

PNEUMATIKOS

The JOURNAL of CHAFER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

chafer.edu

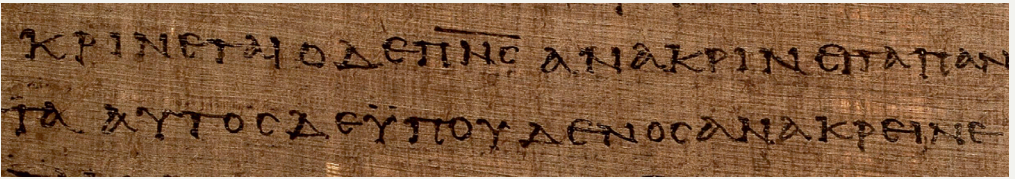


TABLE OF CONTENTS

From the Editor <i>Paul Miles</i>	iv
Jesus and the Rapture Part 1: Matthew 24:40–41 Reconsidered <i>Andrew Woods</i>	1
Let Us Build for Ourselves a City: A Biblical Look at the Correlation Between Secularism, Liberalism, and Urbanization in America <i>J. Morgan Arnold</i>	24
The Problematic Meaning of the Greek Term, <i>Genealogia</i> (i.e., “Genealogies”) from 1 Timothy 1:4 <i>R. Mark Musser</i>	46
Are Any Signs of Christ’s Coming in Matthew 24:1–31? <i>Jeremy Thomas</i>	83
Reviews <i>Robert Dean, Jr., Ian A. Hicks, Robert Dean, Jr.</i>	117

CHAFER
THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY

Pneumatikos: The Journal of Chafer Theological Seminary
Volume 15, Number 1 (Spring 2024)

© Chafer Theological Seminary 2024

ISSN: Online 2996-2099

Print 2996-2080

Journal DOI: 10.62075/chafer.2c4g8s

Issue DOI: 10.62075/chafer.15.1.k1j6hd

President: Andrew Woods (J.D., Ph.D.)

Editor: Paul Miles (D.Min., Ph.D. student)

Peer review committee: Andrew Woods (J.D., Ph.D.), Michael Stallard (Ph.D.),
Mark Mills (Ph.D.), David Mappes (Ph.D.), and Bradley Maston (Ph.D.)

Inception Committee: Beverly Penner, Barbara Appel, Mike Riegel, E. Dane
Rogers, Clay Ward, Shaun Greenwood, and Bradley Maston.

P. O. Box 93580, Albuquerque, NM 87199

(505) 934-3810

info@Chafer.edu

Cover: 1 Corinthians 2:14b–15a from \mathfrak{P}^{46} .

The word *pneumatikos* (πνευματικός) occurs as the *nomen sacrum* ΠΙΝΣ.

[..ἀνα]κρίνεται. [15] ὁ δὲ πνευματικὸς ἀνακρίνει τὰ πάντα, αὐτὸς δὲ ὑπ' οὐδενὸς ἀνακρίνε[ται.]

\mathfrak{P}^{46} is one of the Chester Beatty Papyri. It was copied circa late 2nd–4th century A.D. and is currently at the University of Michigan Library. Images of \mathfrak{P}^{46} are public domain and available online through the University of Michigan Library Digital Collections.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

From the Editor	iv
<i>Paul Miles</i>	
Jesus and the Rapture Part 1: Matthew 24:40–41 Reconsidered	1
<i>Andrew Woods</i>	
Let Us Build for Ourselves a City: A Biblical Look at the Correlation Between Secularism, Liberalism, and Urbanization in America	24
<i>J. Morgan Arnold</i>	
The Problematic Meaning of the Greek Term, <i>Genealogia</i> (i.e., “Genealogies”) from 1 Timothy 1:4	46
<i>R. Mark Musser</i>	
Are Any Signs of Christ’s Coming in Matthew 24:1–31?	83
<i>Jeremy Thomas</i>	
Reviews	117
<i>Robert Dean, Jr., Ian A. Hicks, Robert Dean, Jr.</i>	

FROM THE EDITOR

On behalf of Chafer Theological Seminary, it is my pleasure to present volume 15 of *Pneumatikos*. This is a relaunch of the *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal*. The new title draws inspiration from the Greek word, *pneumatikos* (πνευματικός), which is translated “he that is spiritual” in 1 Corinthians 2:15 (KJV). This title reflects our commitment to studying the Bible in its original languages and is reminiscent of Lewis Sperry Chafer’s book *He That Is Spiritual*, in which our seminary’s namesake expressed several points of our soteriology over a century ago.

This issue features the first article of a two-part series by Andrew Woods on Jesus and the Rapture. While still upholding the doctrine of the pre-tribulational rapture, Woods advocates that the gathering in Matthew 24:40–41 refers to judgment at the second advent rather than the rapture.

J. Morgan Arnold asks a difficult question: Why have the most populous areas in the country also become bastions of paganism, hedonism, and liberalism? He draws from biblical parallels to formulate a model for understanding problems unique to urban environments.

The occurrence of the word *genealogia* (γενεαλογία) has been difficult for interpreters through the years and R. Mark Musser approaches the problem with consideration of the linguistic development and cultural context in which the word is used.

Jeremy Thomas continues the discussion on Matthew 24 as a potential rapture passage. Thomas agrees with Woods and contributes, among other things, a summary of views held by fellow dispensationalists.

The featured reviews include Thomas’ commentary on Galatians, a recent book on historical dispensationalism, and a media review of a documentary about Israel’s Route 60.

As we move forward in the relaunch of this journal, we look forward to your feedback and insights. If you are an author who would like to contribute to future issues of *Pneumatikos*, please reach out to us at info@Chafer.edu. Thank you for being part of the scholastic dispensationalism community! We anticipate further engagement with you in future issues.

Paul Miles

JESUS AND THE RAPTURE

PART 1: MATTHEW 24:40–41

RECONSIDERED

Andrew Woods

Sugar Land Bible Church

Chafer Theological Seminary

Sugar Land, Texas, USA

Keywords: *rapture, Olivet discourse, Son of Man, second advent, flood, Noah, judgment, sheep and goat judgment, seventieth week, Daniel, Matthew, Jesus, upper room discourse*

Abstract: *Is the doctrine of the pre-tribulation rapture authentically biblical? Many seek to answer this question by turning to the ultimate authority in all doctrinal matters, Jesus Christ. Did Jesus believe in and teach about the rapture? This two-part series maintains that He did. Unfortunately, many seek to discover Christ's rapture teaching in the wrong place, which is Matthew 24:40–41. The first article in this two-part series contends that the rapture cannot be found here, given Matthew's overall argument, the exegetical details of Matthew 24:40–41, and the inadequacy of the pro-rapture arguments concerning the passage. However, the second article will contend that John 14:1–4 represents far more fruitful ground for understanding Christ's rapture teaching. This will be demonstrated through an examination of the position of the upper room discourse in John's Gospel, the exegetical details of John 14:1–4, and by answering the anti-rapture arguments concerning the interpretation of the passage.*

INTRODUCTION

Did Jesus ever refer to the rapture? When this question is asked, two passages usually come to mind: Matthew 24:40–41 and John 14:1–4. The purpose of these articles is to show that although Christ did not refer to the rapture in Matthew 24:40–41, He did refer to the rapture in John 14:1–4. This first article is an examination of Matthew 24:40–41 as a potential rapture passage. This article seeks to dissuade readers from connecting Christ’s statement in Matthew 24:40–41 to the rapture through an examination of the role of the Olivet discourse in Matthew’s overall argument, through an examination of the textual details within and surrounding Matthew 24:40–41, and by noting the inadequacy of the arguments for a rapture interpretation of Matthew 24:40–41. The second article will be an examination of John 14:1–4 as a potential rapture passage. That article will attempt to argue that Christ was referring to the rapture in John 14:1–4 by making several preliminary observations that should create an openness to the rapture interpretation, by observing the textual details of John 14:1–4 that point in the direction of a rapture interpretation, and by showing the inadequacy of the alternative non-rapture interpretations of John 14:1–4.

Matthew 24:40–41

Matthew 24:40–41 says, “Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women *will be* grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left.” It is common for popular prophecy writers to assign a rapture significance to these verses.¹ A popular 1970s Christian song by Larry Norman similarly interpreted these verses as pertaining to the rapture: “A man and wife asleep in bed. She hears a noise and turns her head, he’s gone. I wish we’d all been ready. Two men walking up a hill. One disappears and one’s left standing still. I wish we’d all been ready.” However, a close examination of the passage demonstrates that it is unlikely that it is referring to the rapture.

¹ Dave Hunt, *How Close Are We? Compelling Evidence for the Soon Return of Christ* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1993), 210–11.

MATTHEW'S ARGUMENT AND THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

Matthew's Jewish-Christian Audience

Understanding the role of the Olivet discourse in Matthew's overall argument weakens the notion of attaching a rapture significance to Matthew 24:40–41. Although no specific target audience is mentioned, various clues make it apparent that Matthew had a believing Jewish audience in mind.² The Jewish nature of the book is apparent by noting several factors. First, the book contains a disproportionate number of Old Testament citations and allusions. Of the book's 129 Old Testament references, 53 are direct citations and 76 are allusions. On thirteen occasions, Christ's actions are said to be a fulfillment of the Old Testament. Second, the book follows a fivefold division. The five major sermons of the book are delineated through the repetition of the concluding formula "when He had finished saying these things" (Matt. 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). This fivefold structure would have immediately been recognizable to the Jewish mind since Jews tended to categorize items, such as the book of Psalms and the Pentateuch, according to a fivefold division. Third, although originally written in Greek, the book evidences a Hebraistic style, parallelism, and elaboration.

Fourth, *tote* (τότε "then" or "at that time") reflects a Jewish style. While this term is employed ninety times in Matthew, it is only used six times in Mark, fourteen times in Luke, and ten times in John. Fifth, the vocabulary of the book is distinctly Jewish. The following Jewish terms are found in the book: David, Jerusalem as the holy city (Matt. 4:5, 27:53), city of the great King (Matt. 5:35), lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 10:6, 15:24), kingdom of God, and kingdom of heaven.³ Sixth,

² Stanley D. Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew* (Portland: Multnomah, 1980; reprint, Grand Rapids, Kregel, 2005), 15–18.

³ Interestingly, "kingdom of heaven" appears thirty-one times (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 5:3, 10, 19, 20; 7:21; 8:11; 10:7; 11:11, 12; 13:11, 24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47, 52; 16:19; 18:1, 3, 4, 23; 19:14, 23; 20:1; 22:2; 23:13; 25:1) and "kingdom of God" (Matt. 6:33; 12:28; 19:24; 21:31; 21:43) appears only five times. These terms are synonymous (Matt. 19:23–24). However, the multiple references to the former and the scant references to the latter also reflect a common Jewish reluctance of mentioning God's name directly.

the subject matter of the topics covered is distinctly Jewish. Among the topics covered are the Law, ceremonial defilements, Sabbath, kingdom, Jerusalem, temple, Messiah, prophecy, prophets, David, Abram, Moses, scribes, Sadducees, and Pharisees.

Seventh, Matthew's genealogy reveals a Jewish audience. Matthew traces Christ back to David and Abraham rather than back to Adam (Luke 3). Eighth, Matthew places a special focus upon the apostle Peter. Because Peter was the apostle to the circumcised (Gal. 2:7–8), Matthew's focus on Peter harmonizes with the Jewish emphasis of his book. Ninth, unlike the other Gospels that explain Jewish customs to Gentile audiences, Matthew leaves these same Jewish customs unexplained. This is true not only with regard to Jewish rulers (Matt. 2:1, 22; 14:1; Luke 2:1–2; 3:1–2) but it is also true with regard to ceremonial cleansing (Matt. 15:2; Mark 7:3–4). The customs that Matthew does explain are of Roman rather than Jewish origin (Matt. 27:15). Although some of Matthew's writings seem to anticipate at least some kind of Gentile audience by giving the interpretation of some Jewish words (Matt. 1:23; 27:33, 46), it does seem to be a general rule that Matthew provides fewer interpretations of Jewish customs than any other Gospel writer.

Tenth, various church fathers, such as Irenaeus, Origen, and Eusebius believed that Matthew wrote to a Jewish audience. Not only was Matthew written to a Jewish audience but to a believing audience as well. In other words, Matthew's audience primarily consisted of Jewish Christians. Both Eusebius⁴ and Origen⁵ indicated that Matthew was written to those within Judaism who came to believe.

Matthew's Purpose and Argument

Matthew wrote in order to accomplish three purposes.⁶ First, he wrote to convince his Jewish audience that the Christ in whom they had believed was indeed the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. Thus, Matthew

⁴ Eusebius, *Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History*, trans., C. F. Cruse, new updated ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 3.24.6.

⁵ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.25.4.

⁶ Toussaint, *Behold the King*, 18–20.

shows that Christ was the rightful heir to the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants. To accomplish this purpose, Matthew appeals to a variety of devices such as genealogies, fulfilled prophecy, messianic titles, kingdom teachings, and miracles. Because the Jewish understanding was that the kingdom would be immediately established upon the arrival of the king (Isa. 9:6–7, Matt. 20:20–21), the next logical question that a Jew would ask is, “if Christ is indeed the Jewish king, then where is His kingdom?”

Thus, Matthew wrote for the second purpose of explaining why the kingdom had been postponed despite the fact that the king had already arrived. In order to accomplish this purpose, Matthew carefully traces the kingdom program. Here Matthew explains the kingdom’s offer to the nation (Matt. 3:2, 4:17, 10:5–7, 15:24), its rejection by the nation (Matt. 11–12, 21–23, 26–27), the present interim program for those who will inherit the kingdom (sons of the kingdom) due to Israel’s rejection of the kingdom (Matt. 13, 16:18), and the nation’s eventual acceptance of the kingdom (Matt. 23:38–39; 24:14, 31; 25:31). The notion of a past rejection and future acceptance of the kingdom by national Israel would lead to the question, “what is God doing in the present?”

Thus, Matthew wrote for the third purpose of explaining God’s interim program. Here, Matthew introduces the interim program that the sons of the kingdom will experience (Matt. 13), as well as the advent of the church (Matt. 16:18, 18:17, 28:18–20). The church age represents God’s present earthly program between Israel’s past rejection and future acceptance of the King and His kingdom. Since Christ’s disciples would play foundational roles in the church (Eph. 2:20), Matthew explains how Christ prepared them not only for His death but also for their new role in the church age.

At the time of writing, the Gentiles were becoming more prominent in the church. The Jewish believers needed an explanation for this Gentile inclusion. Thus, Matthew explains how God’s interim program would thrust the Gentiles into prominence (Matt. 2:1–12, 8:11–12, 13:38, 15:22–28). In sum, Matthew selectively (John 20:30–31, 21:25) includes material from Christ’s life in order to accomplish these purposes. Therefore, the message of Matthew is the confirmation to Jewish Christians that Jesus is their predicted king who ushered in an interim program

by building the sons of the kingdom into the church in between Israel's past rejection and future acceptance of her King.

In addition to this overarching purpose, Matthew wrote to accomplish three sub-purposes. First, Matthew wanted to confirm the Jewish Christians in their faith. He wanted them to understand that the Jesus in whom they had believed was indeed the Jewish King. This was true in spite of the fact that the kingdom had not immediately materialized according to their expectations and instead God's program had taken a new direction. Second, Matthew wrote to offer the believing Jews an explanation regarding Gentile inclusion in God's present program. This was an explanation that the believing Jews desperately needed since the church was on the verge of becoming predominately Gentile through the coming three missionary journeys launched from Syrian Antioch.

Thus, Matthew wrote his Gospel from this very locale for the purpose of assisting the church through this delicate transition. Third, Matthew wanted to encourage the Jewish Christians. Thus, he explained that although Israel had rejected her King, God was going to use this negative act for the positive purpose of including the Gentiles. He was also going to restore the kingdom to Israel in the future.

Matthew's Structure

A major structural clue in Matthew's Gospel is the repetition of the concluding phrase "when He had finished saying these things" (Matt. 7:28, 11:1, 13:53, 19:1, 26:1). This formula alerts the reader to the book's five major discourses. Each discourse concludes with this phrase. Thus, the five major discourses include the Sermon on the Mount (chs. 5–7), the missionary discourse (ch. 10), the kingdom parables (ch. 13), the discourse on humility (ch. 18), and the Olivet discourse (chs. 24–25).⁷

In order to explain to his Jewish-Christian audience how Christ can be the Jewish King and yet at the same time the Jewish kingdom is absent, and the Gentiles are prominent in the mystery age, Matthew develops a well-organized argument. First, he establishes Christ's messianic identity and traces Christ's offer of the kingdom to Israel (Matt. 1–10). Second,

⁷ Ibid., 24–25.

he shows the nation's rejection of this offer (Matt. 11–12, 20:29–23:39). Third, he explains God's inclusion of the Gentiles in the mystery age during the kingdom's absence and postponement (Matt. 13:1–20:28). Matthew then develops the final part of his argument. Although the kingdom has been postponed in the present, it will be reoffered to and accepted by the nation in the future. Although he has alluded to this restoration earlier (Matt. 17:1–13, 19:28, 20:20–28), Matthew most clearly develops the idea of the kingdom's restoration to Israel in his fifth and final discourse section known as the Olivet discourse (Matt. 24–25).⁸ Matthew's Jewish audience would have been familiar with Old Testament Scripture predicting Israel's conversion as a result of the great tribulation (Jer. 30:7, Dan. 9:24–27). The Olivet discourse is simply an amplification of these prophecies (Matt. 24:15). Matthew includes this final phase of his argument in order to give his Jewish readers hope that present Gentile prominence in the mystery age does not mean that God has forsaken His covenant promises to His chosen nation.

Emphasis of the Olivet Discourse

Matthew's emphasis upon Israel's restoration in the Olivet discourse grows out of the final verses of the previous chapter (Matt. 23:37–39). There, Christ expressed His desire to gather (*episyntagō* ἐπισυνάγω) Israel. However, the nation had rejected the kingdom offer. Christ promises that the time would come when the nation would acknowledge Him as the Messiah by chanting a messianic Psalm (Ps. 118:26, Matt. 21:9) thereby allowing Christ to return and regather (*episyntagō*) His nation (Matt. 23:39). Thus, the Olivet discourse furnishes the circumstances through which Israel's restoration and final regathering will be achieved (Matt. 24:31).

If the Olivet discourse is a natural extension of Christ's promise to restore the nation in the future, interpreters should not be surprised to discover the Jewish nature of this discourse. After all, Christ's promise of restoration at the end of Matthew 23 was given exclusively to Israel. Christ makes this clear through the twofold repetition of the word

⁸ Ibid., 265–66.

“Jerusalem” in Matthew 23:37a. Moreover, various Jewish references, such as the destruction of the second temple (Matt. 24:1–2), the offer of the kingdom (Matt. 24:14), Daniel’s prophecy of the seventy weeks (Matt. 24:15), the holy place (Matt. 24:15), the desecration of the temple (Matt. 24:15), the flight into the Judean wilderness (Matt. 24:16), the Sabbath (Matt. 24:20), the elect (Matt. 24:22), the Messiah (Matt. 24:23–24), and the Davidic throne (Matt. 25:31), found throughout the discourse make it clear that the Olivet discourse primarily concerns Israel.⁹ In sum, the Olivet discourse plays a critical role in Matthew’s overall presentation to his Jewish–Christian audience. As explained, his inclusion of the Olivet discourse is designed to give his readers hope of a future Jewish kingdom. Such a theme should have a bearing upon how Matthew 24:40–41 is interpreted. Rather than understanding these verses as relating to church age truth, such as the rapture, it is better to understand them against the backdrop of the tribulation judgment leading to Israel’s restoration.

TEXTUAL DETAILS WITHIN AND SURROUNDING MATTHEW 24:40–41

Not only does Matthew’s overall argument mitigate understanding Matthew 24:40–41 as the rapture, but the details of the text within and surrounding Matthew 24:40–41 also weaken a rapture interpretation of these verses. Such details include the passage’s connection with Noah’s day, the order of the other Matthean judgments, the reference to Jesus as the Son of Man, and the Lukan parallel passage.

The Connection to Noah’s Day

The context of Matthew 24:40–41 relates directly to what transpired in Noah’s day, which is described in the immediately preceding verses (Matt. 24:37–39). These earlier verses say, “For the coming of the Son of

⁹ Toussaint, *Behold the King*, 277; Renald Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come! A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church* (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel, 1995), 184.

Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matt. 24:37–39). These verses are then followed by verses 40–41, which say, “Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women *will be* grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left.” The connective *tote*, which begins verse 40 links verses 40–41 with verses 37–39. Because of this connective, if we can understand who was taken in Noah’s day, it will help us understand who will be taken in verses 40–41.

When verse 39 says, “the flood came and took them all away,” it is a reference to the unbelievers who did not enter the ark and consequently were taken away by the flood. While the unbelievers of Noah’s day were taken away in judgment, Noah was preserved from being swept away in judgment thereby allowing him to enter the next dispensation of human government. Thus, by way of analogy, the man taken from the field and the woman taken from grinding at the mill (Matt. 24:40–41) are unbelievers being taken away into judgment at the Lord’s return. While the unbelievers will be taken away in judgment, the believers will be left behind, thereby allowing them to enter the next dispensation of the millennial kingdom. Such an order is the exact opposite of the rapture, which will take believers away into eternal bliss and leave the unbelievers behind upon the earth to experience divine judgment (1 Thess. 4:13–18, 1 Cor. 15:50–58). Thus, the more verses 40–41 are connected with the events of Noah’s day as depicted in the same context, the less probable it is to ascribe to verses 40–41 a rapture interpretation.

This view that Matthew 24:40–41 refers to judgment at the second advent rather than the rapture is held by numerous credible Bible interpreters. According to John Walvoord:

According to Matthew 24:40–41, “Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left.” Because at the rapture,

believers will be taken out of the world, some have confused this with the rapture of the church. Here, however, the situation is the reverse. The one who is left, is left to enter the kingdom; the one who is taken, is taken in judgment. This is in keeping with the illustration of the time of Noah when the ones taken away are the unbelievers.¹⁰

Charles Feinberg also explains:

It will be a taking away judicially and in judgment. The ones left will enjoy the blessings of Christ's reign on earth, just as Noah and his family were left to continue on earth. This is the opposite of the rapture, where those who are left go into the judgment of the Great Tribulation.¹¹

Showers echoes:

Jesus was not referring to the Rapture of the church in Matthew 24. When that event takes place, all the saved will be removed from the earth to meet Christ in the air, and all the unsaved will be left on the earth. Thus, the rapture will occur in reverse of the order of things in the days of Noah and, therefore, the reverse of the order at Jesus' coming immediately after the Great Tribulation.¹²

Toussaint similarly notes, "Since it is parallel in thought with those who were taken in the judgment of the flood, it is best to refer the verb to those who are taken for judgment preceding the establishment of the kingdom."¹³

Order of the Other Matthean Judgments

Matthew's description of the flood of Noah's day, which depicts the unbelievers being taken in judgment while the believers are left behind to

¹⁰ John F. Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come* (Chicago: Moody, 1974), 193.

¹¹ Charles Feinberg, *Israel in the Last Days: The Olivet Discourse* (Altadena, CA: Emeth, 1953), 27.

¹² Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come!*, 180

¹³ Toussaint, *Behold the King*, 281.

enter the new dispensation, is by no means an isolated case. All of the Matthean judgments follow the same pattern. For example, in the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt. 13:24–30), it is the tares or the unbelievers that are first gathered to be burned (Matt. 13:30a, 41–42). Then the wheat or the saved are left behind to enter the kingdom (Matt. 13:30b, 43). Moreover, in the parable of the dragnet (Matt. 13:47–50), it is the bad fish or the unbelievers that are first gathered to be thrown away (Matt. 13:48b, 49–50). Then the good fish, or the saved, are left behind to enter the kingdom (Matt. 13:48a). In addition, in the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25:31–46), it is the goats, or the unbelievers, that are first cast off the earth into judgment (Matt. 25:41–46). Then the sheep, or the saved, are left behind to enter the kingdom (Matt. 25:34–40). Matthew’s consistent pattern of judgment found throughout his book is that the unsaved are taken into judgment while the saved are left behind to enter into the kingdom. Thus, the same order of events is likely in view in Matthew 24:40–41. Such an order would contradict the order of the rapture where the exact opposite chronology will transpire.

Jesus as the Son of Man

Throughout the Olivet discourse, Jesus is referred to as the Son of Man (Matt. 24:27, 30, 37, 39, 44; 25:31). This principle holds true in the immediate context of Matthew 24:40–41. The immediately preceding verse (Matt. 24:39) says, “and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be.” Such imagery harks back to the description of Israel’s deliverer at the conclusion of the times of the Gentiles (Dan. 7:13). In fact, this is the very imagery that Christ applied to Himself, thereby causing Israel’s high priest to tear his robes and indicate that Christ should be immediately put to death on account of His alleged blasphemy (Mark 14:60–64). The point is that Son of Man imagery uniquely describes Jesus’s relationship and role with Israel rather than the church. The use of such a nomenclature in Matthew 24:39 is further evidence that Matthew 24:40–41 is a second advent passage about Israel rather than a church age rapture passage.

The Lukan Parallel Passage

Luke 17:26–37 offers the parallel passage to Matthew 24:40–41:

And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building; but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed. On that day, the one who is on the housetop and whose goods are in the house must not go down to take them out; and likewise, the one who is in the field must not turn back. Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses *his life* will preserve it. I tell you, on that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other will be left. There will be two women grinding at the same place; one will be taken and the other will be left. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other will be left." And answering they said to Him, "Where, Lord?" And He said to them, "Where the body *is*, there also the vultures will be gathered.

In addition to Matthew's description of one man taken from the field and the woman taken away from grinding, Luke adds the one taken from the bed and the other left. Luke also records the disciples' question "Where, Lord?" (Luke 17:37a). This inquiry relates to the locale to where those taken will go since Christ made it clear that those not taken will be left upon the earth. Christ answers, "Where the body *is*, there also the vultures will be gathered" (Luke 17:37b). "Vultures" refers to those birds of prey that gorge on the flesh of corpses.¹⁴ Such imagery connotes judgment where the birds of prey will feast upon carcasses of the deceased

¹⁴ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., ed. Frederick William Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 22, 382.

(Matt. 24:28; Rev. 19:17–18, 21). By using such imagery, Christ explains that those taken in Luke 17:34–36 are those taken into destruction and judgment. Of course, the rapture involves the opposite. At the rapture, those taken are taken into glory rather than judgment. Thus, the Lukan parallel passage with its emphasis upon being taken into judgment substantially weakens the rapture interpretation of Matthew 24:40–41.¹⁵ In sum, the connection with Noah’s day, the consistent order of the other Matthean judgments, the Son of Man reference, and the Lukan parallel passage all negate a rapture interpretation of Matthew 24:40–41.

INADEQUACY OF ARGUMENTS FAVORING A RAPTURE IN MATTHEW 24:40–41

Thus far we have seen that Matthew 24:40–41 should not be given a rapture interpretation based upon the place of the Olivet discourse in Matthew’s overall argument and based upon an examination of the textual details within and surrounding Matthew 24:40–41. This section furthers this same thesis by noting the inadequacy of the arguments for a rapture interpretation of Matthew 24:40–41. Such arguments include the use of *paralambanō* (παραλαμβάνω) in verses 40–41, the rapture is in view in Matthew 24:31, the day or hour of the second advent can be discerned once the tribulation period begins, that normal life activities as depicted in Matthew 24:40–41 could not take place at the end of the tribulation period, and the *peri de* (περὶ δὲ) construction of Matthew 24:36.

The Use of *Paralambanō* in Matthew 24:40–41

One of the reasons various interpreters believe that the rapture is in view in Matthew 24:40–41 is because of Matthew’s switch from *airō* (αἶρω) when describing those “taken” in the flood in verse 39 to *paralambanō* (παραλαμβάνω) when describing those “taken” in verses 40–41. Those who believe that the rapture is in view in verses 40–41 are

¹⁵ Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come!*, 184–86.

quick to point out that *paralambanō* in these verses is the same word that John used to depict those taken in the rapture in John 14:3. According to this argument, Christ must also be describing taking believers to Himself in Matthew 24:40–41.¹⁶ However, several reasons make it apparent that Matthew’s use of *paralambanō* in these verses need not signal to the reader that the apostle has suddenly switched to a discussion of the rapture.¹⁷

First, *paralambanō* is a non-technical term. It is not a word that has the same definition everywhere it is used. While *paralambanō* can refer to the Lord taking believers to Himself (John 14:3), it also can refer to a taking away in a negative sense. For example, it is used to describe Satan taking Jesus to a venue for purposes of temptation (Matt. 4:5, 8), a demon taking other demons for the purposes of indwelling a man (Matt. 12:45), and Christ being taken away to be abused (Matt. 27:27) and eventually crucified (John 19:16). Thus, whenever *paralambanō* is used, its meaning must be determined from its context. As explained previously, the context of Matthew 24:40–41 involves judgment rather than deliverance.¹⁸

Second, it is possible for two different words for “taking” to describe the same event rather than different events. For example, 2 Kings 2 uses two different Hebrew words to describe Elijah being taken to heaven. The verse, 2 Kings 2:1, uses *‘alā* (אֵלָא) to describe this taking. In 2 Kings 2:3, 5 *lāqah* (לָקַח) is used to describe the same event. Interestingly, John 19:15–16 uses both *airō* (vs. 15) and *paralambanō* (vs. 16) to denote the singular event of Christ being taken away for crucifixion. Why cannot Matthew 24:39–41 also use the same two words to allude to the singular event of Christ’s return in judgment?

