign of his second coming and that of the end of the age. The question about the destruction of the temple has been answered in 24:15 in which Jesus admonished that when the abomination of desolation spoken of through the prophet Daniel is seen, and then it means the destruction is near. Also in Luke 21:20 (when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near).

Jesus clearly separated the destruction of the temple from his Parousia in 23: 38-39, but the disciples joined the timing of the two events in 24:3.<sup>171</sup> There is no doubt that there is a conflict between the evaluative point of view of the disciples and that of Jesus throughout the narrative until it reaches great intensity in the last third of the gospel.<sup>172</sup> Sign seeking is

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<sup>171</sup> The destruction of the temple meant the end was at hand to them. But Jesus’ answer separates the two events. While the Jewish war (‘you will hear of wars’) will be part of the beginning of the birth pains (general signs that do not signal the end), the end of the age will be clearly and universally signaled by the sign of the Son of Man ((24:30).

<sup>172</sup> J.D. Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (2d ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 17, 130, 139-145.

discouraged in the gospel ('an evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign,' Matt. 12:39; 16:4 cf. 24:24), and yet the disciples ask by what signs they can calculate the Parousia and the end of the age (24:3). While the disciples seem anxious to experience soon the glories of the kingdom and long to know when the end is coming and what specific signs will allow them to predict its approach, Jesus immediately warns them against being deceived (24:4-8, 23-28, 36).

The only specific answer to when the close of the age will come is 'of that day and the hour no one knows' (24:36).<sup>173</sup> The only event called a 'sign' is Christ himself appearing to all humanity at his parousia ((24:30). Then it will be too late for anyone to repent or prepare for the end. Matthew 24:5-14 serves as the reminder to Jesus' followers that entrance into the kingdom of God will necessarily be preceded by suffering in this present age as he had already taught the disciples repeatedly in previous chapters (Matt. 5:10-12; 6:44; 10:14-39 etc). Jesus' response to the disciples question is not to calculate when the end will be but to redeem the time by being watchful ((24:4) and ready (24:44) and by loyally enduring opposition (24:13), by preaching the gospel ((24:14) and by being faithful and merciful in ministry (24:45-51).<sup>174</sup> Jesus' discourse is designed to correct the disciples' misguided perspective rather than giving them specific times by which to calculate the hour of the parousia.

As mentioned above, Jesus did not structure his discourse according to the agenda of the disciples' questions but by what they needed to know and do in the time between his advents and the end of the age. Thus they must not look for sign, preceding the end but must be watchful, enduring, ready, and faithful and preach the gospel to all nations.

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<sup>173</sup> Day and hour speak of time in general and not a specific time period.

<sup>174</sup> Neil D. Nelson Jr. 'This Generation' in Matthew 24:34.

The expression 'this generation' in Matthew 24:34 does not refer to a chronological duration of a life span of humanity at a particular time, but is used to describe the character pattern of people concerning negativity. Example, evil, perverse, adulterous and faithless (Matt. 11:39; 16:4; 17:17). This expression is also used in Deut. 32:5 to describe the corrupted Jews therefore what Jesus said in Matt. 24:34 that 'this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things happened' means evil doers will continue in their corrupt activities till the end comes. Thus the expression is not about Jesus' contemporaries.

This research agrees with scholars such as Maurice Casey on the assertion that the phrase 'the Son of Man' refers to Jesus because Jesus uses it to refer to himself severally in the text, for example, Matthew 8:18-20; and 16:13-17 where Jesus commended Peter for identifying him as the Son of the Living God. The concept about the use of the phrase 'Son of Man' is in two parts: It can be used in the sense of ordinary humanity in his or her weakness, yet visited by God, Ps. 8:4-6. On the other hand, the Son of Man can also be used as a title in the Messianic sense as found in Dan. 7:13. Throughout the discourse, Jesus uses both interchangeably, example in 24:34 as an ordinary being but in 24:29-35 he uses the expression as the Divine Being.<sup>175</sup>

Jesus' aim or the purpose for the discourse in Matthew 24:1-44 is to correct the disciples' misguided perspective about knowing the time of the end when he said to them that the time or the hour must not be known by any human being. He then entreated them to be: Watchful, ready, loyally enduring sufferings, preaching the gospel and finally faithful till the end.

#### **5.4 Recommendation**

First of all, the study recommends that there is nothing substantially in the discourse by Jesus which indicates the actual time or the hour of the Parousia as well as the end of the age, he

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<sup>175</sup> C.H. Dodd, *According to the scriptures*.

