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Exegesis of Matthew 24:21–35: “This Generation” and the Structure of Matthew 23–25

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The identity of “this generation” in Matthew 24:21-35 and its connection with the discourse of Matthew 23-25 as a whole has eluded a satisfactory explanation.* If it was Christ’s purpose to give the reader some specific information on the events addressed in His discourse, it must be admitted that the history of the diverse interpretations of this passage suggests that some cues have been missed somewhere. Appeals made to the parallel passages in Mark and Luke have neither clarified the meaning in their own contexts, nor have they provided help in Matthew’s.

The text itself stands firm philologically, and there is little if any difficulty with terminology; therefore, the problem would seem to be one of interpretation. An exhaustive coverage of the available material on this topic is beyond the limitations of this study and would be unnecessary. Our objective is to obtain exegetical meaning and interpretation, rather than the most logical choice between competing views. Our methodology, therefore, will be an analysis of the literary and historical contexts of the passage. An exegesis of the disputed words and phrases of this passage will also be presented as a basis for further understanding.

Gospel of Matthew: Historical Background

Authorship. This Gospel, like the other three, is anonymous. However, the title (“According to Matthew”) goes back to at least the second century A.D., perhaps as early as A.D. 125. It is sometimes

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suggested that the use of the name Matthew instead of Levi (in the list of the twelve) with the addition of the title “tax collector” (Matt 10:3) serve as autobiographical touches. In any case, it is the unanimous tradition of the church as far back as the early second century that the apostle Matthew was the author of this gospel, and there is little reason to question it.¹

. This Gospel is written from the standpoint of showing the major events in the life of Jesus to have met prophetic fulfillment. The five discourses within the book indicate it was intended to serve as a teaching manual for the church. It also served an apologetic function to answer questions raised by antagonists. Its Jewish flavor, along with the touches of universalism, as well as the fact that it is written in Greek, suggest it was written for Hellenistic Jews in the Diaspora. Since the earliest clear knowledge of Matthew comes from Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch in Syria (ca. A.D. 110), Antioch may have been both the location of his readers as well as the place where the Gospel was written.²

Date. The dating of the Gospel of Matthew is intimately tied to the Synoptic problem. It also ties in more specifically with our passage in Matthew 24, in that the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 is involved. If predictive prophecy, and more particularly the predictive power of Jesus, is denied, the dating of the Synoptics is viewed as late with the exception of Mark, who, on the basis of the two-source hypothesis, is able to see the destruction of Jerusalem coming a few years in advance. However, a growing number of scholars have moved to the Griesback hypothesis of Matthean priority, and this, along with an allowance for predictive prophecy,³ would suggest an earlier date. If Matthew was written first, and Luke ends the book of Acts with the house arrest of Paul in the early 60's A.D., with his own Gospel being even earlier, then Matthew was probably written sometime in the early 50's.

Establishment of the Text. The passage to be exegeted (Matt 24:21-35) will be taken from the Greek text of the third edition of the United Bible Societies version. The only variant in this passage that affects the establishment of the text is the omission of the word *phōnēs* (sound/voice) from qualifying *salpiggos* (trumpet) in verse 31,⁴ which has no effect on the reading. The reading with this omission in the Greek text is given a B rating.

The Context of Matthew 24:21-35

The overall context of this passage falls within the third part of the book, which deals with Jesus' ministry beyond the Jordan and in Jerusalem. Jesus had foretold His death (Matt 16:21), and this sets the

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tone for much of the remainder of the book. The trip from Galilee to Jerusalem (Matt 19-20) consists of confrontations with friends, enemies, and would-be disciples, the blessing of children, parables told, a further prediction of his death, and the healing of two blind men. Upon approaching Jerusalem, Jesus makes His triumphal entry into the city, followed by the casting out of the traders from the Temple and the healing of a number of people (Matt 21:1-17). After Jesus curses the fig tree, He is once again confronted on the issue of His authority, this time by the chief priests and elders, after which He tells a parable which openly reveals the lost condition of His religious hearers (Matt 21:18-46). Matthew 22 consists of the parable of the wedding feast, followed by a series of confrontations by the religious leaders, whom Jesus leaves speechless.