¹⁶ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Yeshua: The Life of Messiah from a Messianic Jewish Perspective*, 4 vols. (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2017), III.365; Robert Van Kampen, *The Rapture Questioned Answered: Plain and Simple* (Grand Rapids: Fleming Revell, 1997), 181–82.

¹⁷ Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come!: A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church*, 180–81.

¹⁸ Toussaint, *Behold the King*, 281; Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come*, 193–94; Ed Glasscock, *Matthew*, Moody Gospel Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1997), 476–77.

Third, there is a logical reason for the use of two different Greek words in Matthew 24:39–41. When God took the unbelievers away into judgment in Noah’s day, He used an impersonal agency to do so: the floodwaters. When He takes the unbelievers away into judgment following His return, however, He will use a personal agency to do so: angelic beings. Although angelic beings are not specifically mentioned in Matthew 24:40–41, they are mentioned in the Matthean parallel passages describing the future judgment awaiting unbelievers at Christ’s second advent (Matt. 13:39, 49). Thus, the switch in Greek words in Matthew 24:39–41 may simply signal the different agencies that the Lord uses in judgment rather than a switch from a judgment coming (Matt. 24:39) to a rapture coming (Matt. 24:40–41). Thus, Toussaint summarizes, “The differences in verbs can be accounted for on the basis of accuracy of description.”¹⁹

Rapture in Matthew 24:31?

Many are confident that the rapture is in view Matthew 24:40–41 because the rapture is also conspicuous in the same context (Matt. 24:31). Matthew 24:31 says, “And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET AND THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.” Those who hold to a rapture interpretation of this passage point to the numerous similarities between the coming of Christ in Matthew 24:31 and other rapture passages such as 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 and 1 Corinthians 15:50–58. Examples of such similarities include Christ’s coming in a cloud (Matt. 24:30), the sounding of a trumpet, and the world-wide gathering of believers (Matt. 24:31).²⁰ On account of these similarities with other well-known rapture passages, many are confident that the rapture is in view in Matthew 24:31 and thus also in Matthew 24:40–41.

However, it is a logical fallacy to assume that mere similarity is the same as equality. For example, although one can point to similarities between two automobiles, this is not to say that one automobile is the

¹⁹ Toussaint, *Behold the King*, 281.

²⁰ Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 135.

same as the other. While there may be some points of similarity between Matthew 24:31 and other rapture passages, this does not necessarily mean that the two passages are speaking of the same event especially if it can be shown that there are substantial differences between the passages. Many observe that any similarities between Matthew 24:31 and other rapture passages are outweighed by substantial differences. Thomas Ice observes, “In 1 Thessalonians 4 believers are gathered in the air and taken to heaven, while in Matthew 24 they are gathered after Christ’s arrival to earth ...”²¹ John A. Sproule queries:

Where does Paul mention the darkening of the sun (Matt. 24:29), the moon not giving its light (Matt. 24:29), the stars falling from the sky (Matt. 24:29), the powers of the heavens being shaken (Matt. 24:29), all the tribes of the earth mourning (Matt. 24:30), all the world seeing the coming of the Son of Man (Matt. 24:30), or God sending forth angels (Matt.24:31)?²²

Paul Feinberg similarly notes:

Notice what happens when you examine both passages carefully. In Matthew the Son of Man comes on the clouds, while in 1 Thessalonians 4 the ascending believers are in them. In Matthew the angels gather the elect; in 1 Thessalonians the Lord Himself (note the emphasis) gathers the believers. Thessalonians only speaks of the voice of the archangel. In the Olivet Discourse nothing is said about a resurrection, while in the latter text it is the central point. In the two passages the differences in what will take place prior to the appearance of Christ is striking. Moreover, the order of ascent is absent from Matthew in spite of the fact that it is the central part of the epistle.²³

²¹ Thomas Ice, *Understanding the Olivet Discourse: A Futurist Interpretation of Matthew 24–25* (Middletown, RI: Stone Tower Press, 2021), 223.

²² John A. Sproule, “An Exegetical Defense of Pretribulationism” (Th.D. diss., Grace Theological Seminary, 1981), 53.

²³ Paul D. Feinberg, “Response: Paul D. Feinberg,” in *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulation*, ed. Richard R. Reiter (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 225.

In order to equate Matthew 24:31 with the rapture passages, a reconciliation of all of these differences is needed rather than merely highlighting a handful of similarities.

Also, Showers explains how the imagery of Matthew 24:31 has more in common with what the Old Testament predicts concerning Israel's eschatological regathering rather than the church's rapture.

First, because of Israel's persistent rebellion against God, He declared that He would scatter the Jews "into all the winds" (Ezek. 5:10, 12) or "toward all winds" (Ezek. 17:21). In Zechariah 2:6 God stated that He did scatter them abroad "as four winds of the heavens." ... God did scatter the Jews all over the world. Next, God also declared that in the future Israel would be gathered from the east, west, north, and south, "from the ends of the earth" (Isa. 43:5-7). We should note that in the context of this promise, God called Israel His "chosen" (vv. 10, 20) ... Just as Jesus indicated that the gathering of His elect from the four directions of the world will take place in conjunction with "a great trumpet" (literal translation of the Greek text of Mt. 24:21), so Isaiah 27:13 teaches that the scattered children of Israel will be gathered to their homeland in conjunction with the blowing of "a great trumpet" (literal translation of the Hebrew) ... Gerhard Friedrich wrote that in that future eschatological day "a great horn shall be blown (Is. 27:13)" and the exiled will be brought back by that signal. Again he asserted that in conjunction with the blowing of the great trumpet of Isaiah 27:13, "There follows the gathering of Israel and the return of the dispersed to Zion." It is significant to note that Isaiah 27:13, which foretells this future regathering of Israel, is the only specific reference in the Old Testament to a "great" trumpet. Although Isaiah 11:11-12 does not refer to a great trumpet, it is parallel to Isaiah 27:13 because it refers to the same regathering of Israel. In its context, this passage indicates that when the Messiah (a root of Jesse, vv. 1, 10) comes to rule and transform the world as an "ensign" (a banner), He will gather together the scattered remnant of His people Israel "from the four corners of the earth."²⁴

²⁴ Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come!*, 182-83.

In fact, contextually, the regathering spoken of in Matthew 24:31 harks back to Matthew 23:37. There Christ expressed a desire to gather an unwilling first-century Israel. He clearly identifies His audience as Israel in verse 37 with the twofold repetition of the word “Jerusalem.” However, although first-century Israel was unwilling to be gathered by her Messiah, a future generation of repentant Jews will be regathered by Christ upon His return at the conclusion of the tribulation. Matthew uses the same verb “gather” (*episynagō* ἐπισυνάγω) in both Matthew 23:37 and Matthew 24:31 in order to draw this connection.

Day or Hour Can Be Known in the Tribulation

Those who argue that Matthew 24:40–41 is speaking of the rapture rather than the second advent note that the context favors the rapture. It is contended that this point is especially true considering Matthew 24:36, which says, “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.” It is argued that the phrase “no one knows the day or the hour” (Matt. 24:36) cannot be speaking of the second advent at the end of the tribulation since people would know the time of that event. This event will take place exactly seven years after the antichrist enters into the peace treaty with Israel (Dan. 9:27). Because Matthew 24:36 cannot be speaking of the second advent, it must be speaking of the rapture.²⁵

The phrase in verse 36, however, could be given from the perspective of an unbeliever.²⁶ Unbelievers will always be unprepared for Christ’s return regardless of what era of history they are living in. Matthew 24:42 exhorts believers to be alert. The same Greek verb for “alert” (*grēgoreō* γρηγορεύω) as used in Matthew 24:42 is also used in 1 Thessalonians 5:6 and Revelation 16:15. Both 1 Thessalonians 5:4–6 and Revelation 16:15 speak of the unalert state of the unbeliever regarding Christ’s return. 1 Thessalonians 5:3 says, “While they are saying, ‘Peace and safety!’ then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child; and they will not escape.” By contrast, the child of

²⁵ Fruchtenbaum, *Yeshua*, III.365–66.

²⁶ Ice, *Understanding the Olivet Discourse*, 265–69.

God will not be caught off guard for Christ's return since he is a child of the day rather than the night (1 Thess. 5:4).

Also, Revelation 16:15 provides the following parenthetical statement after the sixth bowl judgment: "Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked, and men will not see his shame." Late in the tribulation, this verse analogizes Christ's return to a thief coming upon an unprepared victim. Thus, even after eighteen of Revelation's nineteen judgments have transpired, unbelievers living during the tribulation will still be caught off guard by Christ's return.

Interpreting verse 36 from the perspective of the unbeliever fits the parallel with Noah's day (Matt. 24:37–39) that immediately follows verse 36 and concludes before verses 40–41. In Noah's day, it was the unbelievers who were caught off guard when the flood judgment finally came (Matt. 24:39) despite Noah's faithful warning of coming judgment (2 Pet. 2:5) for 120 years (Gen. 6:3). Because Matthew 24:36 is similarly narrated from the perspective of the unbeliever, it can be understood as a reference to the Second Coming rather than the rapture. Although the time of the rapture is unknown to all, the time of the second advent at the end of the tribulation period will be unknown to unbelievers.

Normal Life Activities at the End of the Tribulation?

Another argument used to contend that Matthew 24:40–41 is speaking of the rapture rather than Christ's judgment coming in His second advent at the end of the tribulation relates to how normal life seems to be described in these verses. They speak of people working in the field, grinding at the mill, sleeping in the bed (Luke 17:34), etc. ... Given the global judgments of the tribulation, how could normal life patterns be taking place prior to Christ's second advent? Therefore, according to some, it makes far more sense to associate these events with the rapture before the tribulation unfolds. Dave Hunt notes:

When Christ says, "As it was in the days of Noah and Lot," it is absolutely certain that He is not describing conditions that will prevail at the time of the Second Coming. Therefore, these must be the conditions which will

prevail just prior to the Rapture at a different time—and, obviously, before the devastation of the tribulation period.²⁷

By way of response, the primary purpose of these verses is not to describe normal life patterns. Here, Christ is teaching in the form of a parabolic discourse. Notice His use of the word “parable” in the surrounding context (Matt. 24:32). Parables typically have a single spiritual point. Therefore, to hunt for many meanings in a parabolic discourse beyond its primary point is to misuse the parabolic genre.²⁸ Christ’s major point was to emphasize the unprepared state of the unbeliever rather than convey all of the economic realities that will exist just prior to His second advent. Thus, it is possible that verses 40–41 are merely a figure of speech depicting unbelievers so unduly focused on worldly things that they are caught completely off guard by Christ’s second advent. Therefore, these verses are not speaking of ordinary life activities or economic conditions since such an interpretation lies outside the parable’s central point. In other words, unbelievers in the world’s system will be so caught up in everyday life that they will not be looking for Christ’s return. Consequently, they will be caught off guard when the second advent takes place. This point is the major one that Christ seeks to get across rather than describing all manner of economic conditions and life behavior at the tribulation’s conclusion.

Peri De Construction

Although the context of the Olivet discourse is overwhelmingly Israelitish in tone, some justify an abrupt transition into church age truth related to the rapture in Matthew 24:40–41 on account of the *peri de* (περι δὲ) construction found at the beginning of verse 36. This verse says, “But [*peri de*] of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.” Fruchtenbaum notes:

²⁷ Hunt, *How Close Are We?*, 210–11. See also Fruchtenbaum, *Yeshua*, III.366.

²⁸ Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth* (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 1991), 215–16.

Matthew began the passage with the word *but* (Matt. 24:36). In the Greek language, there is more than one way of saying *but*. Here, the English word is a translation of two Greek words, *peri de*, meaning “now concerning.” As Greek grammar books show, this construction denotes a contrast and often introduces a new subject. Paul uses the formula frequently in his writings when presenting a new topic (e.g., 1 Cor. 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12; 1 Thess. 4:9; 5:1; etc.). In the context of Matthew 24, Yeshua had been talking about one topic (the second coming), then introduced a new subject (the rapture) ... In the passage above, He introduced the new topic by using the *peri de* construction.²⁹

While all of the uses of the *peri de* construction cited above do indeed signal a change of subject, however, they are in fact all related subjects. For example, despite the repeated use of the *peri de* construction in First Corinthians, the entire subject matter of the book relates to the ecclesiastical problems that Paul knew about in Corinth. Paul does not use *peri de* as a signal that he is moving to an unrelated subject but rather only to a tangential subject within the context of problems within the Corinthian assembly. The problem with using the *peri de* construction of Matthew 24:36 as a transition from second advent truth to rapture truth is that it forces into Christ’s words a totally unrelated subject. The Olivet discourse (Matt. 24–25), focusing on Israel, was given on the third day of the passion week, and the upper room discourse (John 13–17), focusing on church age truth, was given on the sixth day of the passion week. Thus, to force into Matthew 24:40–41 church age rapture concepts on account of the *peri de* construction of verse 36 infers that Christ presents church age truth that He had not yet disclosed and, in fact, would not disclose until later in the same week. Such a radical shift in subject matter stands in stark contrast to Paul’s use of the *peri de* construction to signal a shift to a related, rather than unrelated, subject in his letters.

In sum, the arguments used by those seeking to find the rapture rather than the second advent in Matthew 24:40–41 are answerable.

²⁹ Fruchtenbaum, *Yeshua*, III.365.

Such arguments include the use of *paralambanō* in verses 40–41, the rapture is in view in Matthew 24:31, the day or hour of the second advent can be discerned once the tribulation period begins, that normal life activities as depicted in Matthew 24:40–41 could not take place at the end of the tribulation, and the *peri de* construction of Matthew 24:36.

CONCLUSION

Matthew 24:40–41 is not a rapture text. This point has been established through an examination of the role of the Olivet discourse in Matthew’s overall argument, through an examination of the textual details within and surrounding Matthew 24:40–41, and by noting the inadequacy of the arguments for a rapture interpretation of Matthew 24:40–41. Since the rapture is not found in Matthew 24:40–41, is there a better place to locate the rapture in Christ’s teaching? The second article in this two-part series will provide the answer to this important question.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bauer, Walter. *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed., edited by Frederick William Danker. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Eusebius. *Eusebius’ Ecclesiastical History*. Translated by C. F. Cruse. New updated ed. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998.
- Feinberg, Paul D. “Response: Paul D. Feinberg.” In *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational*, 223–31. Edited by Richard R. Reiter. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984.
- Feinberg, Charles. *Israel in the Last Days: The Olivet Discourse*. Altadena, CA: Emeth, 1953.
- Fruchtenbaum, Arnold G. *Yeshua: The Life of Messiah from a Messianic Jewish Perspective*. San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2017.

- Glasscock, Ed. *Matthew*. Moody Gospel Commentary. Chicago: Moody, 1997.
- Gundry, Robert H. *The Church and the Tribulation*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973.
- Hunt, Dave. *How Close Are We? Compelling Evidence for the Soon Return of Christ*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1993.
- Ice, Thomas. *Understanding the Olivet Discourse: A Futurist Interpretation of Matthew 24–25*. Middletown, RI: Stone Tower Press, 2021.
- Showers, Renald. *Maranatha Our Lord, Come! A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church*. Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel, 1995.
- Sproule, John A. “An Exegetical Defense of Pretribulationism.” Th.D. diss., Grace Theological Seminary, 1981.
- Toussaint, Stanley D. *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew*. Portland: Multnomah, 1980; reprint, Grand Rapids, Kregel, 2005.
- Van Kampen, Robert. *The Rapture Question Answered: Plain and Simple*. Grand Rapids: Fleming Revell, 1997.
- Walvoord, John F. *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come*. Chicago: Moody, 1974.
- Zuck, Roy B. *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth*. Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 1991.

LET US BUILD FOR OURSELVES A CITY: A BIBLICAL LOOK AT THE CORRELATION BETWEEN SECULARISM, LIBERALISM, AND URBANIZATION IN AMERICA

J. Morgan Arnold

Chafer Theological Seminary
Gun Barrel City, Texas, USA

Keywords: *hedonism, paganism, urbanization, liberalism, Enoch, Nimrod*

Abstract: *A map of the 2022 U.S. mid-term election results per House district shows a vastness of ‘Republican red’ engulfing most of the country’s land-mass in comparison to small pockets of ‘Democrat blue’ that is concentrated upon the most urbanized metropolitan population centers. Such a unique phenomenon begs the following question: ‘What has happened within the most urbanized metropolitan populations to cause them to overwhelmingly vote for the politically liberal Democratic party, a party whose platform is antithetical in many ways to what is expressly taught in the Bible?’ This question also spawns another: ‘Why have the most populous areas in the country also become bastions of paganism, hedonism, and liberalism?’ This paper demonstrates that past human behavior detailed in biblical narratives is being replicated in today’s modern urbanized culture. As is seen in Scripture, for a large city or metropolitan area to obtain and maintain a consistent and achievable level of peace and prosperity, a compromising layer of tolerance towards immorality and evil must materialize. Subsequently, the sustained tolerance of evil and violence will eventually lead to the approval, propagation, and adoption of evil and violence. Then and now, to the degree an urban population ‘goes along to get along’, the further it drifts from the*

Lord and plunges downward into paganism, hedonism, and idolatry. Thus, when a society consciously usurps the sovereignty of God and thinks it possesses the highest level of authority, then it has arrived at the point where it believes it has the freedom to redefine societal rules according to what it determines to be “right in its own eyes” (Judg. 21:25). By dismissing God’s existence or discounting His holiness, justice, and power, a population cognitively thinks it has effectively shaken off the yoke of sin, guilt, and shame, and has achieved the human right to “call evil good and good evil” (Isa. 5:20).

INTRODUCTION

In the days following the 2022 U.S. midterm elections, all eyes watched the returns as votes were counted and winners of races were announced. The final tally of election results for the U.S. House of Representatives was of particular interest. To control the House, Republicans needed to win at least five seats. Pundits forecasted a “red wave” as voters seemed disenchanted with the Democratic administration in the White House. In the end, Republicans did win the House by gaining nine seats. However, the hoped-for “tsunami” turned out to be not much more than an underwhelming ripple. Surprisingly noticeable from an observation of a map of the election results per

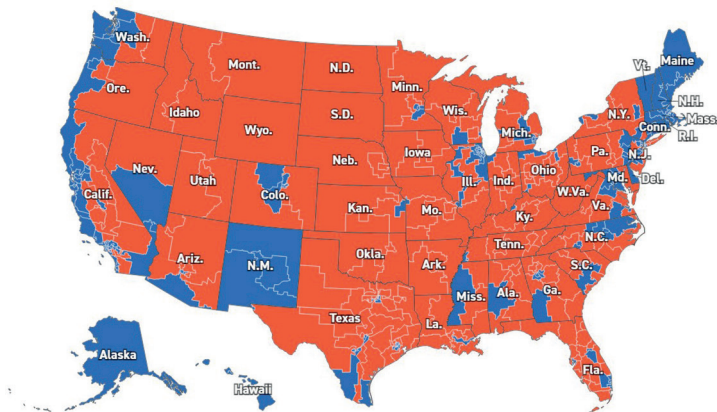


Figure 1. “House Election Results 2022: Live Map: Midterm Races by State.” POLITICO. Accessed December 26, 2022. <https://www.politico.com/2022-election/results/house/>.

House district (fig. 1) was the vastness of “Republican red” that engulfed most of the US landmass versus the small pockets of “Democrat blue.” A person from another country unfamiliar with US politics might rightfully surmise that the Republicans had won the House in a landslide and that America must be a very conservative nation (unaware that Republican rhetoric on campaign trails does not necessarily translate to conservatism in office).

However, once they realize that most of the nation’s largest metropolitan areas and urbanized populations fall within these pockets of blue, two sociological questions might be asked: “What has happened within these largely metropolitan populations to cause them to vote en-masse for the politically liberal Democratic party?” and “Why would they vote for candidates whose party platform is in many ways antithetical to the Bible?” This paper will attempt to answer these questions from a biblical perspective by observing similar scenarios recorded in the Bible, interpreting their historical and prophetic narratives, and then applying the observations and interpretations in a manner that can help us understand what we are seeing in the U.S. today.

A BRIEF BIBLICAL HISTORY OF METROPOLITAN MISSTEPS

In the inaugural chapter of the Bible, God communicated a mandate to the first man and woman: “Be fruitful and multiply, and *fill the earth*, and subdue it;” (Gen. 1:28).¹ Throughout history, man has generally done an excellent job with fruitfully multiplying. However, there have regularly been issues with the filling and subduing parts. The reason? Man has demonstrated an innate trait for gravitating toward a self-generated measure of comfort and security instead of living wholly focused on God and His provision. Generally speaking, families congregated together in villages. An organic layer of mutual benefit and benevolence would develop within the community as it worked, worshipped, and dwelled together. These communities might center around fishing or agriculturally based economies by which fishers, farmers, and their families depended

upon God to provide the environmental conditions necessary for abundant fishing, bountiful crop growing, and healthy livestock husbandry. Successful villages developed into productive towns. Prosperous towns became desirable cities. From these, opportunity-laden metropolises arose. While such large clusters of human populations achieved innovative scientific, architectural, and engineering accomplishments, they did so at the cost of ignoring God's standard to fill and subdue the whole earth. Instead, mankind found it much more comfortable and convenient to grow the size of the city by expanding and distributing established resources and infrastructure. Thus, as diverse populations within a large city become more interactive, diverse ideas entertained become attractive, and divergent lifestyles become enacted.

When a predominant dependence upon God's *provision* wanes, a reliance upon man's *vision* waxes. As a society's moral bedrock erodes, a sociological layer of tolerance towards immorality becomes its topsoil. As a result, the weed of secularism sprouts and grows in order for the city to realize and maintain a consistent, achievable level of peace and prosperity. Without societal submission to a divine authority, the *tolerance* of evil and violence will propagate the *adoption* of evil and violence unless a totalitarian subjugation takes place. We see this scenario played out in the Scriptures repeatedly.

Cain Builds a City Named Enoch

After Adam and Eve's banishment from Eden, how well did their family live with a fallen nature in a fallen world? Not well ... not well at all. It is hard to be optimistic about the righteous potential of mankind when Cain, the third human ever created, murdered his younger brother Abel, the fourth human ever created. As a result, God punished Cain by telling him, "you will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth" (Gen. 4:12b). However, before sending him away God showed grace to the murderer by giving him an identifiable mark that clearly communicated no one was permitted to slay him without incurring a severe penalty. The Bible records Cain headed east into the land of Nod, but instead of nodding in agreement with the LORD to abide by his punishment and remain a wanderer, Cain rebelliously chose to settle down,

gave himself added protection, and built a city he named Enoch, after his son.

Though Cain's descendants made resourceful progress in agriculture, manufacturing, and music, they also rebelliously digressed into evil and wickedness. We are told that Lamech, five generations removed from Cain, chose to take a second wife, a deviance from God's divine institution of marriage. He also killed a young warrior who had wounded him, then bragged about it by self-proclaiming a curse eleven times greater than the curse God pronounced upon anyone seeking revenge on Cain. Ross summarizes the culture at Enoch well: "So here is a picture of an affluent society defying God and His laws, seeking pleasure and self-indulgence."¹

Though God had given man a conscience, a moral monitor by which to know wrong from right, man unashamedly chose to sin in unconscionable ways. The antediluvian culture that sprang forth from the city of Enoch and its sister cities, plunged deeper and deeper into the depths of depravity. What seems unthinkable to us today (or does it?), many believe the culture even allowed demonic beings to take their daughters as human wives, by which monstrous offspring was produced (Gen. 6:2, 4). "Then, the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). Because of the overflowing caldron of evil, corruption, and violence which had manifested upon the earth from the heart of man, God made the executive decision to hit the reset button. As a result, all living creatures were destroyed by a worldwide flood except for an uncorrupted, righteous remnant of eight humans and a boatload of animal species.

Nimrod Builds a City Named Babel

Once the floodwaters abated, Noah and his three sons, members of that righteous remnant, were mandated by God to "Be fruitful and

¹ Allen P. Ross, "Genesis," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 35.

multiply, and *fill the earth*" (Gen. 9:1). However, in the following generations, God's mandate was once again ignored. Even though man's multiplication was extremely fruitful, his compliance to fill the face of the earth was rotten to the core. Noah's great grandson Nimrod came to power as the new villages became towns, and the towns grew into great cities. The Bible doesn't say much about Nimrod other than he was a "great hunter" who was a grandson of Ham (Gen. 10:8–10). Much speculation surrounds what kind of ruler he was. Herbert Leupold claims he was "a mighty hunter of men, not beasts."² Ross states that because "his name seems to be connected with the verb 'to rebel' (*mārad*), tradition has identified him with tyrannical power."³ In the land of Shinar, Nimrod built the cities of Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh from which the Babylonian Empire eventually was spawned. He was also responsible for building the cities of Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, and Resen, which, in time, grew into the Assyrian Empire. Interestingly, God providentially used the armies from these regions to discipline His chosen people some 1500 years later. Josephus writes:

Now it was Nimrod who excited them to such an affront and contempt of God. He was the grandson of Ham, the son of Noah, a bold man, and of great strength of hand. He persuaded them not to ascribe it to God, as if it were through his means they were happy, but to believe that it was their own courage which procured that happiness. He also *gradually changed the government into tyranny, seeing no other way of turning men from the fear of God, but to bring them into a constant dependence on his power* [emphasis added]. He also said he would be revenged on God, if he should have a mind to drown the world again; for that he would build a tower too high for the waters to reach. And that he would avenge himself on God for destroying their forefathers.⁴

² Herbert Carl Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1942), 367.

³ Ross, *Genesis*, 43.

⁴ Flavius Josephus, *The Works of Flavius Josephus: Antiquities of the Jews*, vol. II (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 79.

As a result of Nimrod's strong arm, which was now also divinely supplemented with the "long arm" of capital punishment (Gen. 9:6), these tremendous cities were built and an earthly kingdom of man was formed (Gen. 10:10–12). Not long after, the inhabitants of Babel decided they would rather gather than scatter: "Come, let us build *for ourselves* a city and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and *let us make for ourselves a name* [emphasis added], otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth" (Gen. 11:4). After all, there is safety in numbers, right? This mindset led to the building of a tall tower from bricks made by man's hands as opposed to using stones created by God. Scripture tells us they used tar for mortar, perhaps to waterproof the structure. Interestingly, they seemed to take preventative measures to protect themselves from another flood even though God promised Noah and his sons never to destroy the earth again aquatically. Such actions indicate they did not believe God's word to be true.

Aside from what has been written in extrabiblical sources, we can only speculate as to the exact reason or reasons why the citizens of Babel desired to embark upon such an unprecedented building project. Perhaps they wanted to live independently, apart from the rule and restrictions of the sovereign LORD. Maybe they felt that their high tower would provide immunity from another hydrological judgment even though, as mentioned, God had promised Noah He'd never destroy the earth again in that manner. Perhaps they felt, with their engineering ingenuity, such an accomplishment would make them, in effect, more like gods themselves. Possibly, the seedbed of pagan idolatry had infested the city, and the height of the tower brought them, in their minds, closer to the panoply of false deities they chose to worship. In any case, instead of *filling the earth*, it appears they filled their city with evil.

In addition, from a spiritual perspective, it appears the culture's epistemological system was built upon a foundation of salvation by human works. They sought deliverance from what they perceived to be the greatest threat to their pursuit of happiness—a heavenly tyrant. Under the direction of their preferred earthly tyrant, they took extreme measures to build a culture that glorified man. In their attempt to create

a version of heaven with their own hands and minds, they abandoned the Creator of their hands and minds. Merrill observes: “This represented not only competition with the kingdom of heaven but a kind of invasion, a crossing of boundary lines that said, in effect, that the kingdom of man was a threat to the kingdom of God.”⁵ The citizens of Babel chose to commission themselves as captains of their own ship.