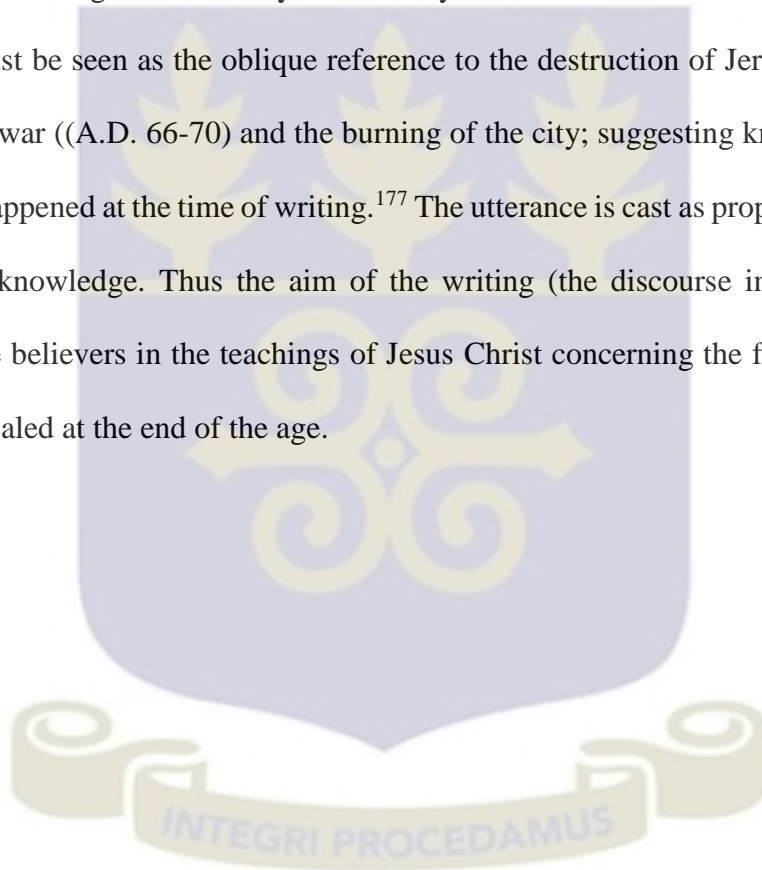
points this out clearly in 24:36 ( Περὶ δὲ τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης καὶ ὥρας οὐδεὶς οἶδεν, οὐδὲ οἱ ἄγγελοι τῶν οὐρανῶν οὐδὲ ὁ υἱός, εἰ μὴ ὁ πατὴρ μόνος), hence it is absurd for anyone to predict the time of the end of the age. Such predictions do not have anything to do with the eschatological discourse by Jesus in the New Testament. Second, the study about the eschatological background of the discourse helps a lot in comprehending the terminologies such as ‘generation’ and abomination of desolation, ‘the Son of Man’ and finally, it is recommended that the use of the original language (Greek) brings out the meaning of the text easily rather than reading it in the translated form. For further studies, the researcher will like scholars to work on the relationship between the abomination of desolation in Matthew 24:15 and the 1,290 days in Daniel 12:11 concerning the abomination that causes desolation.

### **5.5 Conclusion**

At this point it be concluded that, the Olivet discourse in Matt. 24:1-44 is structured by Jesus into two main parts; namely the destruction of Jerusalem as a result of disobedience on the parts of the Jews; and then what believers are supposed to know and do whiles waiting for the parousia and the end of the age. According to the whole discourse, believers must not succumb to false predictions about the end of the age, rather they must remain faithful and preach the word till the end. The discourse is actually written to encourage believers that Jesus is really the Messiah, and that the destruction of Jerusalem is just the fulfillment of one of his eschatological predictions, and thereby making the second coming and the end of the age very certain. The book of Matthew in general of which the Olivet discourse is part aims at encouraging persecuted Jewish Christians and all believers in their faith, and to confute their opponents, and also to prove that the gospel was not a contradiction of the

teaching of the Old Testament, but rather a fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham and to David.<sup>176</sup>

Even though scholars have not agreed on any specific date of writing Matthew's gospel, certain anachronisms in the text point to a date of writing after A.D. 70 phenomenon (the destruction of Jerusalem). The most commonly cited are the reference to the destruction of a city and the reference to the church in Matt. 16:18. In the parable of the wedding feast, it was told that the king sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city 22:7. This must be seen as the oblique reference to the destruction of Jerusalem at the end of the Jewish war ((A.D. 66-70) and the burning of the city; suggesting knowledge of what had already happened at the time of writing.<sup>177</sup> The utterance is cast as prophecy but depends on historical knowledge. Thus the aim of the writing (the discourse in particular) is to strengthen the believers in the teachings of Jesus Christ concerning the future hope which would be revealed at the end of the age.



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<sup>176</sup> Thiessen, *Introduction to New Testament*.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

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