The immediate setting of our passage lies in a discourse covering Matthew 23-25, of which the first portion (chap. 23) takes place in the Temple. Jesus tells His listeners to observe the things the scribes and Pharisees tell them but not to do as they do, giving them several examples (Matt 23:1-7). He also gives some specific instructions, contrary to their practice, for His own followers (Matt 23:8-12). Verses 13-36 are a series of woes or judgments against the scribes and Pharisees. Behind the Greek onomatopoeic interjection *ouai* (woe/alas) is the Hebrew *hōy* (ah, alas), the background of which seems to be laments for the dead, but which in the prophetic literature of the OT is a means of prophetic denunciation. The word is frequently followed by the preposition “to” plus a suffix, and has a tendency to occur in series, addressed usually to Yahweh’s so-called people who have separated themselves from Him by their godless conduct. If the woe oracles go back to the cry of lament for the dead, then they are tantamount to a prediction of death, that is, a judgment from God.⁵

This is precisely what we have here in this series of seven or eight woes to the scribes and Pharisees. The woes are followed by the second person plural form of the personal pronoun “you” in the dative case (*humin*, to you). The issues addressed are the reprehensible conduct of these groups of people. That judgment is involved is further indicated at the end of the last woe by such phrases as “fill up the measure [of the guilt] of your fathers” and “how can you escape the sentence [that is, judgment] (*kriseōs*) of Gehenna” in verses 32-33, as well as “all these things shall come upon this generation” in verse 36. Jesus ends this part of the discourse with a final judgment on Jerusalem and the Temple itself by saying, “your house is left unto you desolate” (vss. 37-39).⁶

Matthew 24 opens with an extra-discoursal section when Jesus leaves the Temple for the last time, His disciples with Him. Prompted

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by Jesus' last statement in the Temple, the disciples point out its magnificent buildings. Jesus responds by saying that the Temple will soon be destroyed. A short time later they ask him two questions: the first regarding the timing of that event; the second regarding His coming and the end of the age (Matt 24:1-3). Jesus continues the discourse by responding to these questions while with the disciples on the Mount of Olives. Interestingly, when in vision Ezekiel saw "the glory of the Lord" depart from the first Temple before its destruction in 586 B.C. It stood over the mountain to the east of the city (Ezek 11:23), the same mountain which was also called the Mount of Olives (cf. 2 Sam 15:30; Zech 14:4), where Jesus sat after He left the Temple for the last time before its destruction in A.D. 70. The theme of judgment, which was the major focus of the first part of the discourse, thus continues into the second part as well.

The next section (verses 4-14) consists of signs of events to come. These deal with false messiahs, wars, famines, earthquakes, persecutions, false prophets, lawlessness, the lack of and the enduring of faith, and the preaching of the gospel to all the world. Whether these signs deal with events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem, the Second Coming, or both, depends on the outcome of the exegesis of verses 21-35; therefore, we will reserve comment until after this has been done.

The section immediately preceding our passage focuses on the destruction of Jerusalem (vss. 15-20). The phrase "abomination of desolation" (*to bedlugmates erēmōseōs*), which was mentioned by Daniel the prophet (vs. 15), has been interpreted in a number of ways, but with the exception of the view that it is the Antichrist, the suggested identifications are related to the days of the Roman Empire (statues of Pilate, Caligula, Vespasian, or Titus, the invading armies of Rome, or the atrocities of the Zealots).⁷ The phrasing of Matthew 12:15 is quite close to Daniel's expression in the Greek Septuagint (LXX) in Daniel 9:27, 11:31, and 12:11.⁸ The latter two references (that is, Dan 11:31, and especially 12:11, where it is exactly the same as in the LXX, ms. 88⁸⁸), has the most going for it in terms of exactness of expression, and would thus seem to fit the Antichrist interpretation. However, the context as a whole in Matthew's record would indicate some aspect of the destruction of Jerusalem,⁹ and this connects it with the context of Daniel 9:27.