However, when God decides He has seen enough, He sinks their Titanic. Icily, He comes down and disciplines His children with a monumental timeout that sends everyone to their own corners ... of the earth! As is often seen at the onset of war, God knocks out the city of Babel’s communication system (Gen. 11:7–9). The brazen rebels are rendered befuddled babblers.

In Babel, the concept of a coming kingdom of God seems to have been as foreign to them as their collection of languages had become. The globalist plan nixed in Genesis 11 gives way to God’s plan for a chosen nation in Genesis 12. Alva McClain remarks, “Following the frustration of man’s first attempt to establish a world state, and the resultant rise of nationalism through the confusion of language, God turned away from ‘man’ in the collective sense and called out one particular man through whom the divine regal will is to be accomplished on earth.”⁶ While the descendants of that one particular man, Abraham, grow to become a mighty nation, it will regularly suffer from bouts of cultural infection and spiritual disease from neighboring pagan cities and nations.

THE IMPACT OF PAGAN AND SECULAR CITIES UPON ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

The collision of kingdoms is a prevalent theme throughout the pages of Scripture. The kingdom of man appears to have two goals: (1) deflect

⁵ Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2006), 298.

⁶ Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God as Set Forth in the Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), 43.

and distinguish itself from God, and (2) infect and extinguish God's people. Thankfully, God's sovereign power has prevented Israel's extinction. However, in the realm of His sovereignty, He allows people to make free will choices, good and bad. The Bible is not shy about recording both.

Sodom and Gomorrah

Abraham's family grew and became prosperous, but tensions also grew between the households as escalating possessions outpaced established property. Genesis 13:7 records "strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock." Thus, the patriarch and his nephew Lot separated their clans. Abram allowed Lot to have his pick of the land. He opted to settle in the lush, well-watered land of the Jordan Valley to the east, but also dangerously near to the city of Sodom where "the men ... were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the LORD" (Gen. 13:13). By tracing the story of Lot, it is not long before he actually "lives in Sodom" (Gen. 14:12). What kind of impact did the city of Sodom have upon Lot and the numerous members of his household? Though the apostle Peter calls Lot "righteous" (2 Pet. 2:7), the Lord is unable to even find ten righteous persons within Lot's household, let alone in Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:32). The judgment is made to destroy the cities and their inhabitants.

Two angels met Lot at the gate of Sodom, a place where *civic authorities* traditionally met to discuss business and governance. After they joined him at his house for dinner, "the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, both young and old, *all the people from every quarter* [emphasis added]; and they called to Lot and said to him, 'Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may have relations with them'" (Gen. 19:4-5). "Righteous" Lot tried to negotiate with them by offering them the opportunity, instead, to gang rape his virgin daughters. When the angels tell Lot to take his family and leave the city because the Lord is about to destroy it, he goes *outside* to tell his future sons-in-law. They thought he was joking. Unfortunately, Lot had lost his witness for the Lord among the people of Sodom. No one took him

seriously. Besides his wife and two daughters (who must have been pretty angry with their father!), not another single person left the city and escaped God's judgment.

We are not told if the Lord considered Lot's wife and his two daughters as "righteous," but what we can rightly infer is that Lot did not make a lot of difference for the Lord all the years he dwelt among the Sodomites. Because he tolerated Sodom's wickedness, Lot lost a lot! He lost his bride. She disobeyed the angels' instructions, looked back at the cities as they were being destroyed, and was turned into a pillar of salt. He lost all of his treasured earthly possessions. He also lost any integrity he may have had by subsequently getting drunk for several nights in a row after the destruction, which allowed his daughters to commit incest with him. Their perverted actions show the kind of influence the pagan cities had upon them. Plus, to make things worse, the two daughters became pregnant and had two sons from their father. They named their sons Moab and Ben-Ammi. These two grew up to become the founding fathers of Israel's neighboring nations Moab and Ammon, perennial thorns in the flesh to Israel.

Egypt and the Exodus

Years later, Abraham's grandson Jacob ("Israel") tells his sons to seek provisions from their pagan neighbor to the south, Egypt, because of a famine in the land. God, in His great love and mercy, sovereignly orchestrated for them to receive protection and provision from Egypt by providentially enabling Israel's son, Joseph, to be the prime minister there. The opening chapter of Exodus tells us that in the years following Joseph's death, "the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them" (Exod. 1:7). It appears God's chosen people became comfortable in Egypt and did not remember why God had chosen them. As a result, "a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph." Israel's comfort and complacency led them into slavery and suffering. The new pharaoh ordered all newborn males to be killed. God miraculously saved them. One of those boys, Moses, grew up in the king's household. He had to flee Egypt, but God chose him to return and

deliver the children of Israel out of the pagan nation they had lived in for over 400 years.

Often in the Bible, the nation of Egypt shares many similarities with the arrogant world system that openly opposes the God of Israel. This can be seen when Moses confronted Pharaoh, the most powerful man in the world at that time. In the narrative, the power of the one true God was pitted against the power of Egyptian magicians. While the magicians did their best to replicate each miracle, they soon discovered their abilities were wholly impotent compared to those of the omnipotent God. Eventually, because of his arrogance, Pharaoh lost his son. He allowed the Israelites to leave Egypt. Then, after realizing he had lost a vital component of his workforce, he pursued the Israelites and ended up losing his army.

Later in Moses's writings, it becomes apparent that although the Israelites left Egypt, Egypt never fully left this generation of Israelites. Despite seeing God work miracle after miracle to save them, their lack of faith continued to enslave them. Several times on the way to the promised land, the lingering adverse effects of Egypt were on full display. In Exodus 32:1–6, the Israelites' proclivity towards pagan idolatry led them to worship a golden calf. This made Moses so mad he made the sons of Israel drink "karat juice" (Exod. 32:20). Then, in Numbers 21:6–9, their longing for Egypt led to another round of congregational grumbling. They soon discovered that the venom interjected from their lips resulted in venom being injected into their hips.

OTHER EXAMPLES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Israel was chosen to be a people set apart for God. He would bless them, and through them, He would bless all the families of the earth (Gen. 12:1–3). They were to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exod. 19:6). Yet, as they routinely dwelt among and interacted with pagan nations, they consistently danced to the tunes played by the pagan piper:

- Moabite women invited the Israelites to sacrifice to their gods. Many ate and bowed down to Baal of Peor. As a result, God killed 24,000 with a plague (Num. 25:1–3).
- The incomplete obedience to the LORD in the book of Joshua to utterly destroy the Canaanites led to the cyclical struggles in the book of Judges. The angel of the Lord told the sons of Israel: “they will become *as thorns* in your sides, and their gods will be a snare to you (Judg. 2:1–4).
- The elders of Israel told Samuel to appoint a king like all the other nations (1 Sam. 8:4).
- King Saul went to a woman medium at En-dor to conjure up a dead Samuel (1 Sam. 28).
- An aging Solomon let down his defenses and allowed his foreign wives to turn his heart away after other gods. His heart was not wholly devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father *had been* (1 Kgs. 11:4).
- Jeroboam, the first king of the northern kingdom, built temples in Dan and Bethel to imitate the authentic worship held in the temple in Jerusalem. Golden calves were erected in both. Non-Levites were appointed to carry out priestly duties (1 Kgs. 12:28–31).
- King Ahab of Israel married Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal of Sidon. She immediately killed many prophets of the Lord. Ahab became a worshipper of Baal. Soon 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah “ate at Jezebel’s table” (1 Kgs. 18:19).
- Idol worship had become so prevalent in the northern kingdom that God raised up Assyria to take them out of the land and into captivity. An exhaustive list of their idolatrous offenses is provided in 2 Kings 17:7–18.
- Mixed ethnic groups resettled in the land of the northern kingdom and became known as the Samaritans. They “feared the LORD ... (but) also served their idols” (2 Kgs. 17:41).
- Judah did not see the handwriting on the wall after Israel was taken captive. Manasseh caused idolatry to become more pervasive in the southern kingdom than it had ever been in the northern kingdom (2 Kgs. 21:9). His actions stirred the Lord to raise up the

Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar to invade and take captive Judah (2 Kgs. 24:1–4).

- After the exile, the work to rebuild the temple stopped for twenty years due to pagan opposition (Ezra 4:1–5). The Lord kicked them back into gear through the prophets Haggai and Zechariah.

EXAMPLES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament also provides historical examples of how cultures immersed in false gods could affect the people of God. The spiritual forces behind the kingdom of man worked overtime to oppose Jesus's ministry and the church's mandated mission from Jesus. Pagan and secular belief systems, embedded into the fabric of various cities and cultures, actively contributed to incidents of persecution and physical harm to God's representatives:

- The Herodians (supporters of the tetrarch Herod Antipas) ensured peace was maintained in the city of Jerusalem to keep Rome happy (and to preserve their political power). As Jesus became more prominent, the Herodians plotted with the Pharisees about how they might trap and kill Him (Mark 3:6; 12:13).
- Pilate also wanted to keep the peace in the city of Jerusalem to keep Rome happy (and to preserve his political career). When the Jews pressed him to have Jesus crucified, he eventually relented, even though he found no accusation to justify the use of capital punishment. Civic peace and political expediency trumped personal justice (Mark 15:15).
- In Lystra, God healed a crippled man through Paul. The people supposed Barnabas and Paul, whom they called Zeus and Hermes, to be pagan gods! They wanted to sacrifice to them, but Paul and Barnabas stopped them. Paul was subsequently stoned (Acts 14:8–19).
- In Philippi, Paul cast a demon out of a fortune-telling girl. When her masters saw that their revenue source had dried up, they dragged

- Paul and Silas before the city authorities, who, under pressure from the mob, had them beaten and imprisoned (Acts 16:14–24).
- Paul observed that Athens was full of idols. He debated Greek philosophers in the city and was allowed to address the Areopagus at Mars Hill. He told them about their unknown God. Some sneered at the resurrection of the dead; others believed (Acts 17:16–34).
 - Paul powerfully warned the Roman churches concerning how pagan and secular thought adversely affected people living within the world system (Rom. 1:18–32).
 - Paul exhorted the Corinthians, many of whom were former pagans, to refrain from committing careless acts of idolatry (1 Cor. 10).
 - Paul warned the churches in Galatia to stay away from “the acts of the flesh.” His list contained practices former pagans would have engaged in (Gal. 5:19–21).
 - Paul corrected believers in Colossae who still held onto pagan philosophies. They thought a self-imposed asceticism could contribute to their salvation (Col. 2:8, 20–23).
 - The Apostle John warned his readers that “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19) and “Little children, guard yourselves from idols” (5:21). All three of John’s epistles warn of the paganistic teaching that was developing into Gnosticism.
 - Jesus addressed the church in Thyatira and condemned them for tolerating Jezebel, a self-proclaimed prophetess who encouraged immorality and eating things sacrificed to idols (Rev. 2:20–23).

TODAY’S METROPOLITAN MISSTEPS

*“It’s *deja vu* all over again.” – Yogi Berra*

As the pages of Scripture verify, when divergent populations of people commune together in sizable metropolitan areas, what inevitably ensues is a large-scale amplification of evil, corruption, and violence. Similar scenarios are being played out today across the major urban areas in the U.S. Thankfully, in these cities, God has a remnant of His

people who are faithfully teaching and proclaiming His word. However, many of these city dwellers have forsaken God. Many have decided to live in such an environment to make a name for themselves or to live a preferred sinful lifestyle that is not only tolerated but celebrated and approved (Rom. 1:32). God’s masterpiece designs for the divine institutions of marriage (Gen. 2:24) and family (Gen. 4:1–2) have been removed from the showrooms of many city museums and are now resting in a dark corner in the basement. In their place, “new and improved” substitutes for the divine institutions that closely resemble Picasso’s absurd abstracts proudly hang in their galleries. Traditional boundaries between what is right and wrong are scoffed at for being obsolete and narrow-minded. Thus, many artfully pursue doing what is right in their own eyes (Judg. 21:25).

Metropolitan Malady and Mayhem

Evil, corruption, and violence continue to escalate in major metropolitan areas. The 2021 National Crime Victimization Survey confirms that violent crime in urban areas rose 29% from 2020 to 2021. Comparatively, violent crime rates in urban areas were 121% higher than rates reported in rural areas and 48% higher than in suburban zones.⁷ The property crime rate in urban areas was nearly three times as high as in rural areas and nearly twice as high as in suburban areas. Across the nation, levels of alcohol and drug addiction, marriage infidelity, mental health instability, joblessness, poverty, and homelessness continue to rise.

Unfortunately, while social ills climb, overall church attendance has steadily fallen. The Barna Group reports that weekly church attendance fell by one-third from 1993–2020 (fig. 2). Compounding this problem is that only 85% of pre-COVID church-goers have returned to their fellowships even though, as of September 2022, 99% of churches have

⁷ Alexandra Thompson and Susannah N. Tapp, *2021 National Crime Victimization Survey* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2022), <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv21.pdf>.

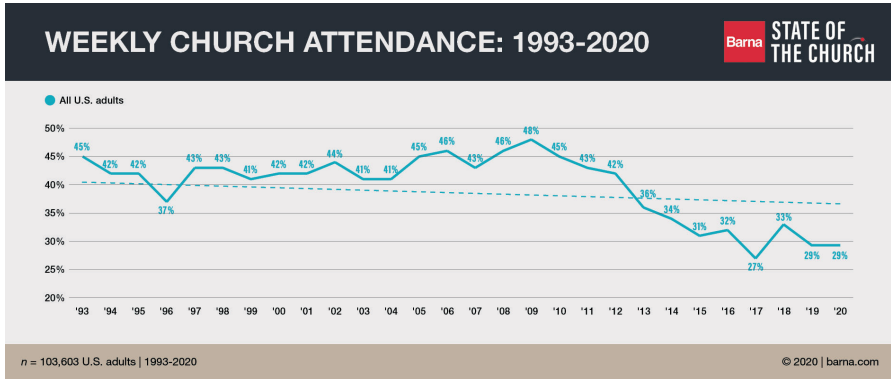


Figure 2. “Weekly Church Attendance: 1993–2020.” Barna Group. Accessed December 30, 2022. <https://www.barna.com/research/changing-state-of-the-church/>.

reopened.⁸ In addition, 29% of the US population now consider themselves religious “nones”—people who describe themselves as atheists, agnostics, or “nothing in particular” when asked about their religious identity.⁹ Surprisingly, while large cities and metropolitan areas comprise an estimated 86% of the U.S. population, only half of the nation’s church congregations are located there.¹⁰ Thus, when all of these toxic trends are mixed together in America’s melting pots, the result is a godless goulash that is poisoning the hearts of our cities.

Metropolitan Mysticism

While a growing number of city dwellers in our major metropolitan areas refuse to identify with any religion, what they probably do

⁸ Lifeway Research, *Pastors’ Descriptions of In-person Worship Attendance 2022: A Survey of American Protestant Pastors* (Nashville: Lifeway Christian Resources, 2022), <https://research.lifeway.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Pastors-Sept-2022-Attendance-Report.pdf>.

⁹ Travis Mitchell, “About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults Are Now Religiously Unaffiliated,” Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project (Pew Research Center, April 14, 2022), <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/>.

¹⁰ Scott Thumma, *Twenty Years of Congregational Change: The 2020 Faith Communities Today Overview* (Hartford, CT: Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2021), <https://faithcommunitiestoday.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Faith-Communities-Today-2020-Summary-Report.pdf>.

not realize is that the city itself, as Ellul explains, has an undeniable spiritual energy of its own:

The city is not just a collection of houses with ramparts, but a spiritual power ... It is capable of directing and changing a man's spiritual life ... It is a 'gathering together' ... the place where the church is held captive, ... a place where it is in combat not against flesh and blood, but against idols, against that spiritual power which is the essential characteristic of the city ..."¹¹

The Bible speaks of the existence of “principalities and powers” in the spiritual realm (Rom. 8:37–39, Col 1:16), demonic beings allowed by our sovereign God to occupy or rule over a particular geographical territory. The angel Gabriel tells Daniel that the “prince of Persia” delayed his coming (Dan. 10:13) and that he and Michael would be battling him again, as well as a coming “prince of Greece” (Dan. 10:20–21). If these two “princes” are engaged in spiritual warfare against holy angels, then they must be strong demonic powers. Paul speaks of a future “lawless one” who is to come, a powerful human who will appear on the world stage. He also says the power that will support him, a “mystery of lawlessness,” is already at work (2 Thes. 2:7).

With such literal references in the Bible concerning these beings, it begs the question: “Do major nation-states, territories, or cities have some sort of demonic principality or power assigned to them?” Scripture teaches that idols are connected to demons (Lev. 17:7; Deut. 32:16–17), and American idols permeate the cities. Ellul personifies the spirit of the city cleverly:

The city's nature (is) a parasite. She absolutely cannot live in and by herself. Everything takes its life from somewhere else, sucks it up. Like a vampire, it preys on the true living creation, alive in its connection with the Creator. The city is dead, made of dead things for dead people. Anything living must come from outside ... There is something magical about her attractiveness,

¹¹ Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, translated by Dennis Pardee (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), 9.

and it is impossible to explain men's passion for the city, her influence on their activity, the irresistible current flowing in long unconscious waves to pull men toward her dead asphalt, without giving a thought for her force, her seductive power ... He assumes her manners, her language, her scorn, her simplistic attitudes ... In the history of every civilization the same process is carried out: life becomes more supple and finally bends, ancestral customs disappear, modes of thought and mental make-up are modified, both the surest instincts and the most defective mysticisms are lost, and everyone everywhere is certain of the city's absolute material necessity.¹²

Enterprising young men ignorantly and arrogantly believe they will tame the city, but the city is the one holding the whip and chair. Its subliminal siren call casts a spell upon their minds and hearts telling them what to think, what to say, how to act, and what to believe. The city morphs once-held morals into "metropolitan values." It converts convictions and interchanges ideologies. Its lucrative promises require compromise. Thus, the city instills a motto within its many inhabitants: "Go along to get along, or else go away and get lost!"

Metropolitan Mind Shift

The city also attempts to methodically hypnotize each of its citizens into believing that what is secular is what is genuinely sacred. The goal of this invasive mind shift is realized when the person's epistemological framework becomes aligned with the city philosophically and politically. This causes many urbanites to either move away from religion or to worship a modern, mainstream messiah who actively fights for income equality and righting social injustices, but who is strangely silent in addressing personal holiness and righteousness. The city's false god winks at uninhibited, demonic sexual deviancy and applauds the convenient, government-sanctioned human sacrifice of the Nephilim offspring before they get too big.

This pagan/secular philosophical mind shift ultimately fosters a progressive/socialist political mindset. After all, if a society really wants to

¹² Ibid., 151–52.

“progress,” then shame on its populace for not voting for progressive causes. The city’s stable of oft-elected candidates knows better than to upset the rotten apple cart. They know they must vocally represent their city’s values and protect its vices. So, to solve their community’s social ills, they methodically medicate their constituents by continually promising to increase the spending and quantity of government services and entitlement programs. As long as the city’s sheep are happy, secure, and well-fed, even scandals involving their shady shepherds will not distract them from grazing.

This pagan/secular philosophical mind shift over the past century in the US’s inner cities and major metropolitan areas has resulted in their political shift to the left. This shift away from traditional, biblical values has also infected most of the major news and media sources headquartered there. In this culture war, the left has seized control of the communication towers. Unfortunately, this also includes what is being communicated within America’s schools, colleges, and universities. Such a tactic ensures an ample supply of “next-gen sheep.”

CONCLUSION

So, to answer the two questions posed in the introduction:

1. *What has happened within these largely metropolitan populations to cause them to vote en-masse for the politically liberal Democratic party?*
2. *Why would they vote for candidates whose party platform is in many ways antithetical to the Bible?*

To address these questions most effectively, they should be answered in reverse order.

The most populous areas in the country have also become the most pagan and secular because, as seen in Scripture, for a large city or metropolitan area to obtain and maintain a consistent and achievable level of peace and prosperity, a compromising layer of tolerance towards

immorality and evil must materialize. Subsequently, a sustained tolerance of evil and violence will eventually lead to the approval, propagation, and adoption of evil and violence. For example, Lot chose to live near Sodom. Then, he moved his family inside its city gates. Eventually, he achieved status as some sort of administrator at the gates of Sodom. Undoubtedly, he earned his position by keeping his mouth shut while probably observing and tolerating disgusting acts of immorality. In the New Testament, Paul tells the Romans that God gave certain people over to a depraved mind who failed to acknowledge Him and chose to live however they desired, "... and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, *they not only do the same but also give hearty approval to those who practice them* [emphasis added]" (Rom. 1:32). To the degree a population "goes along to get along," the more that population drifts away from the Lord and plunges downward into paganism and idolatry.

One reason why a population votes overwhelmingly for the politically liberal Democratic party is because the Democratic platform ideology most closely mirrors their own ideology. For many, their personal belief system has become conflicted with the Bible on various subjects (legalized abortion, approval of same-sex marriage and LGBT lifestyle, etc.). By failing to acknowledge their Creator they have, in essence, usurped the title of Sovereign from God. Thinking *they* possess the highest level of authority in the universe, they become free to redefine societal rules in a manner by which they determine what is right in their own eyes (Judg. 21:25). By dismissing God's existence or discounting His holiness, justice, and power, they believe they have shaken off the yoke of sin, guilt, and shame, and have a right to "call evil good and good evil" (Isa. 5:20).

So, as a result:

- a. the proclivity for many in the larger metro areas has been to move away from God and the standards outlined in His word; and,
- b. since many have chosen to move away from God and His word, they have adopted a pagan or secular humanist framework that justifies sinful and unrighteous behaviors and lifestyles; and,

- c. since an anti-God, anti-Bible mindset most closely aligns with the current platform of the politically liberal Democratic party and the ideologies of most of its candidates, then,
- d. an explanation is given as to why the map data in figure 1 reveals a greater percentage of people in large metropolitan political districts voting for and electing candidates from the liberal Democratic party.

In response, the Bible provides wise counsel as to what the believer's attitude should be toward the pagan/secular world and the allure of its false idols. From the apostle John:

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away and *also* its lusts; but the one who does the will of God continues *to live* forever (1 John 2:15–17).

These words of Jesus to His disciples should be heeded by His disciples today:

These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world (John 16:33).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ellul, Jacques. *The Meaning of the City*. Translated by Dennis Pardee. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970.
- Josephus, Flavius. *The Works of Flavius Josephus: Antiquities of the Jews*. Vol. II. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979.
- Lifeway Research. *Pastors' Descriptions of In-person Worship Attendance 2022: A Survey of American Protestant Pastors*. Nashville:

- Lifeway Christian Resources, 2022. <https://research.lifeway.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Pastors-Sept-2022-Attendance-Report.pdf>.
- McClain, Alva J. *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God as Set Forth in the Scriptures*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959.
- Merrill, Eugene H. *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament*. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2006.
- Mitchell, Travis. "About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults Are Now Religiously Unaffiliated." Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project. Pew Research Center, April 14, 2022. <https://www.pew-research.org/religion/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/>.
- Ross, Allen P. "Genesis." Vol. 1 of *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, edited by J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985.
- Thompson, Alexandra and Susannah N. Tapp, Ph.D. *2021 National Crime Victimization Survey*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2022. <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv21.pdf>.
- Thumma, Scott. *Twenty Years of Congregational Change: The 2020 Faith Communities Today Overview*. Hartford, CT: Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2021. <https://faithcommunitiestoday.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Faith-Communities-Today-2020-Summary-Report.pdf>.

THE PROBLEMATIC MEANING OF THE GREEK TERM, *GENEALOGIA* (I.E., “GENEALOGIES”) FROM 1 TIMOTHY 1:4

R. Mark Musser

Ararat-Rainier East-West Fellowship

Minsk, Belarus

Key Words: *Genealogies, 1 Timothy, Apostle Paul, Philo, Timothy, Philo, Strabo, Ephorus, Cratylus, Historical Meaning, Myth, γενεαλογία, תַּלְמוּד*

Abstract: *This article discusses what later became a sharp controversy in the ancient church over how to properly interpret the Scriptures. The Antiochene School, located in the very city that housed the apostle Paul’s home church during his missionary journeys, emphasized the historical meaning of the Bible. The Alexandrian School, centered in the Greco-Roman Hellenism of Egypt, emphasized allegory. When Paul disparaged the legalism being taught in Ephesus in 1 Timothy 1:4 as “myth and endless genealogies,” the denunciation of allegorism of Scripture was included in his criticism.*

INTRODUCTION

In 1 Timothy 1:3–4, the apostle Paul’s denunciation of “myths and endless genealogies” includes a disparagement of Hellenistic allegorism so widespread at the time when ancient Greek texts of the mythical past were interpreted for contemporary consumption. The great problem in Ephesus at the time of Paul’s writing (A.D. 62–63) was that some church leaders, steeped in the Hellenistic culture of their

times, were also using Greek allegory to interpret the Old Testament as well. This was upsetting the overall spiritual condition of the churches in Ephesus that needed apostolic correction. As such, on his way to Macedonia, Paul thus charged his young protégé Timothy, “Remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith” (1 Tim. 1:3b–4). When viewed historically in context, the atypical use of *genealogia* (γενεαλογία), i.e., “genealogy,” mixed together with the word “myth” in the phrase *mythois kai genealogiais* (μύθοις καὶ γενεαλογίαις) essentially means “mythical genealogy.” Moreover, such mythical genealogies were allegorically derived from the Old Testament, and thus were contrary to the original meaning of what the biblical author(s) wrote. In other words, the general understanding of genealogies today as simply referring to a family tree structure with a list of names on it interferes with grasping what it was that Paul was criticizing in the Ephesian church. The problem was not over the genealogies themselves found on the pages of the Pentateuch, particularly in Genesis, but over the mythical embellishments being added to those lists that were anything but historically or factually based—much less rooted in Scripture. Here is perhaps seen the first serious controversy in the New Testament between the historical meaning of the Bible versus Greek allegorism that will plague the early church for centuries to come in its battle over the critical importance of Scriptural meaning.

THE MEANING OF *GENEALOGIA* IN THE NEW TESTAMENT GREEK

It is true that the Greek term “genealogies” did indeed coincide with the more modern understanding of the term suggesting a list of names on a family tree to identify who was related to who—and perhaps even where such person(s) came from. For example, in its first definition, Arndt and Gingrich’s *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Early Christian Literature* (BAGD) defines *genealogia* simply as

“an account of ancestry.”¹ BAGD, however, then presents another definition that is atypical when it expressly cites 1 Timothy 1:4 denoting Hesiod, Polybius, and Julian “in reference to myths cast in genealogical form.”² This second definition is cited because there are references in ancient Greek literature beyond the New Testament which place “myths and genealogies” on a parallel track so that instead of speaking of a strict historical ancestry, there is an added emphasis upon mythology instead. Whatever is being referenced in 1 Timothy 1:4, it is singled out by Paul as being particularly pernicious within the churches of Ephesus. Paul calls such genealogies “endless.” He compares them to “useless speculations” which are unable to instruct the saints to have a “pure heart, and a good conscience, and a sincere faith” (1:5). Paul further emphasizes such genealogical mythology as “empty talk” connected to legalists who conceitedly presume they are experts in the Old Testament Law even though they are ignorant of what they are talking about (1 Tim. 1:7).

A parallel passage written at the same general time frame shows up in Paul’s letter to Titus on the island of Crete. This problem was thus not just local or unique to Ephesus but was apparently all too common in other places too. Paul thus charges Titus along very similar lines as well, “But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless” (Titus 3:9). This concluding remark by Paul also concords with his introduction when he writes, “This testimony is true. For this reason, reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith, not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth” (Titus 1:13–14).

What does Paul mean therefore, when he sharply condemns “myths and endless genealogies” about the Old Testament Law, seen especially in 1 Timothy 1:4? The answer to this question is thus surprisingly

¹ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 192.

² Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 192.

connected to Greek allegory. Allegorizing the Bible became very popular with all too many after the Old Testament was translated into Greek in Alexandria, Egypt, circa 250 B.C.—the very heart of Hellenistic culture during the later Intertestamental period. This interpretive practice was then unfortunately carried over into the New Testament church as well during the first century A.D. In so doing, the historical meaning of the Old Testament was often syncretized into a Hellenistic Jewish mythology of sorts that was already causing much consternation in the apostolic church long before it became more settled into the long-standing dispute between the Antiochene and Alexandrian schools of interpretation during the age of the early church fathers. While the Antiochene school, represented by Chrysostom (A.D. 347–407), emphasized the historical meaning of the Scriptures, the Alexandrian school, represented by Origen (A.D. 185–253) and Augustine (A.D. 354–430), emphasized allegory in interpreting ancient religious texts—including the Greek Old Testament. Of special note, the apostle Paul’s home church was in Antioch near modern-day Syria. The relationship between the apostolic church of Antioch and the Antiochene school of interpreting the Bible historically in context most likely originated in the apostle Paul’s ministry there. Paul often emphasized the history of the Old Testament in his letters to correct Judaist distortions of the same record (Acts 11:20–30, 13:1–3, 14:24–28, 15:22–35, 18:22; Gal. 2–4; Rom. 4–5, 9–11).

On the other hand, Jewish writers from Alexandria, Egypt, which was the epicenter of Greek Hellenism and the birthplace of the Septuagint, popularized the use of Greek allegory in the interpretation of the Old Testament that was unfortunately passed down to all too many synagogues throughout the Greco-Roman empire of the apostle Paul’s day. This invariably contributed to a Hellenistic distortion of the biblical text that was very widespread—however sincerely or insincerely it may have all occurred. It was this pernicious syncretism between Judaism and Hellenism, between legalism and mysticism, that received the apostle Paul’s ire in the churches of Ephesus when he wrote 1 Timothy. Moreover, what was labeled, “the opposing arguments of what is falsely called ‘knowledge,’ ” (1 Tim. 6:20) is perhaps even closely connected to the Colossian heresy (Col. 2:1–23) that broke out a few years earlier

wherein Judaism, Hellenism, legalism, mysticism, and asceticism had sparked a very serious controversy in Colossae requiring the apostle Paul's special attention while he was still in Roman prison (Col. 4:10, 18). To apply Old Testament practices under the Law of Moses specifically and historically rooted in the promised land of Israel, and then transfer this to the New Testament church in Colossae, if not even later into the churches of Ephesus as well, would require much allegory of the Scriptural text to accomplish. It was this syncretistic mixture, already rampant in Judaism long before it began to seep into the early apostolic church, that Paul derisively characterized as "myths and endless genealogies."

THE MEANING OF *GENEALOGIA* DERIVED FROM ANCIENT GRECO-ROMAN PAGANISM

The Greek term *genealogia* is a compound word. It is made up of two terms, *genea* (γενεά) and *logia* (λογία), which literally means the study of ancestry or generational descent. While *genea* can thus mean either "birth" or "descent," according to Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (TDNT), the term is "common in the synoptics, rare in Paul, absent from John, including Revelation. As a purely formal concept, it is always qualified. It mostly denotes 'generation' in the sense of contemporaries. We often have the formula *hē genea autē* (ἡ γενεά αὐτή), as at Mark 8:12 (Luke 11:29, 30); 13:30 (Matt. 24:34; Luke 21:32); Matthew 11:16 (Luke 7:31); 12:41, 42 (Luke 11:31, 32); 23:36 (Luke 11:50, 51); Luke 17:25; Hebrews 3:10. This generation is to be understood temporally, but there is always a qualifying criticism."³ Thus the study of descent or generation, when it becomes pluralized and stretched over time, becomes a study of ancestry, historical lineage, parentage, generations—or even more simply, a family tree. *The Dictionary of Bible Languages with Semantic Domains* also adds the definitions of "human pedigree" and

³ G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley, and G. Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 663.

“family lineage” to its list of possible meanings.⁴ Lidell and Scott define *genealogia* as “tracing a pedigree.”⁵

The point of genealogy, therefore, was to trace someone or something back to its origins as far back as possible. In other words, the meaning of *genealogia* in ancient sources was broader than the modern connotation which popularly limits the term to just tracing family trees. Together with the family trees in ancient perception came the notion of their histories as well. Perhaps much like individual names in the ancient world had greater meaning than they do today, so too this was true relative to genealogies as well. More to the point, before the rise of secular Greek historiography with early historians like Thucydides and Polybius, the distinction between sacred and secular history was not understood, appreciated, seriously discussed, or even sought after. While the pagans usually mixed their understanding of the past with mythology, sadly, many Jews of the Greco-Roman empire likewise did the same. Religious history in one form or another, however variously understood in the ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman empire of the apostle Paul’s day, was the lens by which both pagans and Jews understood their past. While some Jewish authors were better than others in appreciating the meaning of their past borrowed from the pages of the Old Testament record, tracing genealogical roots back to their origins always was a religious endeavor as much as it was a historical one. In short, ancient genealogies had meaning beyond what is normally understood as a bare family genealogical tree.

Indeed, this can readily even be seen in Plato’s dialogue *Cratylus*. In the dialogue, Plato has his philosophical hero, Socrates, discussing the genealogy and history of Hesiod and the Greek gods of pagan mythology all in the same breath without any incongruity highlighted or noticed:

And Cronus, according to tradition, is the son of Uranus; but the upward gaze is rightly called by the name *urania* (οὐρανία), looking at the things

⁴ James Swanson, ed., *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains*, vol. Greek (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.), 1997.

⁵ H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, H. S. Jones, and R. McKenzie, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 343.

above (ὀρῶ τὰ ἄνω), and the astronomers say, Hermogenes, that from this looking people acquire a pure mind, and Uranus is correctly named. If I remembered the genealogy of Hesiod and the still earlier ancestors of the gods he mentions, I would have gone on examining the correctness of their names until I had made a complete trial whether this wisdom which has suddenly come to me, I know not whence, will fail or not.⁶

Hesiod's ancestry in the original Greek, (i.e., *tēn Hēsiodou genealogian* [τὴν Ἡσιόδου γενεαλογίαν]), is referred to by Socrates as a genealogical tree of his ancestral family, perfectly consistent with the presumed normal meaning of the term. Yet in the same sentence, Socrates then goes on to mention "the earlier ancestors of the gods" so that the "genealogy of Hesiod" is not sharply distinguished from the mythological stories of the Greek gods and heroes. In fact, since Homer and Hesiod are the very fathers of Greek mythology dating back to the 700s B.C., a discussion of their ancestry together with their associated pagan myths are thus impossible to disentangle. Indeed, even the Greek pantheon has its own genealogical family tree(s) where gods, supermen, and heroes can be traced back to their presumed origins in the ancient mythic past. That Socrates was discussing with his colleagues the meaning of names together with the etymology of words all dressed up in hermeneutical problems means that *genealogia* had a broader sense than merely referring to a physical family tree which modern readers may superimpose over ancient texts like 1 Timothy 1:4.

Such a broader conception of "genealogy" also shows up in the Hellenistic writings of the historian Polybius (200–118 B.C.). Yet unlike Plato and Socrates, and much more like the apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 1:4, Polybius uses the term somewhat pejoratively. In some fragments from Book IX in his works called *The Histories*, Polybius writes (395c–396d):

I am not unaware that my work owing to the uniformity of its composition has a certain severity, and will suit the taste and gain the approval of only

⁶ Plato, *Cratylus*, 396. Translation from Benjamin Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato* (New York: Macmillan and co., 1892), 338.

one class of reader. For nearly all other writers, or at least most of them, by dealing with every branch of history, attract many kinds of people to the perusal of their works. The genealogical side appeals to those who are fond of a story, and the account of colonies, the foundation of cities, and their ties of kindred, such as we find, for instance, in Ephorus, attracts the curious and lovers of recondite longer, while the student of politics is interested in the doings of nations, cities, and monarchs. As I have confined my attention strictly to these last matters and as my whole work treats of nothing else, it is, as I say, adapted only to one sort of reader, and its perusal will have no attractions for the larger number. I have stated elsewhere at some length my reason for choosing to exclude other branches of history and chronicle actions alone, but there is no harm in briefly reminding my readers of it here in order to impress it on them. Since genealogies, myths, the planting of colonies, the foundations of cities and their ties of kinship have been recounted by many writers and in many different styles, an author who undertakes at the present day to deal with these matters must either represent the work of others as being his own, a most disgraceful proceeding, or if he refuses to do this, must manifestly toil to no purpose, being constrained to avow that the matters on which he writes and to which he devotes his attention have been adequately narrated and handed down to posterity by previous authors. So omitting these things for the above and various other reasons, I decided on writing a history of actual events; firstly, because there is always some novelty to them which demands novel treatment — since it was not in the power of the ancients to narrate events subsequent to their own time — and secondly, owing to the great practical utility of such a history, both formerly and especially at the present day, when the progress of the arts and sciences has been so rapid, that those who study history are, we may almost say, provided with a method for dealing with any contingency that may arise. My aim, therefore, being not so much to entertain readers as to benefit those who pay careful attention, I disregarded other matters and was led to write this kind of history.⁷

⁷ Polybius, *The Histories*, IX.I. Translation from W. R. Paton, *The Histories*, vol. 4, books 9–15, revised by F. W. Walbank, Christian Habicht in *Loeb Classical Library* 159 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 2–7.

In this excerpt, Polybius, who was one of the more outstanding historians of the Greco-Roman period who broke away from its mythological moorings, contrasts his own style of writing from popular folklore—something which he directly calls “genealogies.”

Polybius even recognizes many readers will not appreciate the austerity of his concentration on “actions” alone and “actual events” in which the “doings of nations, cities, and monarchs” will take center stage rather than the genealogical stories of the colonial past largely rooted in myths which have already been recounted—whatever they may or may not be worth as mere folklore. Polybius is further known for emphasizing cause and effect relationships in the explanation of history, and for being a taskmaster on using good source documents. Furthermore, as far as Polybius represents it, true history will prove to be much more beneficial to his readers than merely entertaining people with genealogical stories of the mythical past. Polybius thus sharply contrasts genuine history from genealogies and myths. Polybius also advocates such actual histories of the real political world need to be absorbed by his contemporary readers because of the rapid progress being made in the arts and sciences of his own day.

Moreover, Polybius’s reference to a certain Ephorus in the citation is also noteworthy. Ephorus was another noteworthy Greek historian (400–330 B.C.). He is often quoted by others since he was known for writing universal histories which dive deep into the mythological folklore of ancient Greece. Anyone who wanted to study the histories of ancient Greece must thus refer to Ephorus. Ephorus organized his accounts into a readable format that were widely read. Most of his works have been lost, but some fragments remain, and many later writers cite him as did Polybius. Polybius categorized Ephorus’s style of “historical” writing as “genealogical,” which “appeals to those who are fond of a story, and the account of colonies, the foundation of cities, and their ties of kindred.” It was thus a history of ancestral origins rooted in legends, stories, folklore, and myth. While Polybius was not dismissive of Ephorus’s work per se, he still compared his work to “genealogies” and/or “stories.” As such, his writing has some historical value and is likewise popular and entertaining to the “curious.” Yet, as far as Polybius is concerned, it lacks truthful rigor.

Some 150 years after Polybius, however, Ephorus had fallen somewhat out of favor with scholars like Greco-Roman geographer Strabo (B.C. 63–23 A.D.). While Strabo does not use the term “genealogy” to describe Ephorus’s writings, in his famous works on Greco-Roman geography, he is critical of both Ephorus and Polybius.⁸ Strabo even alleges Polybius was too gratuitous toward Ephorus. Strabo believed Ephorus dabbled far too much into the ancient mythical past which was full of untruths. Here, we are now much closer to the territory of the apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 1:4 where he strongly criticizes the prevalence of genealogical teachings on the Mosaic Law which was causing much harm in the church. Much like Strabo, Paul compared such teachings in Titus 1:14 to “Jewish myths.” It is of special note that Strabo and Paul are on the same side of this debate. The primary difference is over what and who are the sources of such genealogies—Greek or Jewish? Both men are interested in truth at the expense of genealogies—whether Greek or Jewish myths.

Yet, while Strabo believes Ephorus is all too compromised with ancient folklore to the point that his historical accounts of the ancient past are naïve and thus not exactly trustworthy, neither does he completely dismiss the Greek mythical accounts either. He thus writes, “Without taking into consideration our remarks on the character and aptitude of Homer’s myths, a large array of writers who bear evidence to his statements, and the additional testimony of local tradition, are sufficient proof that his are not the inventions of poets or contemporary scribblers, but the record of real actors and real scenes.”⁹ Ancient Greek mythology has thus been excavated from the reality of genuine historical sources, so there is a “trace of faces and actions” which are historically true. What is therefore recognized in the “genealogies” of writers like Ephorus is a halfway house of sorts between real history and myth. As far as Polybius was concerned, Homer and Hesiod used such a mixture of myth and history to teach the young by building or framing ethical

⁸ Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo*, edited by H. L. Jones (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, Ltd.), 9.3.11, 1924.

⁹ Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo*, 1.2.15.

lifestyles. This then provided a cultural foundation upon which to build more virtuous lives beyond the bare bones of brute facts. Allegories borrowed from the mythical past were thus deemed necessary to transform ancient folklore into honorable lives today.

While Strabo did not believe in the fanciful activities of gods and heroes *per se*, from his viewpoint there was still enough truth in Greek mythology to garner respect as such stories form and shape young and naïve minds about origins, life, and culture. For Strabo, myth still had great meaning beyond the strict historical one. It is here where Greek allegorism of the past becomes so important to the Hellenistic culture of those times. Greek philosophers and scientists like Strabo disparaged Greek myths, however, Greek myths could be applied allegorically to give spiritual, ethical, and cultural guidelines to provide an honorable morality required of everyday life:

“The poets were by no means the first to avail themselves of myths. States and lawgivers had taken advantage of them long before, having observed the constitutional bias of mankind. Man is eager after knowledge, and the love of legend is but the prelude thereto. This is why children begin to listen to fables, and are acquainted with them before any other kind of knowledge; the cause of this is that the myth introduces them to a new train of ideas, relating not to everyday occurrences, but something in addition to these.”¹⁰

Considering myths to be a different “kind of knowledge,” Strabo believed they were critical for the proper spiritual formation of the young in particular, “To children we are obliged to hold out such enticements, in order that in riper years, when the mind is powerful, and no longer needs such stimulants, it may be prepared to enter on the study of actual realities. Every illiterate and uninstructed man is yet a child, and takes delight in fable. With the partially informed it is much the same; reason is not all-powerful within him, and he still possesses the tastes of a child.”¹¹

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.2.9.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Thus, very unlike the apostle Paul who says such “myths and endless genealogies” interfere with godly living, Strabo allegorizes them into ethics so that Greco-Roman morality was/is essentially based upon a genealogical mysticism that was very ubiquitous in those days. Strabo clarifies:

As we relate to children pleasing tales to incite them [to any course] of action, and frightful ones to deter them, such as those of Lamia, Gorgo, Ephialtes, and Mormolyca. So numbers of our citizens are incited to deeds of virtue by the beauties of fable, when they hear the poets in a strain of enthusiasm recording noble actions, such as the labors of Hercules or Theseus, and the honors bestowed on them by the gods, or even when they see paintings, sculptures, or figures bearing their romantic evidence to such events. In the same way they are restrained from vicious courses, when they think they have received from the gods by oracles or some other invisible intimations, threats, menaces, or chastisements, or even if they only believe they have befallen others.¹²

Furthermore, whereas the apostle Paul strongly warns Timothy to “have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women,” (1 Tim. 4:7), Strabo asserts otherwise, “The great mass of women and common people, cannot be induced by mere force of reason to devote themselves to piety, virtue, and honesty; superstition must therefore be employed, and even this is insufficient without the aid of the marvelous and the terrible. For what are the thunderbolts, the ægis, the trident, the torches, the dragons, the barbed thyrses, the arms of the gods, and all the paraphernalia of antique theology, but fables employed by the founders of states, as bugbears to frighten timorous minds.” More to the point, as the apostle Paul strongly emphasizes that the “mystery of godliness” is based on the revelatory truth of biblical history (1 Tim. 3:15–18), Strabo roots it in myth. Despite their transcendent or supernatural character, Paul builds all spiritual ethics upon the historical work of the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ (Acts 13:13–43, Rom. 6–8, Gal. 2–5, Col. 2–3). Strabo, however, uses myth, not history, to encourage most

¹² Ibid.

common folks into ethical living, “Such was mythology; and when our ancestors found it capable of subserving the purposes of social and political life, and even contributing to the knowledge of truth, they continued the education of childhood to maturer years, and maintained that poetry was sufficient to form the understanding of every age.”

As such, by allegorizing the mythical past for the sake of everyday consumption, Strabo thus allows for fictional untruths to become the primary ethical guide for most of society outside of the enlightened few like himself, “Present-day poetry is the main agent which instructs our people and crowds our theatres. Homer here stands pre-eminent, but in truth, all the early historians and natural philosophers were mythologists as well. Thus, it is that our poet, though he sometimes employs fiction for the purposes of instruction, always gives the preference to truth; he makes use of what is false, merely tolerating it in order the more easily to lead and govern the multitude.” While present-day common experience is thus historically real, ethics demand fictitious mythology to govern the crowds, and allegory was the primary means upon which such a contradictory edifice was built. This is precisely what the apostle Paul would never allow since the gospel truth is based on facts of biblical history no matter how transcendent or miraculous such a history was carried out or fulfilled in real time (Acts 13:16–41, 1 Cor. 15:1–10). Fiction is not truth. It is thus a white lie of sorts, historically forbidden by the ninth commandment of the Mosaic Law, which is then updated and forbidden in the New Testament as well (Exod. 20:16, Col. 3:9–11).

For Strabo, as long as such myths and genealogies were understood allegorically and not literally, they could benefit all of society. Yet, on the other hand, if such myths were to be taken as factually true, Strabo cautions, “But nothing can be said against the man who understands the words of the poet in a rational way.”¹³ In truth, therefore, Strabo justifies allegory to rescue Homer and Hesiod from the abyss of madness.¹⁴ While he may not have used the term “genealogies” currently witnessed in the limited fragments available today, his apologetic program for

¹³ Ibid, 1.2.12.

¹⁴ Ibid, 1.2.30.

rescuing the Greek poets of the mythical past for present day application is clearly allegorical and borrowed from earlier writers who did use it.

What is thus remarkable about Strabo is his defense of Homer even though he does not take him seriously as a modern-day geographer. Contrast this with the apostle Paul and the critical importance of the promised land of Israel where geography, history, and ethics all factually converge into a transcendent reality never grasped or attained to by the Greek mind. Strabo used the allegorical method of interpretation to soften his criticism of the ancient Greek fathers of mythology. In 1 Timothy, however, Paul does nothing of the kind. Strabo may thus dispute with Ephorus's excessive myth making, and even criticize Polybius for taking Ephorus too seriously where fiction was conflated with fact. Yet, Greek myth must still be allegorized to help people live virtuous lives in the Hellenistic present of his own day.

More complexly, Ephorus himself did recognize myth as myth in other areas. He himself also allegorized, knowing full well the mythical implications of his subject matter. How allegorical does one wish to be, was thus also an argument over how far does one wish to go or to what degree? As time went on, Greek scientists and historians like Strabo became more allegorical, not less. This has its own problems largely unexamined by Strabo. His criticisms of Ephorus thus ring somewhat hollow since he still maintains the goodness of the mythical past in some sense. How something fictional can lead to something virtuously real today is a blatant contradiction never entertained by the apostle Paul. While Strabo takes Ephorus to task for his inconsistencies, he himself needs to take a closer look in the mirror, "But what could be more mythical than Apollo shooting with arrows and punishing Tityuses and Pythons, and traveling from Athens to Delphi and visiting the whole earth? But if Ephorus did not take these stories for myths, by what right did he call the mythological Themis a woman, and the mythological Dragon a human being—unless he wished to confound the two types, history and myth?"¹⁵ It would thus behoove Strabo to become much more like the

¹⁵ Ibid., 9.3.12.

apostle Paul. Yet, Strabo was unable to do so because he had no proper grounding in the historical revelation of New Testament truth.

Whatever the exact case may be in all this, the confounding of history and myth is perhaps precisely what is largely meant by the Greek term “genealogies” during Greco-Roman times including when the New Testament was being written. As such, “the formula *μῦθοι καὶ γενεαλογίαί* ... may be regarded as traditional”¹⁶ in terms of usage at the time. It was a characterization often used to categorize genres that mixed ancient history with ancestry and myth, and allegory was the way in which such a mixture was accepted and justified. Greek genealogies and allegory thus invariably went hand in hand. Paul, on the other hand, rarely used allegory to interpret the Old Testament—a very important distinction that separates the apostle of the Gentiles from the Greco-Roman geographer. In other words, while Strabo found some very good uses for allegory, particularly in the ethical realm, Paul rarely did—if at all.

NEAR EASTERN MYTHOLOGY AND HISTORY

The mixing of historical annals, monuments, genealogies, and myths was not something unique to the Greco-Roman world. It was widespread throughout the ancient Near East—whether in Egypt, Mesopotamia, or Babylon. In fact, ancient Greece borrowed much from the Near East relative to its own mythical history of gods and heroes.¹⁷ For example, in ancient Mesopotamia, the Sumerian epic or heroic legend of Gilgamesh can be cross-connected to the last king named Agga of a long genealogical list.¹⁸ Agga is Gilgamesh’s opponent. Agga is the last king noted on the genealogical list precisely because Gilgamesh defeated him. The mythology in all such stories is evident. Yet, at the same time, while the

¹⁶ Kittel, Bromiley, and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary*, 664.

¹⁷ C. Bradford Welles, “The Hellenistic Orient,” in *The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East*, edited by Robert Dentan (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1955), 137–38.

¹⁸ E.A. Speiser, “Ancient Mesopotamia,” in *The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East*, 52–53.

Epic of Gilgamesh itself is very mythological, it cannot be “dismissed outright as fictional.”¹⁹ Historical truth is mixed in with legends, folklore, and myths. Indeed, “The Sumerians saw in the society of the gods the prototype of human history. The two interpenetrated.”²⁰ The recording of omens and dynasties thus went hand in hand as did annals and letters to gods which extended even into early Assyrian times.²¹ In particular, Assyrian historiography suffers much from “excessive piety”²² so that the line between real history and legend is difficult to demarcate.

While it is true the Egyptians had no particular term which matched the meaning of the word “history” as is understood today, they were still “intensely interested in the origin of the universe, in their gods, in life after death, and in making and preserving records of their past as a nation.”²³ Although not as detailed or given as much content as one might read in 1–2 Kings or even in 1–2 Chronicles from the pages of the Old Testament, Egyptian “kings carefully recorded what they may be called the facts of public history, and private individuals took great pains to preserve those facts of personal history which would reflect credit upon them.”²⁴ Along with such public historical records came genealogies and ancestry lists of both gods and kings as well.

The mythology and historical lines related to such genealogies were thus inextricably intertwined, “Mention should be made of the Egyptian belief that the long line of kings of the two separate kingdoms was preceded by ... great gods who reigned on earth successively, presumably over the whole of Egypt. In some of their king lists the Egyptians named the gods who had thus reigned on earth before departing to the sky or to the underworld.”²⁵ The Egyptian genealogical royal lists even had their ultimate ancestry coming from the gods themselves as “the rulers of both the northern and the southern kingdoms worshiped Horus, the

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 61–65.

²² *Ibid.*, 67.

²³ Ludlow Bull, “Ancient Egypt,” in *The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East*, 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

last of the god-kings, and traced their descent from him, each king being considered a reincarnation of Horus himself.”²⁶

The ancient conception of history in Egypt was therefore a mixture of genealogy and myth. Such views carried all the way through to the Hellenistic Greco-Roman empire despite the new rationalistic historical traditions which were born in the 400s B.C. The father of history in the more modern sense was Herodotus (484–425 B.C.). He emphasized reason, the self-revelation²⁷ of historical events, humanistic actions, and cause/effect explanations in contrast to mythological stories to understand and remember the past so that it would not be forgotten.²⁸ The word “history is a Greek word meaning simply an investigation or inquiry. Herodotus, who uses it in the title of his work, thereby marks a literary revolution.”²⁹ Thucydides (460–400 B.C.), Xenophon (430–354 B.C.), Polybius, Livy (60–15 B.C.), and Tacitus (A.D. 55–120) later followed the father of history in varying degrees.

As such, “the conversion of legend writing into the science of history was not native to the Greek mind, it was a fifth century B.C. invention, and Herodotus was the man who invented it.”³⁰ Before the fifth century B.C., the Greek term for history simply meant research or inquiry. The historical tradition established by Herodotus converted that term into an inquiry of the factual past based on reason, human actions, politics, and war so that it takes on a more specialized meaning. Yet such historians of the time still were influenced by various forms of pagan mysticism in varying degrees as can be readily seen in their writings. Even modern and postmodern conceptions of the past cannot escape many of its other foundational moorings rooted in the Judeo-Christian theological tradition where eschatological views of history are invariably intermixed within its framework of presumed scientific research.³¹

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁸ Karl Lowith, *Meaning in History: Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History Traced* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 6.

²⁹ R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 18–19.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

³¹ Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 46–56.

In other words, “the Christian and post-Christian outlook on history is futuristic, perverting the classical meaning of *historein*, which is related to present and past events. In the Greek and Roman mythologies and genealogies the past is represented as an everlasting foundation.”³² In spite of the later Greco-Roman scholars who invented the concept of history as is understood and practiced today, much paganism and mysticism remained in New Testament times just as is the case today when progressivist secularized eschatologies of various utopianisms borrowed from the biblical past are superimposed over the interpretation of the history of the world from a modern/postmodern point of view. As such, genealogical myths and stories from the ancient pagan past were still very prevalent and popular during the times of the New Testament in spite of Hellenistic secularity.

Ancient paganism was thriving in the Greco-Roman empire of St. Paul’s day despite the rationalism of many a scholar like Herodotos, Polybius, and Strabo. Strangely, such scholars surprisingly ended up supporting the mythology of the ancient pagan past through allegorical interpretations to save face from the madness of their pagan past if taken at face value. Surprisingly enough therefore, Paul’s animosity directed against “myths and endless genealogies” was much stronger than even the likes of Herodotus, Polybius, and Strabo might have considered. Such a reality should cause much pause on how modern and postmodern historians usually characterize the historical and factual character of the Scriptures. In other words, Paul’s understanding of the Scriptures is at great odds with “myths and endless genealogies” and “worldly fables fit only for old women.”

FROM PHILO TO STEPHEN AND PAUL

In Philo’s (20 B.C.–A.D. 50) *A Treatise on the Life of Moses*, the much-celebrated Jewish scholar, who was born, raised, and resided in the Egyptian Hellenism of Alexandria, specifically mentions the genealogical

³² Lowith, *Meaning in History*, 6.

texts found in the Old Testament.³³ Such a discussion historically parallels within a few decades at the very most, the same time frame of the apostle Paul's day. In a very erudite summary of the first book of Moses, otherwise known as Genesis, after discussing how the Septuagint was painstakingly translated "literally" from the Hebrew notwithstanding the many varied words and synonyms available to the translators because of the richness of the Greek language, Philo unloads this amazing paragraph upon his readers:

The above is sufficient in itself as a high commendation to the lawgiver; but there is another still greater contained in the sacred books themselves, and to these we must now turn to shew the great qualities of the writer. They consist of two parts: one the historical, the other concerned with commands and prohibitions, and of this we will speak later, after first treating fully what comes first in order. One division of the historical side deals with the creation of the world, the other with particular persons, and this last partly with the punishment of the impious, partly with the honouring of the just. We must now give the reason why he began his lawbook with the history, and put the commands and prohibitions in the second place. He did not, like any historian, make it his business to leave behind for posterity records of ancient deeds for the pleasant but unimproving entertainment which they give; but, in relating the history of early times, and going for its beginning right to the creation of the universe, he wished to shew two most essential things: first that the Father and Maker of the world was in the truest sense also its Lawgiver, secondly that he who would observe the laws will accept gladly the duty of following nature and live in accordance with the ordering of the universe, so that his deeds are attuned to harmony with his words and his words with his deeds.³⁴

Although Philo is known for his allegorical interpretation, here he shows his acumen when it comes to discerning the straightforward

³³ C. D. Yonge, *The Works of Philo* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 494–495.

³⁴ Philo, "Moses I and II." *Philo*, vol. 6, trans. F. H. Colson, *Loeb Classical Library*, 289 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935), 470–473.

sense of Scripture, easily demonstrating he was more than able to understand it in its historical, normal everyday sense without resorting to fanciful interpretations.

In many ways, Philo is here acting in the tradition of Polybius and Strabo who well-nigh understood the difference between fact and fiction but still did not repudiate the ancient myths out of hand. Instead, they saved the ancient mythological ancestries of the gods and heroes by looking for a deeper meaning behind the text through the practice of allegorism. Unfortunately, Philo also did likewise relative to the ancient histories of the Old Testament as did many Hellenistic Jews who inherited such an influential Greek tradition that permeated the entire cultural landscape of the time. While Baalism was the forbidden syncretism during the pre-exilic times of Israel, Greek Hellenism increasingly dominated Judaism from Alexander the Great up until the time of the New Testament.