The contexts of both Daniel 9:26-27 and Matthew 25:15-16 would suggest the view that it was the atrocities of the Zealots which best fits the meaning of the "abomination of desolation." In the former, the phrase "upon the wing of abominations shall come a desolator" (vs. 27) would seem to indicate that the desolation was the result of the

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abominations of the Jewish people.¹⁰ In the latter (Matt 24:15-16) the order to flee Judea (and Jerusalem) when the abomination of desolation was seen to be standing in the holy place would seem rather unnecessary if it was only the setting up of statues of various Roman emperors or officials in the Temple that was meant. On the other hand, it would have been too late to flee if the Roman armies were already in the Holy Place, since historically speaking, it was all over by that point. It would seem that the best interpretation historically is that when the Christian Jews, who dwelt in Jerusalem, saw the Zealots make a fortress out of the Temple (Josephus *Wars* IV. 3. 7), they fled to Pella (Eusebius *HE* iii. 32). It was thus the perversion of the use of the original intention of the Temple as a place of worship—the culmination of a long history of religious perversion (cf. Matt 23:37-38),— which was the abomination that brought about the desolation (or the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple) by the Roman armies.

Moving now to Matthew 24:36-39, the context immediately after our passage, we meet with the statement that the exact timing of the coming of Jesus is known only by the Father, but that it will occur in times similar to those of Noah's day. Matthew 24:40-25:46 concludes the discourse with a series of illustrations and parables encouraging the disciples of Christ to be ready at all times and indicates what they are to be doing while waiting for His return.

The Exegesis of Matthew 24:21-35

We have seen that the section immediately before this passage focuses on the destruction of Jerusalem, and the section immediately after it focuses on the Second Coming. Verse 21 says, "For then there will be a great tribulation [*thlipsis*] which has not been from the beginning of the world until now nor ever will be." The question is: When does this tribulation occur? Is it in connection with the destruction of Jerusalem or with the events leading up to the Second Coming? The temporal adverb *tote* can be conjunctive or disjunctive, meaning "at that time" or "then" (next, afterward), as it does in English, so it is of little help in making a distinction.

The wording of this verse reflects Daniel 12:1, which reads in the Greek Septuagint (LXX, Theodotion), ". . . and there will be a time of tribulation, such tribulation [*thlipsis*] which has not been from the time that there was a nation on the earth until that time." C. H. Dodd has shown that when the NT writers quote phrases or sentences from the OT, it is an indication of the whole OT context.¹¹ The context of this verse is Daniel 11:40-12:2, which is at the end of the fourth prophetic outline of Daniel. Here we are told that although there will be this

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unparalleled time of tribulation, Michael the prince will stand up on behalf of His people and will save everyone who is found “written in the book.” This is followed in verse 2 by the resurrection of the dead. On this basis, we should be justified in concluding that the shift of emphasis from the destruction of Jerusalem to that of the Second Coming in this part of Matthew 24 occurs at verse 21 rather than at verse 29, which is often assumed. Therefore, the great tribulation depicted in Matthew appears to be an event connected with those leading up to the Second Coming rather than with the destruction of Jerusalem.

Verses 22-26 have been applied by commentators to both the destruction of Jerusalem and events connected with the Second Coming. Since we have seen, however, that verse 21 is dependent on the context of Daniel 12:1, which indicates a focus on events in connection with the Second Coming, the following verses should also. The days (of the tribulation) being cut short for the sake of the elect in verse 22 is, therefore, more universal in scope than it would be in a context connected with the destruction of Jerusalem. The false messiahs and prophets, their deception of even the elect, as well as the warnings against running here and there to look for the Messiah, could apply quite well to either context. In fact, the seeking of the Messiah in the wilderness (verse 26) fits extremely well in the first century A.D. Again, however, context would indicate events leading up to the Second Coming. This is explicit in verse 27, where the focus is on the *coming* (*parousia*) of the Son of man, with the additional emphasis both here and in verse 28 that when this happens it will be obvious to everyone.

The following three verses (vss. 29-31) are universally seen as a description of events leading up to the Second Coming. Verse 29 begins with the phrase: “But immediately after the tribulation of those days. . .”. The tribulation (cf. vs. 21), has been seen by some as referring to the destruction of Jerusalem, and thus a transition to events connected with the Second Coming proposed here in verse 29. We have seen above, however, that the tribulation is rather to be connected to events leading up to the Second Coming. Thus, the focus is on same event from verse 21 onward and, therefore, there is no transition at verse 29.

The celestial events mentioned in this verse have a long history in the OT in connection with “the day of the Lord [Yahweh]” (for example, Amos 8:9; Isa 13:10; Joel 2:10, 31; 3:15). In these places there is a dual application of “the day of the Lord,” first focusing on the local, national judgment of God in the days of the prophet or relatively soon after, and then jumping to the universal end-time judgment. The same kind of imagery is used here and in Revelation 6:12-17 in connection with the Second Coming or universal “day of the Lord.” The focus on the Son of

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man coming in the clouds of heaven together with the angels (vss. 30-31; cf. the parallel imagery in Matt 13:37-41), also contributes to emphasis on the Second Coming of Christ in this section.

The next section (vss. 32-35) is the crux of the problem in this discourse. A parable (budding fig tree) is introduced to illustrate the seriousness of what Jesus has been saying. It is similar in some respects to the illustration in verse 28, although it is introduced in that verse without drawing a comparison as is done here. More specifically, the comparison in verse 33 focuses on an event: “when-ever you see all these things, know that . . . is near [even] at the doors.” The ellipsis in this last clause can be supplied by either “he” or “it” (ἐστίν), depending on whether the event spoken about is the Second Coming or the destruction of Jerusalem. This is followed in verse 34 by saying: “Truly I say to you that this generation will certainly not come to an end until all these things happen,” and then in verse 35 by a statement of the impossibility of the failure of Jesus’ words.

The phrase “these things” or “all these things” (*panta tauta*, vs. 33) is used a number of times in Matthew (4:9; 6:32-33; 13:34, 51; 19:20; 23:36; 24:2, 3), always referring to something just before it. Thus, it would seem that since verses 21-31 focus on the Second Coming, verses 32-35 should likewise. This creates the problem of having “this generation,” that is, the one to which Jesus’ hearers belonged, alive at the Second Coming. Since over nineteen hundred years have elapsed since then, it would seem that Jesus was mistaken, and we have an unfulfilled prophecy. Some seeking to get around this difficult problem have interpreted the word “generation (*genea*)” with the meaning “race,” “nation,” or “kind,” so as to suggest that the Jewish race/nation or mankind would not pass away before Christ’s return. However, the phrase “this generation” always means the people alive at a particular time and would have been understood as such by Jesus’ hearers. Matthew also uses it in this sense a number of other times (11:16; 12:41, 42-45; 23:36) in the book.

Thus, the question is: What are “all these things” which are to take place before “this generation” comes to an end? Although the section immediately before this would suggest the Second Coming, Jesus is responding to a question posed to Him by His disciples. The context of that question in verses 1-3 is the destruction of Jerusalem; therefore, that destruction, and not the Second Coming, is the focus of verses 32-35.¹² Then, the ellipsis which we left in verse 33 should be translated “it” instead of “He.” In essence, we have the following: the disciples ask, “When will these things be [that is, the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple]?” Jesus responds, “this generation will not come to an end before all these things happen.” By contrast, in regard to their second

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question concerning the Second Coming, He answered, “of that day and hour no one knows . . . but the Father” (vs. 36).