Moreover, even the more Orthodox Jews had their own oral laws, traditions, and allegories as well, which can be readily seen in the writings of Josephus (A.D. 37–100). Josephus was an aristocratic Pharisee of priestly descent. He was also an excellent historian. Yet, he was still not able to escape the clutches of allegorism which had plagued the study of ancient Greco-Roman history for centuries. Some of Josephus's interpretations of the Old Testament, particularly in Genesis, are allegorical. It is in this mixture of allegory and history, often mildly presented by erudite scholars who knew the difference between them, that will help sort out the difficulties of Paul's derision of "endless genealogies" in 1 Timothy. Meaning that if good Jewish scholars (presumed to be respectably orthodox like Philo and Josephus) can easily fall prey to allegory, then so can all too many others as well—perhaps even in the New Testament church as well since Paul has to write a strong letter to Timothy to correct such tendencies.

From his *Works of Moses*, Philo clearly defines what genealogy means taken directly from the text of Genesis, "Again, the historical part may be subdivided into the account of the creation of the world, and the genealogical part. And the genealogical part, or the history of the different families ..." Philo, therefore, designated the "genealogical

part” as “a history of the different families” contained throughout the book of Genesis. Furthermore, “the history of the different families” is clearly delineated in Genesis.

In fact, a rough and ready outline of Genesis can easily be built upon the different family ancestries which include a genealogical list followed by and/or interspersed with the history of that family tree. Moses wrote and wrapped Genesis around the Hebrew term *tôlēdōt* (תּוֹלְדוֹת) which is translated in English as “generations.” Yet the Greek LXX uses the term *genesis* (γένεσις) which transliterates into English as “genesis,” but means “origin” or “descent” or even sometimes “genealogy.” As such, when Moses writes, “These are the generations of” (Gen. 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2), he is providing clear historical markers to go into a different direction which will reveal the following history of the patriarchal ancestors he just listed. The history given in Genesis is therefore a history lesson of its genealogies.

Instead of giving an ancestral list of mythical gods and ancient heroes as was the case with the Mesopotamians, Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans, the “generations of the heavens and earth” (Gen. 2:4) presents the creation of the world by the Creator God who spoke the universe into existence by all His powerful word, including the creation of Adam and Eve in the paradisaical garden of Eden. Here, “generation” can easily mean “account” as it is translated in English. The idea of “account” or “record” is thus strongly implied by the term used in Genesis.

The “generations of Adam” in 5:1–6:8 are then presented within the chaotic context of the antediluvian world of Genesis 4–6 destroyed by the great flood because of the rampaging growth of human sin. The “generations of Noah” and his family during the apocalyptic time of the great flood then stretch to Genesis 10:1 in which “the generations of Shem, Ham, and Japheth” are then given. Here is seen the Table of Nations together with their ancestral family lists which have been shown to be very authentic from a historical point of view. Within this context, the history of Nimrod and the tower of Babel are provided. Moses then starts a new direction in Genesis 11:27 to 25:11 which records the “generations of Terah” that invariably focus on the ancestral history of Abraham, the father of the Jewish faith. The history of Abraham

is then replaced with the “generations of Ishmael” (Gen. 25:12) and then more particularly “of Isaac” (Gen. 25:19). The ancestral family history of Isaac then carries forward all the way to “the generations of Esau” (Gen. 36:1, 9). This is followed up with “the generations of Jacob” (Gen. 37:2) which carries Genesis to its conclusion with the ancestral history given of Jacob and his twelve sons who all end up in Egypt.

The book of Genesis thus provides the paradigm on how to properly present history and ancestry together without resorting to fanciful myths which were so characteristic of those ancient times. The genealogical histories of Genesis are painstakingly conservative compared to the other pagan myths of the great flood and the mythic “heroes of renown,” which Moses simply records that they all died in the deluge with few comments. It is also very likely, despite the many controversies surrounding Genesis 6 and the angelic infiltration of the human race recorded there, that such events prior to the great flood actually form the historical basis upon which the mythical tales of gods and heroes so prevalent in Near Eastern and Greek mythology, were excavated from. In other words, what Moses purposefully minimizes, pagans exalted into false worldviews which became the very religious foundations of their respective countries and nations. Genesis is thus an incredible book of origins. It provides a history and ancestry to historically elucidate from where man and the Jewish people have all come from. Such a genealogical presentation of history did not go unnoticed, including by Philo himself who understood its historical significance. What was sadly too unnoticed, as is the case today as well, was that the pagan genealogical myths were but poor counterfeits in comparison to Genesis.

It is thus in Philo’s *A Treatise on the Life of Moses* wherein is found perhaps the most fertile ground to help determine Paul’s usage of the term “genealogies” in 1 Timothy. Not only is the time reference very close to the apostle’s own day but also Philo would have been someone of a similar mindset who was among Paul’s primary enemies on the Hellenistic mission field. Indeed, Philo was a leading Jew of Alexandria. “Philo of Alexandria stands at the crossroads of three great civilizations of antiquity: the Judaic, the Greek, and the Christian. Philo’s primary heritage was that of biblical Judaism, but in the form it had taken

on in the Diaspora of the Hellenistic world.”³⁵ In the face of growing persecution against the Jews in Alexandria, Philo was even dispatched to Rome in order to defend the Jewish people before Caesar Caligula.³⁶ Philo was thus considered a godly representative of Judaism in a large city where many devout Jews lived, and had lived for a very long time. As such, whatever may be some of the scholarly debates over how orthodox Philo was, he was considered devout and scholarly enough to defend the Jewish faith in Rome in the late 30s A.D. This would have closely coincided with the conversion of St. Paul in Acts 9 on the road to Damascus. Philo’s family was aristocratic. He had connections not only to the Herodian dynasty but even to Roman royalty as well.³⁷ Some have conjectured Philo, like Josephus after him, was of priestly descent.³⁸

More to the point, Alexandria, the home of the Septuagint, which Paul quoted often in the New Testament, was ground zero for Hellenistic culture that most certainly had great influences over the eastern Greco–Roman empire in Asia and Galatia where the apostle suffered greatly on the mission field. The opposition between Paul’s grace gospel and Hellenistic Judaism is on full display recorded by Luke in Acts 13–14. While the Judaism of Jerusalem was, of course, extremely antagonistic against Paul’s law-free grace gospel, it is often neglected that the Jews who made Paul suffer the most on the mission field were of the Hellenistic variety scattered all over Syria, Galatia, Asia, and Macedonia, not to mention some of the problems he faced in Corinth as well. While it is widely understood that Paul was persecuted by Jews from all over the Roman Empire, what is not appreciated nearly enough is their Hellenism. They were the primary enemies of Paul for the simple reason that he was in their backyard where he did most of his apostolic work.

Yet there is a most significant history lesson given in Acts 6–8 which preceded and presaged Paul’s conversion and missionary journeys

³⁵ Adam Kamesar, “Introduction” in *Cambridge Companion to Philo*, edited by Adam Kamesar (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1.

³⁶ Daniel R. Schwartz, “Philo, His Family, and His Times,” in *Cambridge Companion to Philo*, 10.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 12–14.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

which was of the same hostile spirit. Indeed, when Stephen himself was stoned to death by the Jerusalem Jews with Paul standing nearby in hearty agreement (Acts 6–9), it was the Hellenistic Jews who initiated and stoked up the controversy which led to the first martyrdom of the New Testament church. Luke specifically mentions, “But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, including both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and argued with Stephen” (Acts 6:9). Luke then adds it was they who “secretly induced men to say, ‘We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.’ And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes, and they came up to him and dragged him away and brought him before the Council” (Acts 6:11–12). According to Deuteronomy 13, Jews with false doctrines must be thoroughly investigated. Stephen was thus given the opportunity afforded him by the Mosaic Law to defend his position before the Jerusalem Council vividly described in Acts 7.

Yet, Stephen’s defense was a straightforward history lesson, replete with one historical example after the next, chronologically presented in context. Stephen then concluded his defense by applying his message to his present-day audience so that, ironically enough, his accusers were instead accused rather than himself. In fact, using the history of the Old Testament, Stephen accused his listeners of committing the same sins as their forefathers. Stephen’s hearers were so deeply convicted, they went into a mindless rage and murdered him. Here is seen the first inklings of how the Old Testament record, understood historically in context, was used to contradict the Judaism of the New Testament era which Paul later spread and expanded in his missionary journeys across the Greco–Roman Empire. At Stephen’s defense, historical lines were drawn in the sand which remained throughout the writing of the rest of the New Testament.

Indeed, many of Paul’s arguments against Hellenistic Judaism taken from the Old Testament, showcased particularly in Galatians and Romans, were, like Stephen’s defense, directly derived from the text itself interpreted in historical context. Some of the most important arguments presented by Paul, which laid down the critical importance of salvation

by faith apart from works, were in essence, over simple historical questions addressing which came first, Abraham or Moses, justification or circumcision, the Exodus or the Mosaic Law, Adam or Christ, Esau or Jacob. In other words, the Law itself, (i.e., Genesis to Deuteronomy), understood historically in context, teaches justification by faith apart from the works of the Law. Contrary to popular opinion, Paul was thus being perfectly consistent with what the historical record of the Old Testament teaches. The contemporary Judaism of Paul's day needed to be corrected over what they had historically forgotten. Such was even a constant warning seen throughout the Old Testament, "Do not forget" or "Remember." Even Jesus often criticized the leaders of Israel in the Gospels with the simple rebuke, "Have you not read?" More importantly, how was it that Judaism forgot its own history? The Jewish leaders certainly read the same passages of Scripture but came up with far different conclusions. It was their inability to understand the Torah historically in context which lay at the heart of the problem. This also produced many false doctrines that the Old Testament never even taught.

Accordingly, the climax of Stephen's sermon in Acts 7:48–51 was that his views on the Jerusalem Temple were completely defensible and consistent with the historical record of the Torah itself. Stephen quotes Isaiah 66 and argues his views on the Jerusalem Temple are the same as Isaiah's. Immediately following his citation of Isaiah 66:1 in which the infinite greatness of God's dwelling cannot be reduced to a single structure on the earth, Stephen then rebukes his present audience at Jerusalem that the Lord was not pleased with the abject temple ritualism of the sage's day. The same historical truth of Isaiah's strong message was thus no less true today aimed directly against the leaders of Jerusalem. With echoes going all the way back even to King Solomon, the very builder of the Jerusalem Temple who also well understood that the greatness of God cannot be contained in any earthly structure (1 Kings 8:27), Isaiah thus rebuked the people of his own day severely for not believing such basic truths and realities so clearly taught in Scripture:

But he who kills an ox is *like* one who slays a man; He who sacrifices a lamb is *like* the one who breaks a dog's neck; He who offers a grain

offering *is like one who offers* swine's blood; He who burns incense is *like* the one who blesses an idol. As they have chosen their *own* ways, and their soul delights in their abominations, so I will choose their punishments and will bring on them what they dread. Because I called, but no one answered; I spoke, but they did not listen. And they did evil in My sight and chose that in which I did not delight (Isa. 66:2–5).

Isaiah 66 makes very clear under no uncertain conditions that the humble attention and practice of the word of God itself was more important than legalistically performing bald rituals without meaning, “But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.” A sacrificial life based on the application of the Scriptures into one's own life is far more important to God than merely offering legalistic prescriptions to simply carry out the religious system without any appreciation for what it all meant or stood for. Even King Saul lost his kingdom over his false ritualism, a history lesson that David later deeply learned from (1 Sam. 15:22–23, Ps. 40).

For believing and presenting such straightforward history lessons from the Bible, Stephen was murdered by his own kinsmen. Again, how was it they refused to historically remember the words of Samuel, David, Solomon, or even Isaiah the prophet? Though the Judaists fancied themselves as experts in the Law and of the entire Old Testament, their understanding and application were greatly wanting. Such careless misinterpretation and misunderstanding of the historical meaning of the Scriptures quickly led to murder and the breaking of the sixth commandment in real present time. Since they missed it in the past, they invariably missed it in the present as well. Jesus Himself summarized this problem at one of the Jewish feasts, “For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me” (John 5:46).

With regard to Stephen's trial and martyrdom, whatever differences there may have been between the Hellenistic and Jerusalem Jews, they both came together as one to condemn him. The same was true even many years later in Acts 21 when the apostle Paul was almost killed by rioting Hellenistic Jews from Asia (Acts 21:27–33). The same charges leveled against Stephen were essentially repeated against Paul

in Acts 21, “Men of Israel, come to our aid! This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people and the Law and this place; and besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place” (Acts 21:28).

Like Stephen before him, such charges were all untrue. They were mere stereotypes or straw men devoid of substance. In the same way they misunderstood the Scriptures, so they invariably misunderstood the real historical lives of Stephen and Paul as well, not to mention Jesus Himself. Like Stephen’s understanding of David, Solomon, and Isaiah, so Paul also wrote, just before the Acts 21 Jerusalem riot, his letter to the Roman Christians in which he asked, “Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law” (Rom. 3:31). In Romans 3:31, Paul had just quoted a whole string of psalms from the Old Testament Torah to make his point. In Romans 4, Paul then goes back farther and deeper into Genesis to present the great meaning of the first book of the law from chapters 15–17 on how Abraham’s justification before God was a historical precedent to how all people are justified by faith apart from their own works. In the first book of the Law, Moses records that Abraham, for all practical purposes, was a justified Gentile before he became a circumcised Jew. Such a historical understanding of the Torah continues throughout Romans 5–11 as Paul marshals his strong case for a rich and gracious salvation history for both Jews and Gentiles alike. Paul strings together a whole host of citations from the history of the Old Testament in a question/answer format³⁹ to teach his readers about the great meaning of the Christian faith.

In many ways, Paul’s arguments in Romans, rooted in the straightforward historical meaning of the Old Testament record itself, resemble Stephen’s history lesson given in Acts 7 as the apostle strongly argues that the gracious history of the Torah, which teaches salvation by grace through faith apart from works, is by no means lawless as so many of his detractors had presumed. On the contrary, the original historical

³⁹ There are some eighty questions and answers to those questions given in the book of Romans.

meaning of the Old Testament relative to justification, grace, covenants, faith, law, works, and salvation, was all on Paul's side as it was similarly in the case of Stephen. Not only does Paul use the historicity of Abraham, David, Isaac, Sara, and Adam to make his strong case in Romans 4–5, but revisits the whole issue in Romans 9–11 citing from any number of historical personages whose very history taught the same doctrines. In addition to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David who are referred to all over again, in Romans 9–11, Paul goes on to historically cite Jacob, Esau, Moses, Pharaoh, Jeremiah, Hosea, Isaiah, and even the chroniclers of the kings related to Elijah's ministry.

In addition, Stephen's history lesson given in Acts 7 undoubtedly stayed with Paul throughout his life and ministry. Paul was present when Stephen gave his message. In fact, Stephen's prayer for his antagonists was probably answered by the Lord relative to the salvation of the apostle Paul in Acts 9. Thus, perhaps very unsurprisingly, in Acts 13, Paul essentially gave the same history lesson before a synagogue in Pisidian Antioch that Stephen gave years earlier in Acts 7. Paul's history lesson in Pisidian Antioch also led to much opposition among the Hellenistic Jews of Galatia (Acts 13–14). At one point, Paul himself was stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:19). Paul received the same treatment he applauded back in Acts 8:1 against Stephen.

Moreover, when Paul was forced to try and correct the inherent legalism and ritualism of the Hellenistic Jews in the book of Galatians, he once again used Old Testament history to do it. In Galatians 3–4, Paul summarized the entire history of the Old Testament, a precursor to the book of Romans, to teach the gracious salvation history of the Torah itself which the Judaizers had forgotten historically and thus greatly confused. The history of the Old Testament clearly teaches that salvation is law-free, but not lawless, the great theme of the apostle Paul's ministry for so many years.

Aside from the one exception of Galatians 4:24–31 presented as an allegory, such a genealogical history of the heroes of the faith taken from the pages of the Old Testament, are not presented as mythical or even presented in any allegorical way. They are always presented as real historical men in real historical times, the great meaning of which

has been too often ignored in Judaism, whether by Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem, or by the Hellenistic Jews of the Diaspora. Paul's gracious salvation and ethics are based on straightforward biblical history (Gal. 4:1–7).

Judaism, on the other hand, was based on a mixture of history, mysticism, tradition, legalism, myth, and allegory too often akin to paganism (Gal. 4:8–11). Judaism moralized over the presumed weaknesses of a bare historical record seemingly too dull, amoral, and distant to help one live properly, religiously speaking—particularly in the contemporary world of the Hellenistic Greco-Roman empire. Yet at this juncture, they commit the same sins as Ephorus, Polybius, and Strabo did. All such men could not grasp how historical facts can lead to genuine ethics. As such, Paul was most certainly writing and correcting Hellenistic Christian Jews in both the books of Galatians and Romans. They were far too influenced by their Jewish brothers and the teachers of Judaism wherein the oral law trumped the straightforward historical meaning of the Scriptures. They were also too deeply infected with the Greek Hellenism of their own day without even realizing it.

Furthermore, Paul's one use of allegory in Galatians 4:24–31 was also used against his enemies, most likely because they were the ones emphasizing salvation by works using the allegorical method of interpretation to overturn the clear historical meaning of the Old Testament. Paul thus concludes his very strong historical arguments summarized in Galatians 3–4 by emphasizing that he has an allegory too. However, Paul's allegory was not the foundation of his arguments, but the capstone. Because of the previous context, Paul uses it much more like a historical type or even an illustration than a typical allegory. It was also much more graciously rooted in the actual history of Isaac and Ishmael (Gal. 4:21–23; Gen. 25). In short, Paul's allegorical presentation of Isaac and Ishmael did not overturn salvation by grace like so many of the Judaizers had done before him. Unlike his enemies, Paul's allegory matched the historical record perfectly. Paul's later criticism in Ephesus of a Christianized Hellenistic Judaism overtaken by genealogical folklore at the expense of biblical history is thus fully warranted, and Timothy needs to rectify.

THE GENERAL CHARACTER OF GENEALOGIES IN 1 TIMOTHY 1:4

While there is some evidence in Jewish writings going as far back as 200 B.C., or perhaps even as late as A.D. 50, which speak of a Joseph-like Messiah from Joshua's lineage that might have indeed fueled a debate relative to the Messianic genealogies found in the Bible,⁴⁰ this does not contradict the understanding of Paul's mention of genealogies as a mixture of ancestral history and mythology. Such Jewish writings are pseudepigraphal and/or fragments of apostate Samaritan writings that even sometimes surface among the Dead Sea Scrolls. The *Testament of Naphtali* even suggested a Messiah along the ancestral line of Levi.⁴¹ As such, even if such writings were the object of Paul's genealogical ire in 1 Timothy, they too could and would have fallen into the same category of "myths and endless genealogies" (1 Tim. 1:4). Myth, allegory, folklore, and history were all frequently mixed together in the pseudepigrapha, not to mention in many other writings of Judaism—all in varying degrees but still off the mark. Later, the church itself all too often sadly followed suit.

That Paul even added the adjective "endless" to describe the "genealogies" also means that he is using the term very broadly in 1 Timothy. He is thus not focusing on a particular set of ancestral names, but is most concerned with what is being added to those names—which was a mixture of myth and history along the lines already discussed by Plato, Ephorus, Polybius, Strabo, and Philo—discussions which would have most certainly been seen in the Jewish pseudepigrapha as well. While Philo's "chief literary medium was biblical exegesis... he sought to interpret the Scriptures by reference to the most advanced and sophisticated

⁴⁰ David Mitchell, *Messiah Ben Joseph* (Newton Mearns, Scotland: Campbell Publications, 2016), 63–101.

⁴¹ "The *Testament of Naphtali* is unique among the Twelve Testaments in that a 12th-century medieval Hebrew manuscript exists of the complete text. Since medieval Christians did not write apocalyptic prophecy in Hebrew, and since Jews are unlikely to have translated and treasured a Christian document, this suggests that the *Testament of Naphtali* is of Israelite origin, as the 2,000-year-old Dead Sea scroll fragments of the Hebrew text also confirms." Mitchell, *Messiah Ben Joseph*, 73.

systems of thought of the times, which were those of Greek philosophy.”⁴² It is here where the division lies between Philo and the apostle Paul. While Philo saw “genealogies” as something relatively positive, Paul called them “endless” and “useless” speculative “myths” contrary to the Christian faith. That Philo’s writings on Moses and Genesis largely miss out on the grace of God seen throughout the book of Genesis, which Paul so otherwise champions, is at the very heart of the problem. Paul spent much of his ministry trying to prevent such teachings from penetrating into Christian circles. The heresies of legalism and mysticism were largely brought about by disregarding the clear history of the Old Testament that instead led to fanciful allegories.

Once the historical meaning of the Scriptural text in which various genealogies are found is abandoned, myths are inevitable. They then become “endless” when allegorism takes over, something readily seen throughout the ancient Greco-Roman world of Paul’s day starring both pagan and Jewish authors alike. How mild or how wild the allegories were is not singled out as Paul is against all kinds of folklore contrary to the true meaning of the historical revelation of the Bible. While authors like Plato, Polybius, Strabo, Philo, and Josephus were relatively mild in their allegorism, others like Ephorus were more free as they mixed ancestry, history, folklore, legend, and mythology together for the everyday consumption of the average man. Other authors, of course, were far worse in their allegorical confusion between history and legend, which very sadly also carried over into the early church fathers.

Paul’s grammar in 1 Timothy 1:4 also makes clear he is not sharply distinguishing myths from genealogies, “From 1 Timothy 1:4 we learn that γενεαλογίαι cannot be separated from μῦθοι.”⁴³ Since Paul speaks of legalists in the immediately following verses connected to the Mosaic Law (1 Tim. 1:6–7), there is no reason to doubt that Paul’s use of “myths and endless genealogies” is one and the same as in Titus 1:14 where he simply labels such similar teachings as “Jewish myths” and “the commandments of men.” Accordingly, Paul then later

⁴² Adam Kamesar, “Introduction” in *Cambridge Companion to Philo*, 1.

⁴³ Kittel, Bromiley, and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary*, 664.

writes, “But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless” (Titus 3:9). Paul’s condemnatory statements calling such teachings the “commandments of men” against a false asceticism (1 Tim. 4:1–5) and false knowledge (1 Tim. 6:20) bespeaks further of the same troubling aspects of mixing Scripture, mythology, ancestry, history, and allegory into a useless enterprise of philosophical speculation and foolishness. Kittel summarized “that the Rabbis had a lively interest in both their own genealogies and those of others, but especially those taken from the Old Testament, and that these played a role in the debates between the Jews and Jewish Christians. The errorists ... however, are ... syncretists.”⁴⁴ As noted earlier, *mythoi kai genealogiai* (μῦθοι καὶ γενεαλογίαι) “is a traditional Greek formula. Hence it is probable that the expression denotes the biblical history enriched by interpretations and additions.”⁴⁵ Such additions to Scripture were creeping into the New Testament church as well which now required Timothy’s and Titus’s special attention.

CONCLUSION

If one presumes the Greek term “genealogies” in 1 Timothy, or even in Titus, to strictly refer to a family tree or a mere list of names, Paul’s grave concerns about what was going on in either Ephesus or Crete, becomes largely inexplicable. Genealogical lists in the Bible are ubiquitous. They are a *bona fide* reflection of historical names that the Scripture records as being most pertinent to its own self-revelation relative to the Table of Nations, the history of Israel, and the coming of the Messiah. How it is that such genealogies became a flashpoint of serious controversies connected to false teaching in early New Testament church history can only be explained by the allegorism of genealogical mythology so popular at the time. To argue merely over genealogies

⁴⁴ Ibid., 665.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

related to who the Jewish Messiah might be is not broad enough to encapsulate the general nature of the false teaching Paul charged Timothy to stand up against. In short, Paul qualifies the “genealogies” as “endless.” This demands that the “genealogies” being spoken against be understood more broadly to include added mythology connected to genealogical lists, as even the words themselves indicate. That “myths” and “genealogies” were often understood together throughout the history of Greek Hellenism in the Greco-Roman empire thus makes Paul’s statements against them readily understood. It even helps explain the rest of 1 Timothy.

False teaching was growing in the Ephesian church which was wrestling over the historical significance of the Old Testament. The Old Testament is largely a historical account of God’s word revealed from within history despite its transcendental character. The Hebrew word “testimony” is a common term used throughout the Old Testament describing God’s revelatory actions and visitations, particularly within Israel’s rich salvation history program.⁴⁶ While the ultimate source of such revelation is from the metaphysical beyond, its divinely sanctioned truth is still revealed from within the historical confines of Israel’s history following the great flood and the Table of Nations. The object of faith for the Hebrew worshipers was therefore based on the historical revelation of the Old Testament, not upon the abstract, metaphysical beyond that had few boundaries to curtail the excesses of the human

⁴⁶ This statement is not meant to endorse reformed views on the Old Testament, which often blur the distinction between typology and allegory, but is to be understood dispensationally because only dispensationalism takes the history of Israel, historically understood in context, seriously. Reformed views on the Old Testament undermine their own emphasis upon “salvation history” because they spiritualize and/or allegorize too much of God’s plan through the nation of Israel that is anything but historical. This neglect of genuine Hebrew history is precisely part and parcel of the apostle Paul’s great concern with the false teaching going on in Ephesus at the time of the writing of 1 Timothy. The historical lessons of 1 Timothy still thus need to be learned today as well, particularly in the modern and postmodern church that is not all that far removed from the leaven of Greek Hellenism. Greek Hellenists like Strabo often characterized themselves as *modern* progressivists and scientists who still held onto *post-modern* relativism through allegorical interpretations taken from their own religious past for the sake of good morality and cultural upbringing, all the while damning their own mythical history in the process.

imagination. On the surface, such bare history lessons taken from the ancient Torah needed something more spiritual, (i.e., allegorical), to be updated for public consumption. Such concerns thus appeared to warrant allegorical interpretations and mystical applications from the presumed ancient folklore of early Old Testament times to bring it up to date. This would allow the teachings of the Torah to fit in better with the Hellenistic times of Greco-Roman education, philosophy, religion, and culture. Sadly, many Jews living in the diaspora of the Greco-Roman empire of those times, were also heavily influenced in varying degrees with such propaganda. Gentile proselytes would have received a steady diet of such teaching as well in their respective synagogues, not to mention that they were already Hellenists. When they became Christians, such influences remained that needed to be cleaned out and/or prevented from spreading. This was precisely Paul's charge to Timothy in Ephesus.

As such, rather than entertain anything worthy of such common Greco-Roman practices of interpreting the mythical past with mystical moralism and allegory, Paul entirely rejects this interpretive framework precisely because he did not view the Old Testament as myth, even with regard to Genesis. A historical understanding of Genesis was actually the very hallmark of much of Paul's biblical theology, the very foundation upon which he often criticized the Judaism of his day. To take a historical narrative like Genesis together with its critical genealogical lists and revelatory histories attached to them, and then interpret them like quasi-myths is to do violence to the Scriptures. Paul thus begins his first letter to Timothy by characterizing the "myths and endless genealogies" as "useless speculations" (1 Tim. 1:3-4).

More to the point, and very contrary to Strabo who found a place for myth and allegory relative to morality, the genealogical "myths" and "speculations" are "useless" precisely because it cannot produce godly fruit in the hearers that Paul desires most of all in the lives of the saints (1 Tim. 1:5; 6:3-5). This "useless" or "fruitless discussion" (1 Tim. 1:6) then produces a "morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction" (1 Tim. 6:4-5). Such

practices are anything but holy. Paul thus portrays this false teaching as an empty form of legalism (1 Tim. 1:7) in which the Law of Moses was not only being misunderstood, but also betrayed and misused, very contrary to the law-free grace gospel (1 Tim. 1:8). While Paul taught the “mystery of godliness” was a “great” divine revelation, it i.e., He was still factually “revealed in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16)—to which the apostle Paul himself was even a historical eyewitness of (Acts 9:1–19; Cor. 9:1; 1 Tim. 1:1, 12–17).