Since the destruction of Jerusalem occurred within the generation of the disciples, this section (vss. 32-35) does not constitute an unfulfilled prophecy, and the charge that Jesus was mistaken is unsubstantiated. Although the order of the elements (in chap. 24) alternates back and forth between two distinct and separate events, this is not such a strange phenomenon when answering distinct and separate questions. It would seem, therefore, that there is no problem in this section regarding “this generation” unless one insists, contrary to the overall context, that the event concerned is the Second Coming. While the phrase “these things” usually refers to that which comes immediately before it, since it is used here in reference to a specific event within a series of two, an alternation between the two events is possible without losing track of the original referent. We shall now look at this passage in terms of the overall structure of the discourse.

The Literary Structure of Chapters 23-25

As we have seen, the extra-discoursal material in Matthew 24:1-3 appears to be the key for solving the problem of “this generation” (vs. 34). It is now necessary to see if this same section can contribute to an understanding of the discourse as a whole in terms of structure. Unlike the other discourses of the book (chaps. 5-7, 10, 13, and 18), in which there is only an introduction and conclusion (5:1-2; 7:28-29; 10:1-4; 11:1; 13:1-2; 51-53; 18:1-2; 19:1), the discourse in chapters 23-25 has besides these elements (23:1; 26:1a) an extra-discoursal narrative (24:1-3). This in itself suggests a distinct and unique function.

In response to Jesus’ remarks (23:37-39), the disciples showed Him the magnificent temple buildings. Whereupon Jesus predicted their destruction. In private, they later asked him two questions: (1) “When will these things be?” and (2) “What [will be] the sign of your coming and the end of the age?” These questions referred to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Coming, respectively. The last question, which may sound like two questions, is actually one. The second “and” is exegetical, that is, the second element is a further explanation of the first. Thus, “the sign of Your coming” is equivalent to “the end of the age.”

Chapter 23 may be seen as a prologue focusing on a series of judgments addressed to God’s so-called people for their godless behavior and ultimately emphasizing the soon coming destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. We have already seen the connection between “these things”/ “all these things” (*panta tauta*)” and “this generation” (*genea*

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hautē)” in Matthew 24:32-35 with that of 24:1-3. This same connection with Matthew 24:1-3 can be made with Matthew 23:36, the last woe oracle, which states that “all these things (*panta tauta*) will come upon this generation (*genean tautēn*).” Thus, there is a literary link between the prologue (Matt 23), the extra-discoursal section (Matt 24:1-3), and Matthew 24:32-35.

Moving now to the section of verses in Matthew 24:4-14, we find that at least verses 4-8 also focus on events connected with the destruction of Jerusalem. Although the description of events is general and could fit at any time in history from the first century A.D. until the Second Coming, there are two literary cues that would seem to confirm our suggestion. In verse 6, we are told that “the end (*telos*) is not yet,” suggesting that this section is *not* focusing on the Second Coming = the end of the age. Further, it states in verse 8 that “all these things (*panta tauta*) are [only] the beginning of birth pains.” Again, there is the connection with verses 1-3 and the destruction of Jerusalem by the phrase “all these things.”

The opposite seems to be the case for verses 9-14. In verse 9 Christ says, “they will deliver you up to tribulation (*thlipsin*),” and although, as in verses 4-8, most of these events seem general and applicable to almost any time, the tribulation (verses 21, 29) is connected with events leading up to the Second Coming. This is further confirmed by the use of the term “the end (*telos*)” in verses 13 (cf. 10:22) and 14 in connection with the one who endures to the end and the preaching of the gospel to the whole world before the end comes.

As we have seen above, the next section (Matt 24:15-20), focuses on the destruction of Jerusalem. A further connection can also be seen between “your house is left to you desolate (*erēmos*)” in 23:38 and “the abomination of desolation (*erēmōseōs*)” of 24:15.