In 1 Timothy 4:1–5, Paul then later warns of the end game of this legalism in that it will eventually lead to a false worldwide asceticism that has its ultimate source rooted in “deceitful spirits and the doctrines of demons” (1 Tim 4:1). It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that Paul earlier warned of “myths and endless genealogies” which Greco-Roman idolatry was completely absorbed with. The relationship between mythology, false gods, demons, and idolatry runs deep. Ancient paganism spiritualized nature through worshiping the materially created world. Indeed, ancient pagan sources spoke much of the genealogies of the gods and demi-gods, together with their respective kings and/or heroes, as a counterfeit religion wherein physical idols replaced the invisible God of Scripture. While creation was thus converted into the worship of the material, history was then transformed into mythology. Such paganism was a veritable substitute for God, Creation, the Fall, and the genealogies of the nations in opposition to the Messianic Seed first historically promised to Adam and Noah before moving on to the patriarchs of Israel after the great flood. What was perhaps so insidious as addressed in 1 Timothy is that such mythology was now being used to misinterpret the Old Testament for the express purpose of undermining the spiritual health of the Ephesian churches. This, in turn, was leading the church to a false ethic every bit as fruitless as paganism itself. Even too much of Judaism had also fallen prey to Greek Hellenism (Gal. 4:8–11; Col. 2:8–23) in much the same way the pre-exilic Jews worshiped Baal. Such was the apostle Paul’s great concern about these “myths and endless genealogies” that were starting to get out of control in the churches of Ephesus under Timothy’s watch.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arndt, W., F. W. Danker, W. Bauer, and F. W. Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Bainton, Roland H., Ludlow Bull, Millar Burrows, George G. Cameron, Erich Dinkler, Julian Obermann, Paul Schubert, E. A. Speiser, and C. Bradford Welles. *The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East*. Edited by Robert C. Dentan. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1955.
- Collingwood, R. G. *The Idea of History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1956.
- Kamesar, Adam, ed. *Cambridge Companion to Philo*. Edited by Adam Kamesar. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Kittel, Gerhard, G. W. Bromiley, and G. Friedrich, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977.
- Liddell, H. G., R. Scott, H. S. Jones, and R. McKenzie, *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.
- Lowith, Karl. *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History Traced*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949.
- Mitchell, David. *Messiah Ben Joseph*. Newton Mearns, Scotland: Campbell Publications, 2016.
- Musser, R. Mark. "The Battle for the Historicity of the Bible: German Idealism, Theological Romanticism, Biblical Criticism, and Postmodern Fascism." Houston, TX: Chafer Seminary Bible Conference, March 14, 2017.
- Philo. *Philo*. Vol. 6. "Moses I and II." Translated by F. H. Colson. Loeb Classical Library 289. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935.
- Plato. *The Dialogues of Plato*. Vol. 1, translated by Benjamin Jowett. New York and London: Macmillan and Co., 1892.

- Polybius. *The Histories*. Vol. 4, books 9-15. Translated by W. R. Paton. Revised by F. W. Walbank, Christian Habicht. Loeb Classical Library 159. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011.
- Sandmel, Samuel, "Myths, Genealogies, and Jewish Myths, and the Writings of the Gospels," *Hebrew Union College Annual*. Vol. 27. Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College (1956): 201–11.
- Strabo. *The Geography of Strabo*. Edited by H. L. Jones. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1924.
- Swanson, James, ed. *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains*. Greek vol. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997.
- Yonge, C. D. *The Works of Philo*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995.

ARE ANY SIGNS OF CHRIST'S COMING IN MATTHEW 24:1–31?

Jeremy Thomas

Spokane Bible Church

Spokane, Washington, USA

Keywords: *Matthew 24, signs, Israel, church, rapture, abomination of desolation, earthquakes, wars, temple, dispensationalism, kingdom, deception, generation*

Abstract: *Dispensationalists continue to hold a wide variety of interpretations of Matthew 24–25. Views fall into two main groups: historical-futurist and strict futurist. Within the historical-futurist interpretation, there are the gap and chronological views. Both see the church, and sometimes the rapture and judgment seat of Christ, in Matthew 24 and 25. Within the strict futurist interpretation, there are the general to specific, chronological, and recapitulation interpretations. These views see only Israel in the discourse. Each interpretation is evaluated, and weaknesses are shown.*

The intended meaning is discovered by placing the discourse in the larger context of Matthew's argument and five discourses concerning the kingdom, then narrowing in on the immediate context of Jesus's denunciation of the Pharisees, His weeping over Jerusalem, and the disciple's questions. Exegetical reasons are given for showing a close connection between all the events in Matthew 24–25 and placing them all within Israel's 70th week. Along the way, the analogy of faith is used to demonstrate the view that best harmonizes with other prophetic passages.

The study shows that while there has been progress toward a more unified interpretation, dispensationalists are still wrestling with consistently applying the grammatical-historical hermeneutic to Matthew 24–25.

INTRODUCTION

Matthew 23:37–24:31 is the first section of our Lord’s greatest prophetic discourse, known popularly as the Olivet Discourse. This section continues to be interpreted a number of different ways by dispensationalists, especially 24:4–14. This paper is divided into two sections: 1) a sketch and critique of various views held by modern dispensationalists, and 2) a proposed interpretation consistent with Matthew’s argument.

The views of Matthew 24:4–31 by modern dispensationalists fall into two categories: 1) historical-futurist interpretations that blend fulfillment between the church age and the 70th week of Daniel, and 2) strict futurist interpretations that find fulfillment strictly during the 70th week of Daniel. The difference between the two basic categories is important since it has a bearing on whether one interprets events in the church age as signs that Christ’s coming is near, especially false Christs, wars, earthquakes, famines, and pestilence.

My approach is to evaluate the biblical text without asking whether a historic event may or may not be identified as the intent of the text. Proper exegesis requires exhausting the exegetical process and only afterward evaluating an event to determine if it is the intended event.

VIEWS HELD BY MODERN DISPENSATIONALISTS¹

In introducing the views held by some modern dispensationalists,² I am not disregarding non-dispensationalists. In fact, it’s interesting to study how non-dispensational interpretations of the discourse are similar to some interpretations of dispensationalists. For example,

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

² Many more views of dispensationalists are considered by Leonardo Costa at <https://i-disp.com/the-fulfillment-of-matthew-244-31-in-dispensational-tradition/>.

covenant theologian and amillennialist Louis Berkhof describes the presence of wars and earthquakes in the present age as characteristic of “... the natural order of events.”³ One wonders what the impact of such views has been on dispensationalists who view some or all of these verses as historically fulfilled in the church age. Beyond this brief mention of a non-dispensationalist, my aim is to have an in-house evaluation of the views of traditional dispensationalists who share the same grammatical-historical-contextual hermeneutic.

Historical-Future Views

Hiatus View

John Nelson Darby said the discourse concerns the Jews and Jerusalem as the center of the system before God. Verses 4–14 speak of the general condition of the disciples and of the world during the time of the testimony which is the administration of the gospel of the kingdom in the land of Israel. Therefore, Darby considered verses 4–14 to be fulfilled between A.D. 30 and the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, with a hiatus between verses 14 and 15 for the church age, followed by a resumption of fulfillment taking place in the second half of the 70th week beginning with the abomination of desolation.⁴ In his own words,

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

³ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 703.

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

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

Darby's interpretation is linked to a Jewish presence in the land with Jerusalem as the spotlight. Interestingly, Darby wrote this long before the establishment of the modern state of Israel in 1948 and before Jerusalem came under Jewish control in 1967.

Stanley Toussaint interpreted the discourse similarly to Darby. The disciples saw the fulfillment of verses 4–6 between A.D. 33–70. A hiatus of time (between verses 6 and 7) followed for the rest of the church age. Verses 7–14 will be fulfilled in the first half of the Tribulation, and verses 15–26 will be fulfilled in the second half of the Tribulation.⁶ Indicative of a hiatus, he said, “After warning His disciples lest they should be deceived by the presence of false messiahs and wars, the Lord goes on to give a very general picture of the period just preceding His coming.”⁷ The verse division for his hiatus is distinct from Darby's, but follows the same pattern of a break between events immediately following the first coming and events immediately preceding the second coming.

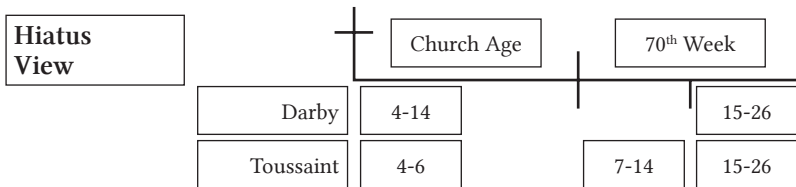
The strength of both views is that they both see the discourse as related to Israel only, even when they see historical fulfillment during the church age until A.D. 70. However, there are also weaknesses. First, there were no “false Christs” between A.D. 30 and A.D. 70. Some, such as Kenneth Gentry and Gary DeMar, have claimed there were, but their suggestions, on closer inspection, reveal they were false prophets. Ice said, “We possess no *historical* record of any false Messiahs having appeared *previous to the destruction of Jerusalem*.”⁸ Therefore, it is unlikely that Matthew 24:4–5 was fulfilled between A.D. 30 and A.D. 70. Second, Matthew 24:8 says the things in verses 4–8 are “the beginning of birth pangs.” To say that “the birth pangs” begin in verse 7, as Toussaint said, arbitrarily excludes verses 4–5. Why would they not begin with Jesus's answer in verse 4? And if they do begin in verse 4, as Darby claimed, then how can one legitimately begin the birth pangs in the early days of the pregnancy? By definition, birth pangs come at the end of the

⁶ Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1980), 270–78.

⁷ Toussaint, *Behold the King*, 271.

⁸ Thomas Ice, “An Interpretation of Matthew 24–25 (Part 6),” http://www.pre-trib.org/articles/view/an-interpretation-of-matthew-24-25-part-6#_ednref5.

pregnancy. Third, Matthew 24:34 says “this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.” While there are several interpretations of “this generation” *hē genea autē* (ἡ γενεὰ αὐτῆ),⁹ it seems clear from the previous illustration of the fig tree, that the meaning is “the generation that sees all these things” (24:33). The events occur within the same season. If that is the case, it is impossible to say that some of Matthew 24:4-14 was fulfilled historically in the first century, while the rest will be fulfilled in the future 70th week.



General and Specific View

C.I. Scofield viewed verses 4-14 as a general description of the present church age gathering into an awful intensity at the end of the age.¹⁰ By the “end of the age” he meant the 70th week. He saw the gospel of the kingdom in 24:14 as being preached by the Jewish remnant in the 70th week, “during the great tribulation, and immediately preceding the coming of the King in glory.”¹¹ Walvoord followed Scofield very closely. He said Matthew 24:4-14 is

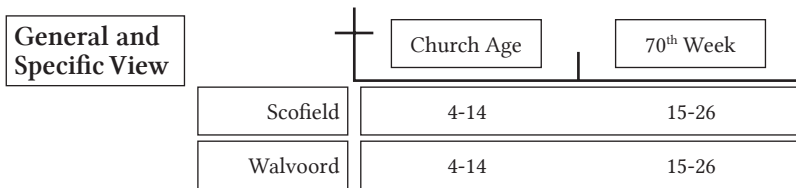
⁹ There are three major views of the meaning of “this generation.” First, some view “this generation” as the generation of disciples to whom He was speaking. The problem with this view is that the disciples He was speaking to did not see all these things. Second, some view “this generation” as the race of people, referring to the Jewish race. This is possible, but the word is not usually used this way and it is an unusual form of argument to affirm the fulfillment of these signs. Third, some view “this generation” as the future generation that sees all these things. This view hinges on taking the metaphor of the fig tree’s budding as indicative of a short period of fulfillment.

¹⁰ C. I. Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), 1033.

¹¹ Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible*, 1343.

... describing the general characteristic of the age leading up to the end, while at the same time recognizing that the prediction of the difficulties, which will characterize the entire period between the first and second coming of Christ, are fulfilled in an intensified form as the age moves on to its conclusion.¹²

This view, while somewhat vague, does have the strength of seeing 24:14 as being the very end of the great tribulation. However, it has a number of deficiencies. First, it is a double interpretation. Scofield even stated that “Verses 4 to 14 have a double interpretation.”¹³ One interpretation of earthquakes is general throughout the church age, and another interpretation is specific, during the 70th week. This violates the principle of single meaning. Once multiple interpretations are admitted, there are no controls on the interpreter’s imagination. Second, the view states that verses 4–14 are “the beginning of the birth pangs,” and yet if all of verses 4–14 are the birth pangs both in general throughout the church age and specifically in the tribulation, then the entire church age is the birth pangs. However, this is too broad of an understanding of “birth pangs.” The Old Testament described the birth pangs as a specific set of pains the world would undergo during the day of the Lord (e.g., Isa. 13:8–9), and did not apply them to general pains due to the fall. Third, the meaning of “this generation” in Matthew 24:34 requires the unlikely meaning of the Jewish race.¹⁴



¹² John F. Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come, A Commentary on the First Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1974), 183.

¹³ Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible*, 1033.

¹⁴ Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come*, 183.

Chronological Historic and Future View

Lewis Sperry Chafer insisted that Jesus is addressing Israel, not the church, and made clear that the church is a hiatus in Israel's 70-week calendar, beginning at the triumphal entry. He states that "There is not a thing here ever connected to the Church and to the true Christian that is addressed to them or may be applied to them,"¹⁵ insisting that they knew nothing about the church at all.¹⁶ Matthew 24:4–5 warns Jews not to accept a false Christ. Matthew 24:4–8 are events of the church age leading up to the tribulation. He stresses that the extent of this time period is unknown and that the church is raptured in 24:8, though it is not mentioned by Jesus. Matthew 24:9 is the beginning of the tribulation.

Chafer outlined his view around 1947. He thought the rapture could happen very soon because of the movement toward the modern state of Israel. He may have seen World War I and World War II as well as earthquakes and famines as prophetically significant, but he laid more emphasis on the re-formation of Israel as a state.

Cooper¹⁷ and Arnold Fruchtenbaum¹⁸ outline a more detailed version of Chafer's view. Cooper seems to argue that the false messiahs in 24:4–5 would appear to the apostles. This period has already been noted to have not had any false messiahs historically reported. Fruchtenbaum argues that false messiahs would appear throughout the church age and cites several who have appeared, beginning with Bar Kochba in A.D. 132–135. This adds legitimacy to the idea that 24:4–5 is being fulfilled throughout the church age. Further, Cooper and Fruchtenbaum argue that wars and rumors of wars in 24:6 will take place throughout the church age. However, these local wars are not prophetically significant because they do not herald the end. They interpret 24:7, "nation rising

¹⁵ Louis S. Chafer, "The Olivet Discourse, Part 1" <http://www.dts.edu/media/play/olivet-discourse-part-one/?audio=true>.

¹⁶ Perhaps Chafer reasoned that the mention of the *ekklēsia* (ἐκκλησία) in Matthew 16:18 and 18:15 was understood by the disciples as "an assembly" of Jewish believers.

¹⁷ David L. Cooper, "The Olivet Discourse" <http://promisestoisrael.org/the-olivet-discourse/>.

¹⁸ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), 624–632.

against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” as World War I (Cooper and Fruchtenbaum) and World War II (Fruchtenbaum).¹⁹ Matthew 24:7 adds “famines” and “earthquakes” to World War I and World War II as the first birth pangs. Therefore, the birth pangs began with World War I and continue to this day. Matthew 24:9 is viewed as the beginning of the first half of the tribulation.

This view has much to commend it. There have been false messiahs throughout most of the church age. There have been local wars and rumors of wars. There have been large conflicts, namely World War I and World War II and earthquakes and famines in various places. There are, however, also deficiencies to this view. First, in verse 6 “wars and rumors of wars” are said to be local wars distinct from the verse 7 world wars. However, the word “For” in verse 7, is an explanatory *γὰρ* that clarifies the nature of the “wars.” These will be wars fought between coalitions of nations which seems larger than local wars.²⁰ Second, arguments that “nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” must refer to World War I and World War II, usually rest on the fact that it is an “idiom” pointing “to a total conflict of the area in view.”²¹ The total area in view in the Olivet Discourse is “the whole world.” The conclusion is drawn that the first time such a conflict occurred was World War I. However, historians still debate whether War World I was the first truly global war or whether a war like the earlier Seven Years’ War or the Napoleonic Wars were earlier global wars. Debate continues on how to define a world war. If it requires fighting on every continent and every nation, then no war has ever been a world war. If it requires that the war ‘reach’ every continent and every nation, then there have been world wars. Most agree that the key fronts of World War I were in Europe and that the fighting was more widespread in World War II. None of these wars were fought on American soil, though they were fought on American seas. Third, the same argument

¹⁹ Cooper was writing before World War II.

²⁰ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 189 ff.

²¹ Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*, 94.

that “nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” is an “idiom” pointing “to a total conflict of the area in view” and that the total area in view in the Olivet Discourse is “the whole world,” applies better to the second seal in Revelation 6:4 than it does to World War I or World War II. There it is said that to the rider on the red horse “it was granted to take peace from the earth.” This is a truly global conflict which takes place in the first half of the tribulation.²² Accordingly, David Cooper was cautious on this point and said, “Here one must be very cautious and avoid dogmatism.”²³ Fourth, joined with World War I and World War II, “earthquakes” from the twentieth century are often cited as evidence that we are in the last days. Sometimes it is argued that there is an increase and that the increase will continue. However, the text does not say there will be an increase and the data do not indicate an increase. Biblical creationist and geologist, Steve Austin, has shown from the data held by the National Earthquake Information Center that in the twentieth century there was an overall slight decrease in earthquake frequency and that during the latter half of the twentieth century there was a slight decrease in earthquakes registering 7.0 or greater on the Richter scale, relative to the earlier half of the twentieth century.²⁴ Thus, the last century witnessed an actual decrease in both frequency and intensity. The sixth seal in Revelation 6:12–17 mentions “a great earthquake.” It is more plausible that Jesus’s mention of “earthquakes” in Matthew 24:7 should be linked to the sixth seal earthquake. When it happens “every mountain and island were moved out of their places.” Fifth, this interpretation begins the birth pangs with

²² One may try to argue that “earth” (*gē* γῆ) should be translated “land,” as a reference to the land of Israel. However, consistency would demand that the peace under the first seal was also only Israel. That may be maintained on the basis of a Daniel 9:27 peace treaty. However, would one be willing to stay consistent with that into the third and fourth seals? Are these for Israel only? The fourth seal is death of a fourth of the earth’s population. Or is this to just be interpreted as a fourth of the Jews? Such a local interpretation does not seem plausible in light of the fact that the opening of the seals occurs in the first half of the tribulation, and Israel is under the security of the antichrist until the midpoint.

²³ <http://promisestoisrael.org/the-olivet-discourse/>.

²⁴ Steven A. Austin, Ph.D. 1998. Twentieth Century Earthquakes – Confronting an Urban Legend. *Acts & Facts*. 27(1).

World War II. If this is the case, the birth pangs have been going on for over 100 years now. This seems too long to fit the birth pangs metaphor.²⁵ Birth pangs are compact and occur with increasing magnitude coupled with less time between each convulsion. This has not been the pattern for either earthquakes or wars. The seals, trumpets, and bowls are a better fit for this aspect of the birth pangs metaphor. Sixth, the illustration from the fig tree in 24:32–34 indicates that the generation that sees these things will see *all* of these things, that is, all the birth pangs that lead to Messiah’s coming. Those who saw World War I did not see all these things. Seventh, this view places the beginning of the first half of the Tribulation in 24:9 where Jesus said, “Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name.” This, however, is not a good description of what will happen to Israel at the beginning of the tribulation. At the beginning of the tribulation the antichrist will enter into league with the nation Israel and provide peace and security for them for the first three and a half years. It is not until the midpoint that Israel will be delivered to tribulation and killed and hated by all nations.²⁶ Therefore,

Chronological Historic and Future View	Church Age			70 th Week		
	Chafer	4-8			9-26	
	Cooper	4-5	6	7-8	9-14	15-26
	Fruchtenbaum	4-6		7-8	9-14	15-26

²⁵ A typical pregnancy is forty-weeks gestation. Even if the birth took twenty-four hours, which is abnormally long, the ratio of gestation to birth pangs would be 420:1. Compare that with the 20:1 ratio that would be required for the birth pangs to have started with World War I. This example is for perspective only, not for specificity that would lead to any date-setting venture.

²⁶ The “you” is not the disciples who became a part of the church because Jesus is addressing Israel under the metonymy of 23:37, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem ... your house is being left to you desolate ... you will not see me until you say ...” These are all references to Israel, not the church. While it is true that Jesus’s disciples became the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20), this later fact cannot be read back into the discourse where the questions concern the destruction of the Jewish temple and the second coming.

24:9 doesn't fit the scene at the beginning of the first half, but it does fit the scene at the beginning of the second half. By 24:14 the end would have come. Thus, 24:9–14 is not a good description of the first half of the tribulation, but fit better with the second half.

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

Strict Futurist Views

Chronological Future First Half View

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

It was delivered to the disciples and concerns the future ... The first part concerns the end of the age, and in it the King described what will take place on earth immediately before His visible return ... It will last seven years, the last week of the great prophecy of Daniel ... It is this end, these seven years still future which our Lord describes in the first part of His discourse.²⁷

This was a large step away from historical views. He frankly stated that things like wars, earthquakes, pestilence, and famine in this present age “will occur in a more intensified form during the end of the age, when the true church is no longer on earth.”²⁸ Variations of his view are

²⁷ A.C. Gaebelein, *The Annotated Bible* (New York: Publication Office “Our Hope” 1913), 50–51.

²⁸ Gaebelein, 51.

followed by Alva McClain,²⁹ Charles Ryrie,³⁰ John McClean,³¹ and Ron J. Bigalke.³²

McClean refined this view and there is much to commend. Exegesis shows a strong connection between Matthew 24:4–14 and the seals in Revelation 6:1–17. Such a close connection does not appear incidental. The birth pangs are limited to the 70th week, with the beginning taking place in the first half and the end being more intense until the end of the second half. This fits well with the birth pangs metaphor. However, this view also has some weaknesses. First, adherents link those killed in Matthew 24:9 with the martyrs under the altar at the breaking of the fifth seal in Revelation 6:9–11. The reason this is a weak link is because Jesus was not talking about martyrs in general in Matthew 24:9, but Jewish believers being martyred. He said, “Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name.” The “you” repeatedly refers to the future Jewish remnant being addressed throughout the passage. The “nations” who will hate the Jews are Gentile nations. The persecution of Israel will not begin until the midpoint because Satan will not be cast out of heaven to persecute Israel on earth until that time (Rev. 12). Therefore, Matthew 24:9 could not be in the first half of the tribulation, but it must be at the midpoint and begin the second half. Second, the first half of the tribulation cannot end in verse 14 because verse 6 says it is not the end and verse 14 says, “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.” Many early expositors including Darby, Scofield, Walvoord, and Whitcomb argued that this

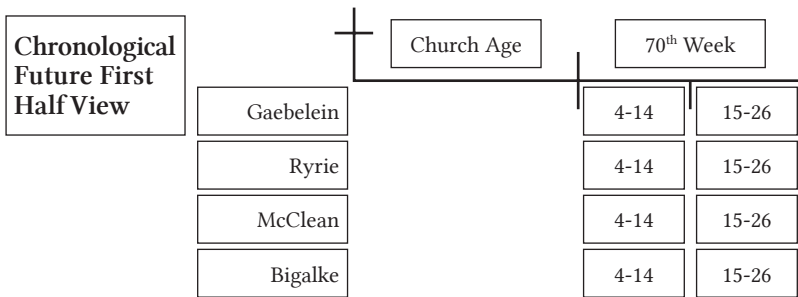
²⁹ Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1959), 362–369.

³⁰ “Verses 4–14 list characteristics of the first half of the tribulation period, whereas verses 15–28 deal with the second half.” Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible: New American Standard Bible*, 1995 Update, expanded ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 1559.

³¹ John McClean, “Chronology and Sequential Structure of John’s Revelation” in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, ed. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), 323–326, 337.

³² Ron J. Bigalke, “A Comparison of the Olivet Discourse and the Book of Revelation.”

was the very end of the second half and that it cannot be the end of the first half. Third, if verse 14 was the end of the first half and the first half is not the end, but merely “the beginning of the birth pangs,” then it is apparent that this interpretation is dubious, for if verse 14 was the end of the first half, it would have made more sense to state in verse 14 that this is “the beginning of the birth pangs”. Therefore, while this view is better than the historical-futurist views, it is still not the best.



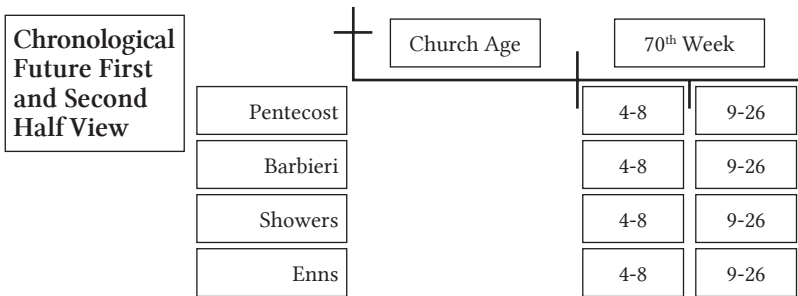
Chronological Future First- and Second-Half View

Dwight Pentecost held that consistency of interpretation required one to not apply any of this portion to the church or the church age. He suggested that 24:4-8 refers to the first half of the 70th week, 24:9-14 to the second half of the week, and 24:15 introduces a recapitulation of the second half beginning with the event that triggers the second half and leads to the coming of the Son of Man. He said:

There seems to be evidence to support the view that the first half of the week is described in verses 4-8. The parallelism between verses 4-8 and Revelation 6 seems to indicate that the first half of the tribulation is here described. ... There are indications that verses 9-26 describe the events of the last half of the week. The abomination of desolation (24:15) is clearly stated by Daniel (9:27) to appear in the middle of the week and continue to the end of the period. The word “then” in verse 9 seems to introduce the great persecutions against Israel that were promised them and were described in Revelation 12:12-17, where John reveals

that this persecution will last for the last half of the tribulation period (Rev. 12:14).³³

This view, or a close version of it is followed by John C. Whitcomb,³⁴ Louis A. Barbieri,³⁵ Renald E. Showers,³⁶ John Hart,³⁷ and Paul P. Enns.³⁸ It is my conviction that this view best represents the text. It places all the events within the time frame of the 70th week and avoids speculation about what constitutes fulfillment of prophecy. It also solves the problem of 24:32–34 which seems to indicate by the fig tree illustration, that the generation that sees these things will see *all* these things, thus compacting the events together in a single season. It also gives due attention to the *tote* (τότε) in verse 9 which introduces a sequential event in the flow of the narrative. Finally, it does a good job of allowing Jesus to give the entire flow of the 70th week followed by application beginning in verse 15 with the word “therefore,” which signals a recapitulation of the key event in the 70th week that the Jews should watch for.



³³ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, first Grand Rapids printing (Grand Rapids: Dunham Publishing Company, 1964), 278–279.

³⁴ John C. Whitcomb, interview by author, October 24, 2017.

³⁵ Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., “Matthew,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 76.

³⁶ Renald E. Showers, *The Sign of His Coming* (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 2016) 9–77.

³⁷ John Hart, *Evidence for the Rapture: A Biblical Case for Pretribulationism* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2015), 48–50.

³⁸ Paul P. Enns, “Olivet Discourse” in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1996), 287.

This concludes the sketches of the futurist dispensational views. These include the chronological future first half held by Gaebeline, Ryrice, McClean, and others and the chronological first and second half held by Pentecost, Barbieri, Showers, others, and this writer. The second section is the case for the chronological first- and second-half view in 24:4–14.

THE BOOK CONTEXT

The Argument of the Gospel of Matthew

Too often a study of the discourse begins with Matthew 24 rather than the argument of the Gospel of Matthew. When taken apart from the entire argument, one similarity,³⁹ word,⁴⁰ phrase,⁴¹ or concept⁴² can

³⁹ Often the mention of earthquakes in 24:7 is associated with present earthquakes and a rise in earthquake activity in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Nothing, however, is mentioned in Matthew 24:7 about an increase in earthquakes. Furthermore, earthquakes have been occurring at least since the flood of Noah and the greatest earthquakes known occurred in the distant past. Even the geological data from the USGS during the twentieth century shows that the greatest intensity and quantity of earthquakes peaked in the 1940s. Therefore, just because earthquakes are mentioned in the discourse does not mean that they are descriptive of earthquakes we have experienced in the twentieth century. Similarity does not mean identity. Context is king. The context is the 70th week of Daniel.

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

⁴¹ Often the *peri de* (περί δέ) in Matthew 24:36 is said to refer to a "change of topic" or "slight change of subject matter," on the basis that Paul uses it often that way in 1 Corinthians (e.g., 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 25). In Matthew's Gospel, however, *peri de* is used four times (20:6, 22:31, 24:36, 27:46), and not once is it used as a "change of topic" or "slight change of subject matter." To import Paul's meaning is to commit the fallacy of illegitimate totality transfer.

⁴² Sometimes the concept of imminence in Matthew 24:36 is linked to the rapture, resulting in the conclusion that the verse is about the rapture rather than the second coming. This, however, contradicts the use of Son of Man as related to the kingdom (Dan 7:13–14) and violates the context of Jesus's words (24:27, 30).

be used to present a seemingly strong case for portions of the discourse referring to events in the church age. Interpreted within Matthew's argument, however, these points break down.

While Jesus taught the discourse, Matthew selected the material to include in order to make his argument. Most recognize, even from earliest times, that the book has a particularly Jewish flavor.⁴³ Matthew is presenting his argument to Jewish believers. His argument is two-fold; Jesus is the King even though Jesus's kingdom did not come (Matt. 1–11). The reason the kingdom did not come is because the kingdom's arrival in history is contingent on Israel's repentance. When Israel rejected the King (Matt. 12)⁴⁴ the kingdom was postponed, and the King began to prepare His disciples for an inter-advent age (Matt. 13–28). Matthew's Gospel would strengthen a Jewish believer's faith and provide an apologetic to unbelieving Jews.

The Five Discourses

In keeping with the argument, the five discourses all relate to the kingdom, not to the church.⁴⁵ The first discourse is Matthew 5–7, the discourse on kingdom righteousness.⁴⁶ In this discourse Jesus explains the kind of righteousness one generation of Israel will need for the kingdom to come.⁴⁷ The second discourse is Matthew 10, the discourse

⁴³ "Trenaeus says: "Matthew issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews," and "The Gospel of St. Matthew was written for the Jews." Origen says, "St. Matthew wrote for the Hebrew." Eusebius says: "Matthew...delivered his gospel to his countrymen." The complexion and content of the Gospel abundantly confirm this view. Graham Scroggie, *Guide to Gospels*, 248. Cited by Toussaint, *Behold the King*, 18.

⁴⁴ This was the informal rejection of the King. The formal rejection would take place later, leading to the crucifixion.

⁴⁵ There are certainly truths in Matthew that are for the church. The church is first mentioned in Matthew 16:18. Discipline within the church is described in Matthew 18:15 ff. Jesus is preparing His disciples for their ministry during the church age in Matthew 13–28. Nevertheless, the argument of Matthew is to explain why if Jesus was the King, Jesus's kingdom did not come. Obviously, the church had already begun when this argument would have its full force, and arguably Paul was using this type of argument in Acts 19:8, 28:23.

⁴⁶ Known traditionally as *The Sermon on the Mount*, but this tells us only the historical location of the discourse, and little about the content. I prefer to refer to each discourse by its content.

⁴⁷ It is not a self-righteousness like the Pharisees', garnered through keeping a misinterpretation of the law, but an imputed righteousness that comes only through faith in Messiah.

on kingdom missions. In this discourse Jesus explains the missionary enterprise to Israel whenever the kingdom is at hand.⁴⁸ The third discourse is Matthew 13, the discourse on kingdom postponement. In this discourse Jesus explains that the kingdom will be postponed and reveals new truths about the characteristics of the age leading up to the kingdom's establishment. The meaning of the kingdom of the heavens continues to have the same meaning it did before Matthew 13, that is, the covenanted, prophesied Messianic kingdom envisioned and hoped for by all the prophets. New truths are being revealed about that kingdom.⁴⁹ The fourth discourse is Matthew 18, the discourse on kingdom greatness. Here Jesus explains how a believer living during the postponement period can be great in the kingdom to come. The fifth discourse is Matthew 24-25, the discourse on kingdom coming. In this discourse Jesus explains the events that will immediately precede the kingdom's arrival in history and the judgments that will take place when He comes.

The reason for reviewing each of the discourses is to highlight the fact that none of the material Matthew chose to record in the discourses relates directly to the church.⁵⁰ This is because Matthew's argument is that Jesus is the King, but His kingdom did not come because that generation of Israel did not repent and recognize Him as their King.⁵¹ As such, the kingdom was postponed until a later generation of Israel repents. The discourse in Matthew 24-25 describes the events that will

⁴⁸ The kingdom was "at hand" in the past during the first advent and will be "at hand" again in the future 70th week. This discourse deals with both time periods.

⁴⁹ See Mike Stallard, "Hermeneutics and Matthew 13, Part II: Exegetical Conclusions" (paper presented at the Conservative Theological Society, Fort Worth, 2001).

⁵⁰ They do relate to the church indirectly, or as a consequence of the Jewish rejection of the King and the kingdom offer. For example, the church age falls within the age of postponement of the kingdom, but it is not identical to the age of postponement. The postponement is longer, beginning with Israel's rejection of the Messiah, while the church began on the day of Pentecost. Further, the church will end on the day of the pretribulation rapture, while the postponement will end with Israel's acceptance of the Messiah near the day of the second coming. So, the church gets involved, specifically in Matthew 13 and 18, but only as a result of Israel's rejection.

⁵¹ Acts 13:27 says they did not "recognize neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath ..." The leaders of Israel were spiritually blind, and they led the people into their ignorant state.

take place that will bring Israel to repentance and result in them calling upon Him to return in the name of the Lord (Matt. 23:39).

The Context of the Discourse on Kingdom Coming (Matthew 23:37–39)

The context for the discourse begins after Jesus’s scathing rebuke of the Pharisees in Matthew 23. After this rebuke in Matthew 23:37–39 the King laments Israel’s rejection saying, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gather’s her chicks under her wings, but you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you will not see me until you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’”⁵² Jerusalem is the eternal capital of Israel, including the capital of the kingdom of heaven. Jerusalem is being personified as the nation Israel. Jesus had come to gather Israel into the kingdom (Matt. 10:5–7), but they were not willing. As a consequence of their rejection, their house, the temple in Jerusalem, would be destroyed.⁵³ Furthermore, their King would be absent until they uttered the Messianic greeting of Psalm 118:26, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!” This provides the immediate setting for the discourse and establishes that the audience of the discourse is the future Jewish remnant being addressed through His believing disciples.⁵⁴

The Disciples’ Questions (24:1–3)

In 24:1–3 the disciples came out from the temple and were pointing out the beautiful temple buildings under construction according to

⁵² All Scripture citations are from the *New American Standard Bible*: 1995 update (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995).

⁵³ Others have interpreted the “house” as “the house of David” or “Jerusalem.” However, the following verses in 24:1–3 make these options unlikely. The disciples point out the Temple buildings and ask Jesus “When will these things be?” Jesus’s answer that “not one stone will be left upon another that will not be cast down” shows clearly that the house = the Temple.

⁵⁴ Mark 13:3 shows that only four of the disciples were initially present, “Peter and James and John and Andrew.”

Herod's design. Jesus remarked in verse 2 that "not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down." This prompted their questions in verse 3, as "He was sitting on the Mount of Olives," "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

It is often noted that there are two questions here, rather than three, but some see as many as four.⁵⁵ The two-question view is significant enough to briefly evaluate. Usually, the argument is made that two questions are in view because of the two interrogatives, "when" (*pote* πότε) and "what" (*ti ti*). The first, "Tell us, when will these things happen" and the second, "What *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age." There could, however, just as easily be one "when" question and two "what" questions, making a total of three questions. Others claim that the TSKS construction (article-substantive-καὶ-substantive), as described in the Granville Sharp rule, is employed in the last two questions, combining them into one question. A proper understanding of the Granville Sharp rule, however, shows that if there is any relationship, it would be unclear because of the plural impersonal nouns.⁵⁶ Hart's insistence that there are two questions is a crux in his case for Jesus being given more credit for originating the pretribulation rapture in Matthew 24:36 ff. According to Hart, "... Jesus answers these two questions in reverse order. This technique is called chiasm."⁵⁷ In other words, the second question, "What will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?" is answered first in 24:4-35, and then the first question, "When will these things happen?" is answered

⁵⁵ Alva McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1980), 363.

⁵⁶ Known also as the Granville Sharp rule after its discoverer, the TSKS construction is present, but the substantives are impersonal rendering the relationship is unclear. They could be distinct, overlapping, first a subset of the second, second subset of the first, equality or identity, though identity is rare. One should not be dogmatic arguing from the construction; cf. Wallace, Daniel B. *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics - Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Zondervan Publishing House and Galaxie Software, 1996), 270-290.

⁵⁷ John F. Hart, "Jesus and the Rapture in Matthew 24" in *Evidence for the Rapture* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2015), 48.

second in 24:36 ff.⁵⁸ Hart interprets the disciples' first question to mean "When will the signs of His coming and of the end of the age begin?" or put simply, "When will the day of the Lord begin?"⁵⁹ The day of the Lord is viewed as the entire 70th week. Hart's answer is that there will be no signs indicating the day of the Lord is going to begin, that it is imminent, and therefore Jesus also introduced an imminent event that will happen simultaneously with the pretribulation rapture. The fatal flaw in this line of argument, however, is that he has changed the meaning of the first question the disciples asked. Their questions do not amount to "When will the day of the Lord begin?" but "When will the temple buildings be destroyed?" The temple was the subject Jesus was talking about in Matthew 23:38 when He said, "your house is being left to you desolate." The temple is what the disciples were pointing out in 24:1 when they "came up to point out the temple buildings to Him." The temple is what Jesus prophesied would be torn down in 24:2 when He said, "not one stone here will be left upon another."⁶⁰ Therefore, Hart's argument that "these things" refer to "the day of the LORD" misconstrues the question. His remaining arguments for the rapture being presented in Matthew 24:36 ff completely rely on his misunderstanding of the first question.

As for the first question concerning when the temple buildings would be destroyed, most recognize that Matthew did not record Jesus's answer in his Gospel. Some consider this to be an egregious error, as

⁵⁸ His argument is fortified by noting Jesus's use of *peri de* (περί δέ) in 24:36 as denoting a "change of subject," cross-referencing Paul's usages of *peri de* in 1 Corinthians for support (cf. 1 Cor. 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12). However, *peri de* does not always have this meaning. In fact, Matthew uses *peri de* four times and not once does it denote a "change of subject" (cf. 20:6, 22:31, 24:36, 27:46). To read Paul's usage into Matthew is an illegitimate totality transfer.

⁵⁹ For example, Hart said, "A key Greek transitional marker in verse 36, "Now concerning" (*peri de*), shifts the focus from the second advent to the events that begin the day of the Lord." Hart, *Evidence for the Rapture*, 46. Proponents often believe that the rapture begins the day of the Lord and occur at the beginning of the 70th week of Daniel. This is the view of dual imminence.

⁶⁰ Sometimes it is objected that they could not have been asking about the temple, since it is singular, and their question is plural, "when will these things be?" However, the nearest antecedent is the "temple buildings," which is plural. They are asking when the "temple buildings" would be destroyed.

if something would be awry with the inspiration of Scripture.⁶¹ Most, however, recognize that Luke 21:12–24 records a distinct section that has no parallel in Matthew or Mark. McClain explained,

It should be obvious that in this section of Luke's account we have the answer of Christ to the disciples' question about the judgment of Jerusalem and the temple, for here He speaks especially of the events which will occupy the time from His departure to the destruction of the city in A.D. 70.⁶²

While this seems clear, some have questioned why Matthew would include the first question without recording the answer.⁶³ All answers are purely conjecture. I can only guess that the reason Matthew recorded the question is because it was connected to the other questions in the disciples' minds, but the reason he did not record the answer is because Jesus showed it was not connected. The destruction of the temple would happen in the near time frame, as Luke recorded in Luke 21:12–24, while the other events would take place at a later time in connection with the second coming. Further, to record information about the events leading up to and including A.D. 70 would not contribute to Matthew's argument. Matthew's argument is that the kingdom has been postponed until a future generation of Israel utters the words, "blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD." Therefore, Matthew records the questions as the disciples asked them, but he only records the answer to the questions directly related to his argument. Luke records the other answer.

As for the second question, one passage that discusses something that might be considered a sign of His coming is Zechariah 14:6–7, "In that day there will be no light; the luminaries will dwindle. For it will be a unique day which is known to the LORD, neither day nor night, but

⁶¹ Wes Spradley, *Jesus is a Pre-Tribber* (paper delivered at the Grace Evangelical Society, Fort Worth, January, 2017), 3.

⁶² Alva McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 364.

⁶³ Toussaint, *Behold the King*, 268.

it will come about that at evening time there will be light.” Even this is not entirely clear, but it does sound strikingly similar to the luminaries dwindling which provides a backdrop for the sign of the Son of Man in the sky (Matt. 24:29–30). The disciples’ use of *parousia* (παρουσία) was very definite. It referred to the day He would return to earth to end this present age and usher in the Messianic age. It certainly did not refer to a broader period of time such as “the day of the LORD” or the entire “70th week” as some suggest.⁶⁴ The disciples were thinking in terms of Daniel 9 and Zechariah 14. Their question relates to a precise time that would signal His coming. Daniel predicted this would happen immediately after the 70th week when all Gentile kingdoms would be crushed simultaneously (Dan. 2:44–45, 7:12–14, 26–27). Then the Son of Man would come in His kingdom. The use of the title Son of Man is also important in clarifying the discourses relationship to the kingdom (cf. 24:27, 30, 36, 37, 39, 44; 25:31). Its origin as Messianic is Daniel 7:13–14 when the Son of Man is seen receiving an everlasting kingdom from the Father. It is used eighty-six times of Jesus in the New Testament, eighty-four of which are in the gospels with some relationship to the kingdom and the other two view Him in His exaltation, at the right hand of the Father, ready to return to establish the kingdom. The title Son of Man relates entirely to the kingdom. It does not relate to Christ coming for His church at the rapture or His coming in the broad day of the Lord. Therefore, the disciples’ question about the sign of His coming is not about the rapture or the coming of the broad day of the Lord, it is about the coming of the Son of Man on the day He returns in His kingdom to sit on David’s throne (25:31). This meaning is consistent throughout the discourse.

The third question concerns “the end of the age” and is related to the second question, the sign of His coming. The Jews thought in terms of two

⁶⁴ Frank E. Gaebelein, A. Skevington Wood, Homer A. Kent Jr., Curtis Vaughn, Robert L. Thomas, Ralph Earle, D. Edmond Hiebert, and Arthur A. Rupprecht, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 318.

ages, the age leading up to Messiah's coming and the Messianic age.⁶⁵ The end of the age is the end of the age leading up to Messiah's coming. Since the age leading up to Messiah's coming ends with Messiah's coming, then the question dovetails with the second question regarding the sign of His coming. Jesus mentions "the end" often (*telos τέλος* in Matt. 24:6, 13, 14), as a reference to the day of His second coming, confirming that they relate to the same day.⁶⁶

Therefore, the meaning of the three questions, and what the disciples really wanted to know was, "What is the relationship *in time* between the destruction of the temple buildings and the sign of His coming and the end of the age?" They knew from Zechariah 12-14 that in the last days Jerusalem and Judea would come under attack resulting in a miraculous deliverance by the Messiah, bringing about the end of the age and the beginning of the age of Messiah. They wanted to know how the destruction of the temple fit into that picture. They probably assumed it would take place at the same time Jerusalem was under attack. As Alexander Balmain Bruce said, "The questioners took for granted that all three things went together; destruction of the temple, advent of Son of Man, end of the current age."⁶⁷ Jesus's full answer, when harmonized with Luke 21:12-24, shows that they did not all go together, one would occur in the near time frame, and the other in a future time frame. Matthew recorded the answer that related to the future time frame because it supported his argument.

⁶⁵ "In Jewish eschatology two ages were recognized, the first was this present age, the age in which Israel was waiting for the coming of the Messiah; the second was the age to come, the age in which all of Israel's covenants would be fulfilled and Israel would enter into her promised blessings as a result of Messiah's coming. The present age would be terminated by the appearance of Messiah, and the coming age would be introduced by His advent" Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 398.

⁶⁶ The disciples asked about the *synteleia* (συντέλεια), the very end. The prefix *syn-* (συν-) may intensify and therefore relate to Daniel 12:13 where Daniel was told that he would "enter into rest and rise again for" his "allotted portion at the end of the age." The last phrase in the LXX of Daniel is *eis synteleian hēmerōn* (εἰς συντέλειαν ἡμερῶν), the end day. The prepositional prefix *syn-* emphasizes it is the very end. Daniel was told in 12:11 that the very end day was the 1,335th day. Therefore, the third question may relate to the 1,335th day which is separated from the day of the second coming by seventy-five days.

⁶⁷ Alexander Balmain Bruce, "The Synoptic Gospels" in *The Expositors Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2002), 1:289.

Jesus's Answer (24:4–31)

Having discussed the meaning of the disciples' questions, we now come to Jesus's answer in 24:4. Again, Matthew does not record Jesus's answer to the first question, but it is plainly recorded in Luke 21:12–24 which was fulfilled between His ascension and A.D. 70.⁶⁸ In verse 4, He begins to answer the second and third questions, the sign of His coming and the end of the age. A central event is found in Matthew 24:15 where Jesus mentioned Daniel the prophet and the abomination of desolation from Daniel 9:27. Thus, the 70th week of Daniel provides the contextual background for His answer.

As mentioned before under the futurist chronological first- and second-half view, the 70th week may be broken down as follows; 24:4–8 refers to some of the events of the first half of the 70th week; 24:9–14 describes some events of the second half of the 70th week when Israel comes under distress all the way to the end; then 24:15 recapitulates and describes the event spoken of by Daniel that will trigger the second half of the 70th week that coincides with 24:9.⁶⁹ Enns said,

In 24:4–8 Jesus describes the signs in the first half of the Tribulation. These are not signs for the church, since the church will be raptured prior to the Tribulation. These signs parallel Revelation 6. ... In the second half of the Tribulation (vv. 9–14) the suffering will intensify. "Then" (v. 9) marks a transition, referring to the occasion when the Antichrist breaks the covenant with Israel and persecutes the nation (Dan. 9:27). ... Matthew 24:15–26 amplifies the period discussed in 24:9–14. In 24:9–14 Jesus foretold many signs; now He singles out one sign—the Abomination of Desolation (v. 15).⁷⁰

⁶⁸ John Hart perceives a chiasm of two questions and answers, but he misconstrues the first question to be asking about the beginning of the day of the Lord rather than the destruction of the temple. Therefore, his chiastic approach is imposed on the text.

⁶⁹ Several hold this position. See Barbieri, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Paul Enns, *The Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, 287. Renald Showers, *The Sign of His Coming*, 15, 21–27.

⁷⁰ Paul Enns, *The Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, 287.

The literary style of a sequence followed by recapitulation is a common style of Jewish writing (e.g., Gen. 1-2, Ezek. 38-39, Rev. 6-7). Much of the discourse is land-centered because that is the center of the action, but the effects often extend to the whole world. By verse 30 the second coming will have taken place in the land of Israel, and Jews from outside the land will be gathered by angels for judgment described in later parables (24:45-25:30).

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

Matthew 24:4-8 describes events of the first half of the 70th week of Daniel. This is established by seven arguments. First, the verb “deceive” connects the time period of these verses with the following verses, putting them all in the 70th week. The verb “deceive” (*planaō* πλανάω), is used by Jesus in verses 4, 5, 11 and 24 to reveal the key characteristic of the 70th week. Most dispensational interpreters admit that deception in verses 11 and 24 refer to the tribulation, but some claim that verses 4 and 5 refer to the early church or the entire church age. However, it is better to connect Jesus’s use of “deception” in verses 4 and 5 with the uses in verses 11 and 24 as indicative of deception being the key characteristic of the 70th week.

Second, the reference to “false Christs” connects the time period of the early verses with the later verses. Jesus refers to false Christs in verses 5, 23 and 24. All dispensational interpreters admit that the false Christs in verses 23 and 24 will come during the tribulation, but some continue to maintain that the ones in verse 5 came between A.D. 30 and A.D. 70 or during the church age. This seems inconsistent with Jesus’s usage. During the 70th week many false Christs will appear on the world stage, thus contributing to the key characteristic of deception in the 70th week.

Third, the “wars and rumors of wars” and “nation rising against nation ...” in 24:6-7 correspond to the wars in Revelation 6:2-4. The “wars and rumors of war” that Israel will be hearing about in verse 6 are further explained in verse 7 as “nation rising against nation.” In other words, verse 7 explains that these wars will be fought by coalitions of nations. While this may be explained by World War I and World War II,

it is better explained as the wars of the second seal. Many premillennial interpreters have pointed out that the seal judgments parallel Matthew 24:4–8.⁷¹

Fourth, the “famines and earthquakes” in 24:7 correspond to the famines and earthquakes in Revelation 6:8, 12–17. It is common to hear that these are being fulfilled in the present age and escalating until the 70th week, but it is never stated that they will increase, and the earthquake data from the twenty-first century shows a slight overall decrease in both intensity and frequency of earthquakes.

Fifth, the entire 70th week must be described in 24:4–14. In 24:6 Jesus is careful to note that these wars are “not yet the end,” but in verse 14 it is “the end.” The end is not at the midpoint described in verse 15, so verse 15 is a recapitulation of the events of the second half. At any rate, the wars of verses 6 and 7 do not signal the end of the 70th week, but by verse 14 the end of the 70th week will have come.

Sixth, the birth pangs occur inside the 70th week, not throughout the church age. In 24:8 Jesus described the events of verses 4–8 as “merely the beginning of birth pangs.” Birth pangs in pregnancy occur right at the end before the baby is born. In the analogy with the coming of Messiah in His kingdom, these birth pangs occur during the 70th week. Price said,

... the involuntary and uncontrollable nature of birth pangs, as well as their intensification leading ultimately to a time of deliverance, well pictured the concept of a time of divine judgment that must run its course until the promise of new life could be experienced.⁷²

It is unlikely that the birth pangs are stretched across the entire church age or a portion of the church age. It is more likely they are entirely within the 70th week.

⁷¹ See John McClean in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, ed. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), 322–330. Robert Thomas, *Revelation 1–7* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1992), 416.

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

Seventh, these things must all take place in one generation, binding 24:4–8 to 24:9–31. In 24:34 Jesus said that the generation that sees all these things will not pass away until they have all taken place. If the things in verses 4–8 occurred before A.D. 70 or throughout the church age, and are identified with false Christs like Bar Kochba (A.D. 132–135) or wars and rumors of wars like World War I and World War II (1914–1918, 1939–1947), then the problem is that those generations did not see all these things including the abomination of desolation. Everything in 24:4–31 must take place within one generation.

In summary, verses 4–8 describe the first half of the 70th week which are the beginning of birth pangs. The verb “deceive” and mention of “false Christs” throughout the verses bind the verses into a single time period, the wars and rumors of wars as well as famines and earthquakes also occur in this same time period and are paralleled by the seal judgments in the first half of the 70th week.⁷³ All this is confirmed by the truth that one generation will see all these things, compacting them into the 70th week.

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

Matthew 24:9–14 describes events of the second half of the 70th week of Daniel. This is established by six lines of argument. First, in verse 9 the word “Then” (*tote τότε*) signifies a transition to things that will take place after “the beginning of birth pangs” (24:8). Some have tried to argue that the things of verse 9 take place simultaneously with the events of verses 4–8, thus placing them in the first half.⁷⁴ However, the word either means, “at that time,” emphasizing the immediacy of an event following on the heels of whatever was prior, or “then, thereupon,” as simply an event which follows in time.⁷⁵ Either way it refers to an event that will follow “the beginning of birth pangs,” and not something that

⁷³ See Robert Dean, “The Chronological Relationship of the Three Septet Judgments of the Tribulation to Daniel’s Seventy Weeks,” <http://www.pre-trib.org/articles/view/chronological-relationship-of-three-septet-judgments-tribulation-to-daniels-seventy-weeks>.

⁷⁴ <http://www.pre-trib.org/articles/view/an-interpretation-of-matthew-24-25-part-9>.

⁷⁵ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1012–1013.

occurs simultaneously with them. Therefore, verse 9 occurs after the beginning of the birth pangs, and is not a part of the beginning of those pangs. It signals the beginning of the second half.

Second, the “you” who are delivered over to tribulation and killed and hated by all nations because of Jesus’s name are the believing Jewish remnant. Many argue that this is a description of martyrs in general during the first half of the tribulation, and so a continuation of seal judgments described in verses 4–8, placing it in the first half.⁷⁶ However, this is probably incorrect. The “you” is the future Jewish remnant being addressed through the believing Jewish disciples, not believers in general. To reject this identification is to change Jesus’s audience mid-stream. The mention of being “hated by all nations” should immediately bring to mind the anti-Semitism revealed in Daniel 7:21–22, 25 where we are told that this will go on for “a time, times and half a time” which is explained further in Revelation 12:6, 13, 17; 13:7 as beginning at the midpoint of the 70th week when Satan is cast out of heaven and comes to indwell the antichrist (cf. Dan. 8:24; 12:1, 7). Thus, Matthew 24:9 is the beginning of the second half of the 70th week.

Third, 24:10 describes division in the nation Israel which will take place in the second half of the tribulation. “At that time (*tote τότε*), many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another.” The Jewish people will be divided over who is the Messiah. Those who adopt the antichrist will betray those who believe in Jesus Christ.

Fourth, 24:11 describes “false prophets” that “will arise” and “mislead many” which is primarily during the second half of the tribulation. Zechariah 13:2–6 spoke about false prophets in the land saying,

“It will come about in that day,” declares the LORD of hosts, “that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they will no longer be remembered; and I will also remove the prophets and the unclean spirit from the land. And if anyone still prophesies, then his father and mother who gave birth to him will say to him, ‘You shall not live, for you have spoken

⁷⁶ Pre-wrath normally takes this view as the route to get the church into the Matthew 24–25 discourse.

falsely in the name of the LORD'; and his father and mother who gave birth to him will pierce him through when he prophesies." (Zech. 13:2–3)

This section of Zechariah is describing events of the second half of the tribulation, providing more evidence for Matthew 24:9–14 describing the second half of the tribulation.

Fifth, in 24:12 the period is described as “lawlessness” which corresponds to Daniel 7:25 where the antichrist would intend to make “alterations in times and in law,” all related to Israel. This will take place for “a time, times, and half a time,” which is the second half of the tribulation. The antichrist is also referred to as “the man of lawlessness,” in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, and this title refers to his actions beginning at the mid-point of the tribulation and not the first half.

Sixth, in 24:13 and 14 Jesus speaks of events right before the end of the 70th week which immediately precede the sign of His coming. The disciples had asked about the sign and the end of the age. Jesus takes them up to the events just before the end in these verses. Verse 13 encourages them to persevere to the end. In the context this is Jewish saints persevering in love during the second half. Because of the lawlessness under the policies of the antichrist, love will grow cold among the Jewish people, but the one who endures to the end in love, he will be saved. This refers to a physical rescue by the Messiah at His second coming.⁷⁷ This also shows that the events of verse 14 are in the second half of the tribulation. Matthew 24:14 states that “This gospel of the kingdom” shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.” The gospel of the kingdom is preached whenever the kingdom is “at hand,” meaning imminent, on the verge of breaking into history, which makes sense during the second half of the 70th week.⁷⁸ In Revelation 14:6–7 an angel will fly in the atmosphere above earth and preach “an eternal gospel” “to every nation and tribe and tongue and people ...” That event occurs during the second half of the tribulation. This will happen near the end when the sign of the coming of the Son of Man will appear.

⁷⁷ They are believing Jews who persevere so as not to grow cold in their love.

⁷⁸ Not “here” but “near”.

The entire 70th week has been summarized in 24:4–14, and 24:15 takes place at the midpoint. The word “Therefore” indicates that our Lord is giving application in light of the events of the 70th week. By doing so He backs up to reveal the key sign to the Jews that they are about to be persecuted by all nations. The event that triggers their persecution and the worst anti-Semitism in history is the abomination of desolation (Rev. 12–13). The abomination is the sign that Jacob’s trouble has come. It is not the sign of His coming (Jer. 30:5–7). The backdrop for the sign of His coming is described in 24:29 as a cosmic blackout (Zech. 14:6–7). The sign is described in 24:30 as something which will appear in the sky, perhaps some kind of light (Zech. 14:6). The sign is probably not the Son of Man because it will appear in the sky before the tribes of the land see Him. The sign itself is not specified, but it is perhaps the Shechinah Glory, the same sign that signaled His first coming and the cloud that He ascended into at His departure (Acts 1:9–11). The goal of this paper is not to show what that sign is, but that all the events in 24:4–30 occur within the 70th week of Daniel and none occur before it. Therefore, false Christs, wars and rumors of wars, famines, and earthquakes that we experience today are not signs of His second coming. Even these events in the 70th week are not signs of His second coming and the end of the age. The only sign is the one stated to be a sign in verse 30, which is left unspecified, but clearly understood by the tribes of the land who mourn when they see it. According to Luke 17:20–24 the coming of the Son of Man in His kingdom is likened to lightning flashing out of one part of the sky and shining to the other part of the sky. In other words, it will come suddenly and not as something to be observed occurring over time. Until that time, they do not mourn, but continue in jubilation (24:38; cf. Rev. 18:22–23). When that day comes, they will mourn (Zech. 12:10–15).

CONCLUSION

This paper has evaluated dispensational views of the Olivet Discourse, primarily where disagreement occurs, in Matthew 24:4–14. These views can be divided into two classes; historical-futurist and strict

futurist. Among the historical-futurist views, Darby and Toussaint hold to a *hiatus* in these verses, suggesting that the early verses were fulfilled in the first century and the later verses are reserved for the future. Scofield and Walvoord hold to a *general and specific* interpretation, suggesting a double interpretation of the verses so that in general these signs occur throughout the church age and will intensify during the 70th week. Chafer, Cooper, and Fruchtenbaum hold to a *historic-future chronological view* that begins with general characteristics of the age followed by significant signs beginning with World War I and World War II in conjunction with an increase in earthquakes and famines with the first half of the 70th week beginning in 24:9.

Among the strict futurist views, Gaebelein, Ryrie, and others teach a *future chronological first half view* that suggests verses 4–14 refer exclusively to the first half of the 70th week. Pentecost, Barbieri, and others teach a *future chronological first and second half view* that argues that the verses refer to the first and second half of the 70th week. This seems to be the best view in light of the teachings in Daniel, Zechariah, and Revelation.

The second part of the paper emphasizes that the overall argument of Matthew must be kept in mind throughout. All of the discourses relate to the kingdom in some way and the Olivet Discourse relates to the events immediately preceding the coming of the King in His kingdom. Jesus was lamenting the fact that generation of Israel rejected. He pronounced judgment on the temple and announced He would not return until the nation welcomed Him back. The disciples asked about the timing of the destruction of the temple buildings in relation to the sign of His coming and the end of the age. Jesus's answer was that the temple buildings would be destroyed in the near time frame (Luke 21) and the sign of His coming and end of the age would occur in the far time frame. The far time frame is held together by the verbal use of "deception" and "false Christs" throughout the whole passage. The illustration of the fig tree and the statement that the generation that sees all these things will not pass away until all these things take place puts all the events in the same season, which is the 70th week of Daniel. The descriptions of wars, famines and earthquakes are more

likely linked to the events of the first half of the 70th week than they are to events of the twentieth century. Therefore, the first half of the 70th week is described in Matthew 24:4–8. These are the beginning of birth pangs. The word “then” in 24:9 transitions to the second half when the nations of the world will hate the Jewish remnant and deliver them to tribulation and death. This will cause division in the nation and false prophets will abound leading many to be deceived. An increase in lawlessness under the policies of the antichrist will cause the love of most Jews to grow cold, but the one who endures to the end will be rescued. The mention of the end signifies the end of the 70th week. Matthew 24:15 recapitulates the second half showing that the abomination of desolation is the event that will initiate the persecution of the Jewish remnant described earlier in verse 9. The conclusion is that there are no signs in Matthew 24 that describe events in the present church age that indicate His second coming is soon. The events all take place within the 70th week and lead up to the one sign in 24:30 that immediately precedes His coming and the end of the age (cf. Luke 17:20–24).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arndt, William, et al. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Austin, Steven A. “Twentieth Century Earthquakes – Confronting an Urban Legend.” *Acts & Facts* 27(1), 1998.
- Barbieri, Louis A., Jr. “Matthew.” Vol. 2, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, edited by J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985.
- Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939.
- Bigalke, Ron J. “A Comparison of the Olivet Discourse and the Book of Revelation.” Available at <https://www.pre-trib.org/pretribfiles/pdfs/Bigalke-AComparisonoftheOliv.pdf>.

- Bruce, Alexander Balmain. "The Synoptic Gospels." In *The Expositors Greek Testament*, edited by W. Robertson Nicoll. Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2002. Vol. 1.
- Chafer, Louis S. "The Olivet Discourse, Part 1." Available at: <http://www.dts.edu/media/play/olivet-discourse-part-one/?audio=true>.
- Cooper, David L. "The Olivet Discourse." Available at: <http://promisestoisrael.org/the-olivet-discourse/>.
- Costa, Leonardo. "The Fulfillment of Matthew 24:4–31 in Dispensational Tradition." Available at: <https://i-disp.com/the-fulfillment-of-matthew-244-31-in-dispensational-tradition/>.
- Darby, J. N. *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible: Matthew to John*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008.
- Dean, Robert. "The Chronological Relationship of the Three Septet Judgments of the Tribulation to Daniel's Seventy Weeks." Available at: <http://www.pre-trib.org/articles/view/chronological-relationship-of-three-septet-judgments-tribulation-to-daniels-seventy-weeks>.
- Enns, Paul P. "Olivet Discourse." In *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, edited by Mal Couch. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1996.
- Fruchtenbaum, Arnold G. *The Footsteps of the Messiah*. Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003.
- Gaebelein, A. C. *The Annotated Bible*. New York: Publication Office "Our Hope," 1913.
- Hart, John F. *Evidence for the Rapture: A Biblical Case for Pretribulationism*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2015.
- Ice, Thomas. "An Interpretation of Matthew 24–25 (Part 6)." Available at: http://www.pre-trib.org/articles/view/an-interpretation-of-matthew-24-25-part-6#_ednref5.
- McClain, Alva J. *The Greatness of the Kingdom*. Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1959.
- McClellan, John. "Chronology and Sequential Structure of John's Revelation." In *When the Trumpet Sounds*, edited by Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995.
- Pentecost, J. Dwight. *Things to Come*. Grand Rapids: Dunham Publishing Company, 1964.

- Price, J. Randall. "Old Testament Tribulation Terms." In *When the Trumpet Sounds*, edited by Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995.
- Ryrie, Charles Caldwell. *Ryrie Study Bible: New American Standard Bible*, 1995 update. Expanded ed. Chicago: Moody Press, 1995.
- Scofield, C. I. *The Scofield Reference Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1945.
- Showers, Renald E. *The Sign of His Coming*. Bellmawr: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 2016.
- Toussaint, Stanley. *Behold the King*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1980.
- Walvoord, John F. *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come, A Commentary on the First Gospel*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1974.
- Watson, William C. *Dispensationalism Before Darby: Seventeenth-Century and Eighteenth-Century English Apocalypticism*. Silverton, OR: Lampion Press, LLC, 2015.

REVIEWS

Galatians: Gospel of Freedom, A Concise Commentary. 2nd edition. By Jeremy Thomas. Spokane: Independently Published, 2023. Paperback. 98 pp. \$10.99. ISBN: 979–8858408215.

Reviewed by:

Robert Dean, Jr.

*West Houston Bible Church
Houston, Texas, USA*

This short, easy to read commentary is evidence of the author’s diligent, in-depth study and analysis of the Greek text and the theological issues involved. The author’s intended audience is “pastors, teachers, and laymen” (p. v). He states his goal is to reach a happy medium between too many details and ignoring important details. His intent was to write “bite-sized chunks” (p. vi) explaining as succinctly as possible the author’s intent. Along with explanations of the meaning of the text, he also sought to address verses in light of relevant positions within several theological positions: the lordship salvation-free grace debate; dispensationalism issues related to hyper-dispensationalism, progressive dispensationalism, as well as interacting at a basic level with Roman Catholic doctrines, or those of Campbellism, Arminianism, and others.

Pastor Thomas has indeed written an accessible overview of Paul’s epistle to the Galatians with comments on every verse of the text. His outline is derived from the text and an understanding of the epistle as an integrated, well-thought-out whole. As such he provides a valuable tool for examining the author’s central theme, the structure of the epistle in addressing that theme, and how the different parts of the epistle relate back to that theme. Quality summaries of a book’s argument are beneficial for the student of the text to understand the meaning of the text within the topic or theme of the epistle or narrative. Thomas clearly expresses the structure and organization of the text in helpful, easy to understand language.

His achievement of the second objective, to show how sections of the text related to current as well as long term theological debates, was somewhat less successful. In the first part of the commentary, he has extremely helpful counterpoints to various false conceptions of the gospel and interactions with other theological views pertaining to current debates on soteriology, eschatology, dispensationalism, or the spiritual life. As the commentary proceeds these appear less frequently. In the second edition, he has expanded on this.

The commentary begins with a succinct summary detailing the recipients, seven features unique to this epistle, a brief outline, and brief statements on the key word, the key theme, the key verse and the key idea. His commentary then follows and develops his initial summary outline. This is valuable because it does not overwhelm a novice reader with too much information at the beginning, but adds it slowly as the commentary progresses.

According to Thomas the epistle neatly divides into three sections along with an Introduction and Conclusions.

Introduction (1:11–10)

Personal: Paul's Gospel and Apostolic Authority (1:11–2:21)

Doctrinal: Paul's Gospel of Faith and Freedom (3:1–4:31)

Practical: Paul's Gospel of Freedom by Walking by the Spirit (5:1–6:10)

Conclusion (6:11–18)

The issue with a different gospel including the nature of the biblical gospel is clearly stated. Thomas emphasizes the centrality of grace to the biblical gospel. Followed by brief interactions by those theological or ecclesiastical positions today that commit the same error of adding human works to the finished work of Christ.

Thomas has a clear summary and explanation of the conflict between Paul and Peter in the first half of the chapter. Here he makes a clear point about the statement in Galatians 1:22–24 that those in Judea who had not seen him face to face, but only heard reports of what he proclaimed, glorified God. Thomas makes a keen observation that this shows that he was preaching what Peter and James preached. The timing of this would refute the arguments of Pauline, mid-Acts, and late Acts dispensationalism because it shows that the same gospel was proclaimed by all.

In the explanation of the second chapter, Thomas explains Paul's second visit to Jerusalem fourteen years later. At that time, he affirmed the gospel he

preached among the Gentiles, which did not include circumcision. He was accompanied by an uncircumcised Gentile, Titus, who was not compelled to be circumcised. All of this is set forth as evidence that the Jerusalem apostles did not include circumcision, or any other work, into their gospel. Thomas correctly connects this to the theme of our liberty in Christ. However, he then relates Peter's turnabout in Antioch when he went along with the legalists. Peter was acting like an unbeliever, validating their legalistic nonsense.

This set the context for Paul's explanation that justification was by faith apart from any works (Gal. 2:16). Thomas explains justification by faith alone in a clear, understandable and lucid manner. After salvation the believer is looked upon by God as righteous. In his explanation, he confirms his understanding of faith as being convinced of the truth of the gospel that "is found in Acts 13:22–39 and centers on believing Jesus, the son of David, who died and rose again" (p. 18), citing Paul's preaching of forgiveness in Acts 13:32–39 as central to understanding the gospel.

Thomas concludes with a clear correlation of Galatians 2:20 with that Romans 6 teaching that we died with Christ, thus being set free from the tyranny of the sin nature.

Thomas's summary statements throughout are very beneficial to the reader who wants to follow the apostle's train of thought. The next major section he sees is Paul's gospel of faith and freedom in chapters 3–4. There he argues that Abraham's justification did not include the works of the law because they preceded the giving of the law. He uses Paul's six rhetorical questions. In his discussion he emphasizes that just as the Galatians had received salvation and the Spirit by faith, so, too, their growth after salvation would be based on faith alone, not by works.

Two items should be noted for the reader. Within dispensationalism there is much discussion surrounding the relationship of the new covenant announced in Jeremiah 31:31–33 (quoted in Heb. 8:7–12; referred to in 2 Cor. 3:6) to the current church age. Of the three central views, Thomas understands the new covenant to be in effect today to some degree. Second, Thomas's brief statements regarding inheritance do not appear to be the more expected explanation.

The second major division Thomas sees spans Galatians 3:1–4:31. The focus in this section is "Paul's gospel of faith and freedom." Paul lays the

foundation by asking a rhetorical question about how they began their spiritual life — by faith or by the works of the law? This is built on the examination of Abraham's faith (Gal. 3:6–14). Thomas argues correctly that based on the Hebrew grammar of Genesis 15:6, Abraham had already believed God's promise of salvation prior to the events of Genesis 12:1–3. Thus, Abraham's justification could not in any way have been based on works of the law. Another solid, easily grasped explanation of justification by faith alone follows.

From this Thomas deftly shows that Paul's argument of faith alone is the only logical conclusion and that those who are of faith are blessed as Abraham's spiritual descendants, because of the faith, not the works of the law. This is followed by an understanding that Abraham's descendants are those who believed in the Seed (singular), a reference to Christ. The conclusion to this is that all who believe are sons of Abraham.

The fourth chapter is a well-developed explanation of how Paul continues to logically develop his teaching that we are neither justified nor sanctified by the works of the law because we are free from the law. Thomas explains this through the sections showing the purpose of the law as a temporary guardian (Gal. 4:1–11), an argument based on the way they received what he had taught when he first came to them (Gal. 4:12–20) and an understanding of the nature of the promise of salvation in Abraham which was not based on the law (Gal. 4:21–30). Thomas concludes his explanation by showing Paul's conclusion that if the law is unnecessary for justification and sanctification, then we must understand the freedom that Christ has given us.

In the third major section, Thomas shows that our true freedom in Christ comes by walking by means of the Spirit (Gal. 5:1–6:10). Here he shows that Paul is explaining the nature of our freedom, that it is not licentiousness, but living out God's plan by walking by the Spirit. This walk is the basis for the Spirit's production of fruit in our lives. But as believers we either walk by the Spirit or according to the flesh. The evidence of which is found in the list of sins or the list of virtues provided in Galatians 5:19–23.

The conclusion of this section begins by showing the basis for our victory in Galatians 5:25 which is well-explained. Since we currently live by the Spirit, our positional truth of eternal life, we must also walk or live by the Spirit in our daily Christian life. Thus, to defeat the flesh we must consciously

follow the Spirit's step by step leading. Along with this we are to bear one another's burdens, support those who teach the Word, and not grow weary (Gal. 6:1–10).

He then explains Paul's conclusion (Gal. 6:11–18). Here Paul reveals the motivation of his opponents is to circumcise the Galatians. One of the most significant verses in this section is Galatians 6:16 where Paul speaks of the "Israel of God." Thomas has a brief, but solid explanation of the meaning, referring to Jewish background believers in Yeshua as their Messiah.

The strong points in this commentary are the clear, brief, sound definitions and explanations of the key verses as noted above. One weakness is a lack of footnotes not only to explain some of the more technical issues in problem passages, but also to point to more in-depth studies in commentaries, journal articles, or articles within collections or Festschriften.

All in all, this is a fine commentary to provide a solid overview and framework for the argument of the epistle.

DOI: 10.62075/chafer.15.1.z4p7ce

Discovering Dispensationalism: Tracing the Development of Dispensational Thought from the First to the Twenty-First Century.

Edited by Cory M. Marsh and James I. Fazio. El Cajon, CA: SCS Press, 2023. Hardcover. 399 pages. \$29.95. ISBN: [979-8988237600].

Reviewed by:

Ian A. Hicks

*Independent researcher
Sarnia, Ontario, Canada*

Editors Cory M. Marsh and James I. Fazio have set out on an ambitious endeavor! Any attempt to trace a theological system through church history can be perceived as a bold task that runs the risk of oversimplification and bias sampling; nonetheless, to avoid these potential shortcomings, the editors have gathered twelve prominent scholars to trace dispensational thought in its nascent forms. Marsh spearheads the introduction of the book by correcting age-old misconceptions about dispensationalism and then has each author brilliantly engage with their respective eras (Ancient Mediterranean, Vintage Europe, and Modern America).

Given the recent published criticisms of dispensational theology¹ and the growing hostility on social media from the general public, this work could not be timelier. As Marsh rightly points out in his introduction, anti-dispensational academics are “driven by misguided and uninformed assertions about dispensational thought ...” (p. 1) and I would add, so is the public. This ignorance continues to grow in every circle of evangelical theology, and this is due in part to the lack of publications that are accessible and promoted in various circles. Though it might seem that dispensationalism has gone relatively quiet, there are still excellent published works coming out² and we can add *Discovering Dispensationalism* to that list. It is high time for dispensational thought leaders to push back with these types of robust investigations and provide the church with material that will stand the test of time.

Directly addressed in this excellent resource is the claim that is oft repeated that dispensational theology is “novel.” A robust collection of essays from numerous theologians clearly indicates otherwise. Each author methodically traces *proto*-dispensational elements from the church’s inception down to this present day, and as Marsh aptly notes, “... dispensationalism did not appear in a vacuum or as the brainchild of any one individual” (p. 17).

There are several positive features of this book: (1) The overall goal of the work was achieved in that it grounds dispensational thought through church history and the result from this conclusion is that academic and lay persons *must* abandon the rhetoric surrounding the novelty of dispensationalism. Proto-dispensational thought is established by Fazio through an exegetical assessment of the socio-historical usage of *oikonomia*; Hartog displays that premillennialism and dispensations were prevalent in the Patristic era; Mutie builds on Hartog’s article by demonstrating that premillennialism, dispensations, and literalism were influential in the Nicene era; Watson shows that dispensations, literalism [including the prophetic aspects], futurism, and premillennialism were all clear expressions in the Medieval era; Bigalke demonstrates a resurgence of literalism and the perspicuity of scripture during the Reformation era; Snoeberger displays

¹ See Daniel G. Hummel, *The Rise and Fall of Dispensationalism: How the Evangelical Battle over the End Times Shaped a Nation* and Brian P. Irwin and Tim Perry, *After Dispensationalism: Reading the Bible for the End of the World*.

² For a similar work see, *Forged from Reformation: How Dispensational Thought Advances the Reformed Legacy*, published by SCS Press in 2017.

a clear distinction arising between Israel and the Church, with an emphasis on national Israel and their future salvation/restoration pre-Darby; Weremchuck highlights these features with Darby's systematization; and lastly moving forward to the refinement of these ideas in differing formats through the last 200 years [mid-acts, progressive dispensationalism]. (2) The book is well researched, loaded with academic citations, and exceptionally objective in its assessments. (3) The book, while retaining an academic perspective, is also extremely accessible to the lay reader and therefore makes this a valuable resource for all.

With that said, there are always areas for improvement. The main criticism with a work like this is that despite there being a goal set by Marsh (pp. 8–9), a more clearly defined goal would have likely provided a more unified outcome. It is of this reader's opinion that the *key* distinctives of dispensational theology (i.e., the *sine qua non*) were at times lost in the individual essays. An agreed upon revision/reassessment of the *sine qua non* of dispensationalism at the outset could have provided a more unified approach from each author in their respective eras. Mark Snoeberger understands this best when he says, "it seems better to secure seventeenth- and eighteenth-century provenance of the dispensational approach (if such may be found before Darby) by looking for elements of dispensationalism's *sine qua non* during that period" (p. 187). However, this begs the question, does dispensationalism require further refinement at this point and are dispensationalists still in agreement with Charles Ryrie's articulation or John Feinberg's refinement of the *sine qua non*? Also, how does one factor in the growing lack of agreement surrounding "dispensations" as a key distinctive, yet the term is built directly into the name *dispensational* theology? Is it time to pivot, as others have done, placing more emphasis on kingdom and covenant as the grand meta-narratives of scripture rather than focusing on dispensations?³

Potential areas of research could include: (1) tracing Darby's view of Daniel's 70th week through church history, (2) the impact of dispensational thought in Europe and Asia since its systematization, and (3) dispensations as a sub-theme of the doctrine of total depravity.

³ See Paul M. Henebury, *The Words of the Covenant - A Biblical Theology: Volume 1 - Old Testament Expectation*, and Michael Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever: A Biblical Theology of the Kingdom of God*.

It is impossible to include a full evaluation of the book in such a short amount of space, but let it be stated that it is of this reader's opinion that Marsh's hope for this book as articulated (p. 17) has been achieved in this publication. This book has helped to establish the historical development of dispensational thought, it has corrected misunderstandings, and it has clarified mischaracterizations. Now, the question that is most pertinent is, will the other side take the time to read and engage it? May it be so! Contrary to the opinion of its detractors, dispensationalism is not *dead*, nor has it *fallen*, as the editors state in conclusion, "its future remains bright" (p. 370).

DOI: 10.62075/chafer.15.1.h9y2ja

Route 60: The Biblical Highway. Directed by Matthew Crouch. Starring Mike Pompeo and David Friedman. Trinity Broadcasting Network; Fathom Events. Documentary film. 1h 40m. NR. Released September 18, 2023.

Reviewed by:

Robert Dean, Jr.

West Houston Bible Church

Houston, Texas, USA

Route 60: The Biblical Highway is a well-crafted, visually stunning, documentary about the central north-south highway passing through the hill country of Samaria and Judea. Produced by Trinity Broadcasting Network and presented by two hosts, former CIA Director and Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, and US Ambassador (ret.) to Israel, David Friedman. Pompeo is a devout evangelical Christian, Friedman an Orthodox Jew. Both bring a significant presence to the project which will be discussed later.

I strongly recommend this film to everyone, Jewish or Christian, for several different reasons. First, for those who have never been to Israel, as well as those who have, the photography is stunning. Second, for many who have been there, it will remind them of what they saw and learned as they travelled in Israel. Third, for those who have never travelled to Judea and Samaria, it will take you to the heart of Old Testament Israel, Shechem, Shiloh, Bethel, Machpelah in Hebron (Gen. 23:19–20), and Beersheba (Gen. 21:22–34). Many who take tours in Israel rarely get to some of these sites. Their confirmation of biblical stories demonstrates the ancient presence of Israelites. To stand in Shiloh ten feet

from where the Ark of the Covenant, the visible presence of God on the earth for over three hundred years, is quite profound. To stand near where Abraham and Sarah camped (Gen. 12:8) and where Jacob had a vision of angels ascending and descending (Gen. 28:10–22) brings the reality of these events home in a personal way. To be where Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Leah are buried at Machpelah (Gen. 23:19–20) in Hebron drives home the historical accuracy of the Bible. And finally, it should and does impress the viewer with the historical factuality of the Bible as Friedman puts it: these are real places, real events, and real people. This cannot be denied.

The hosts always refer to these areas as “Judea” and “Samaria.” Never do they use the ambiguous “West Bank.” This may not be so apparent to everyone in the audience. West Bank implies an “east bank.” Following Jordan’s conquest of territory on the west side of the Jordan in 1948, the name of the country, Transjordan (“across the Jordan from Israel”), became obsolete. The Hashemite Kingdom now ruled over the east and west banks of the Jordan. But following Jordan’s defeat in the Six-Day War, the so-called territories continue to be described as the West Bank. But this begs the question, the west bank of what? For Israelis who believe all of the land west of the Jordan is theirs by international law (as voted on by a majority in the League of Nations in 1922), the territories should only be referred to by the historic, biblical names, Judea and Samaria. This offers a clue to the underlying message of the film.

The trailer begins with Friedman focused on the road he describes as “the road to believing in the One True God.” Along this road, God made His covenant with Abraham promising that his descendants would be more numerous than the stars, also the road Jesus, the founder of Christianity, walked. In this opening statement he introduces something that will only be expanded more toward the middle of the film, where a gradual connection between the sites visited on the road and the modern Abraham Accords is crafted by these two statesmen.

The trailer presents the film as a sort of travelogue through the history of Judea and Samaria. They begin in the north, at Nazareth, the home of Jesus. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but grew up in Nazareth, an extremely tiny Jewish village in Galilee. Today, Nazareth is a large, urban, Arab city. Though not actually in Samaria, Nazareth serves the purpose of the sub-text which is to show through archaeology and history that the Jewish people have had a presence in Samaria, Judea, and the “Promised Land” for four thousand years.

From Nazareth, they travel south to Shechem, where Abraham first “built an altar to the LORD” (Gen. 12:7) who promised this land to the descendants of Abraham. Just northwest of Shechem is Mt. Ebal, the location of the 6 tribes who recited the curses on Israel for disobedience to God. Our hosts take us to Joshua’s altar on Mt. Ebal, where a recent curse tablet was found (Deut. 11:29; 27:13–26; Josh. 8:30–33). This tablet is dated to the fourteenth century and uses both the name *El* and the name *Y*. A clear refutation of all modernist claims that Israel’s religion did not develop with the use of both of these names together until the ninth century B.C. or later.

Then Abraham moved south in Genesis 12:8, to a site between Bethel and Ai. This is the third site visited in the film. The same site where Jacob later slept and dreamed of a stairway to heaven with angels ascending and descending (Gen. 28:10–22). This location was visited by this reviewer just a few short months ago.

Between these sites, lies the second site, Shiloh. Shiloh was the location of the ancient Israelite tabernacle and the ark of the covenant. Tabernacle translates the Hebrew word *miškān* (מִשְׁכָּן), meaning “the dwelling place of the LORD,” where God dwelt between the cherubs on the Ark of the Covenant. This area has continued to be excavated since 2017 with remarkable finds. There is little as moving as standing ten feet from where God dwelt for over three hundred years!

As the travels continue south through Jerusalem, and on to the burial site of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Leah, and then to Beersheva we are again reminded of Israel’s ancient claim to this land.

From the time in Jerusalem the film emphasizes more and more what was accomplished in the Abraham Accords signed September 15 by Israel and the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, bringing these Arab states together with Israel in a treaty for the first time. Pompeo and Friedman were the architects of the agreement. Again we are reminded of Israel’s ancient claim.

The subtext which refutes the denial of the historicity of the Hebrew Scriptures has another significance. The attempt to discredit the historicity of the Bible was led by a variety of German “Christian” scholars who were also antisemitic. By destroying the historicity of the Bible, they sought to destroy the “myth” of the Jews as God’s chosen people. This religious assault on the veracity of the Hebrew Scriptures was wedded later to the political,

ethnic antisemitism in the ideology of Nazism. If everything about Israel's claims to a historical presence in the land was based on myth and legend then the denial of the historicity of their Scripture also validated anti-Zionism and antisemitism. The verification of Israel's existence in the promised land since approximately 2000 B.C. not only validates the biblical historical accounts, but also validates their 4,000-year presence in the land.

The reaction to this film will be harsh because the political left and the theological left have both built an edifice on the assumption that the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures are just myth and legend and cannot be relied on for historical fact. But that foundation was laid in the 18th century when we did not have the archaeological evidence that we have today. The attack to destroy the credibility of the Old Testament was an attack to destroy the foundation for Christianity. Many theological liberals both Protestants and Jewish accepted the validity of these unfounded historical assertions. What we now know is that the presuppositions, undergirding, theological liberalism, and the liberalism that rejects the claims of Israel to the land are both grounded on anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist assumptions which cannot be denied. The reality is archaeology and history have confirmed the presence of the Jewish people in their historic homeland for 4,000 years. This destroys the Arab claim to the territories.

There are two drawbacks to the film, but they neither discredit the presentation, nor will they be noticed by most in the audience First, the most egregious error was which Ambassador (ret.) Friedman asserted that Abraham was the first believer in Monotheism. Such a claim ignores much, but specifically Adam, Enoch, Noah and his family, Melchizedek, and Job. Friedman also misstated a few other biblical events. The second is that the music at times distracted from the film.

As the film approaches its conclusion, there are many more scenes which connect the Judeo-Christian foundation of the United States government with the historic teaching derived primarily from the Torah, but also from a few other key passages in the Old Testament. The film ends on a high note, connecting conservative patriotism to Christianity, the Hebrew Scriptures, and Israel.

The film also has a supporting website: route60.movie which provides resources for further study, discussion groups, and Bible studies.

DOI: 10.62075/chafer.15.1.d5x1lr



PNEUMATIKOS

The JOURNAL of CHAFER
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Since 1995, *Pneumatikos* (formerly the *CTS Journal*) has shared biblical exegesis and exposition with readers seeking in-depth Bible teaching. The articles in each issue of *Pneumatikos* are approved through a double-blind peer review and deemed as theologically consistent with the **seven theological distinctives of Chafer Theological Seminary**:

LITERAL HERMENEUTICS

•

DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGY

•

THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURES

•

THE FREENESS OF GOD'S GRACE

•

FULL COUNSEL OF GOD'S WORD

•

EMPHASIS ON GREEK AND HEBREW EXEGESIS

•

COMPREHENSIVE WORLDVIEW BASED ON THE BIBLE

For an explanation of each of these distinctives and to view all of the doctrinal statements for Chafer Theological Seminary, please visit our website at **Chafer.edu**.

We know there are many options for obtaining a theological degree or taking theological classes today. We invite you to learn how Chafer is distinct from other seminaries.

Have questions? Feel free to email our administrative staff at **info@Chafer.edu**.

We would love to discuss with you why you should
CHOOSE CHAFER.



DOCTRINAL DISTINCTIVES

LITERAL HERMENEUTICS

•

DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGY

•

THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURES

•

THE FREENESS OF GOD'S GRACE

•

FULL COUNSEL OF GOD'S WORD

•

EMPHASIS ON GREEK AND HEBREW EXEGESIS

•

COMPREHENSIVE WORLDVIEW BASED ON THE BIBLE

chafer.edu