Matthew 24:21-31 focuses on the Second Coming. Literary relationships can be seen between “the sign (*sēmeion*) of the Son of man” in verse 30 and “the sign of Your coming” in the extra-discourse (vs. 3). “The coming (*parousia*) of the Son of Man” in verses 27 and 30 (the latter with the synonym *erchomenon*, coming) also link with “Your coming and the end of the age” in verse 3.

We have already looked at the literary relationships between Matthew 24:32-25 and other sections. Moving to the next section (Matt 24:36-39), we note the focus is on the Second Coming (*parousia*). The remainder of the discourse can be considered an epilogue consisting of illustrations and parables focusing on the theme of being ready for the Second Coming and what one should do while waiting.¹³ In each of these (Matt 24:40-42; 43-44; 45-51; Matt 25:1-13; 14-30; 31-46) the phrase Son of man/lord/bridegroom is coming/comes/came/will come

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occurs, each time using a form of *erchouai* (come) a verb which in these instances is parallel to *parousia* (coming, cf. 24:27, 30), and in one instance the verb *hēkō* (come) in 24:50.

In sum the structure of the discourse of Matthew 23-25 appears to be as follows:

- Introduction (23:1)
- Prologue (23:2-39) Woe Oracles — Destruction of Jerusalem
- Extra-Discoursal (24:1-3) — Two Questions (A & B)
 - A (24:4-8) Destruction of Jerusalem
 - B (24:9-14) Second Coming
 - A' (24:15-20) Destruction of Jerusalem
 - B' (24:21-31) Second Coming
 - A'' (24:32-35) Destruction of Jerusalem
 - B'' (24:36-39) Second Coming
- Epilogue (24:40-25:46) Be Ready - Second Coming
- Conclusion (26:1a)

Recently, it has been suggested that this discourse has a chiasmic structure.¹⁴ Our study need not preclude that, but may be seen as complementing it, though a few modifications are necessary.

A few observations on the parallel passages in Mark and Luke might be in order at this point. Hans LaRondelle¹⁵ has recently suggested that both Mark and Matthew present this discourse from the dual fulfillment perspective which is characteristic of the classical prophets of the OT, while Luke presents his version in historical succession, as is typical of apocalyptic.¹⁶ While in general this is a good observation, I would modify it somewhat (in terms of Matthew), on the basis of our present study.

The disciples, according to both Mark and Luke, appear to ask two questions about the same event, and both under the rubric of “(all) these things:” (1) “when will these things be? and (2) what (will be) the sign when (all) these things are going to be fulfilled/to take place?” Mark then follows by blending the events of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Coming, as is typical of classical prophecy, while Luke separates the two events by the phrase “. . . until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled,” as is characteristic of apocalyptic (cf. Rev 11:2).

While in one respect one could still view the discourse in Matthew as classical prophecy in the sense that the destruction of Jerusalem is a local manifestation of the day of the Lord which then jumps to the universal day of the Lord with the Second Coming, the fact that the disciples ask two very clear and distinct questions in Matthew

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and Jesus makes two distinct answers (the alternating structure) would cause one to move away from that interpretation. This would seem to be even clearer on the basis of Matthean priority. Looked at from that perspective, Matthew presented our Lord's discourse first, with a rather distinct structure. Luke followed, presenting it in apocalyptic style, with Mark last, in terms of classical prophecy.

Summary

Throughout the history of the interpretation of this discourse, the phrase "this generation" has generated a number of interpretations. The most prominent have been that it refers to (1) the generation of those who heard it, (2) the Jewish race or nation, (3) mankind or the human race, and (4) the generation alive when the event takes place. The most natural meaning is the first. However, if the event referred to is the Second Coming, it would suggest that Jesus was mistaken and we are left with an unfulfilled prophecy. Even though the phrase "all these things" and with it "this generation" seems to refer naturally to the immediate preceding section, it was found that the context would indicate that it refers back to the question of the disciples about the destruction of Jerusalem in the extra-discoursal section in Matthew 24:1-3.

Building on this, we propose with supporting evidence that the two questions of the disciples are the key to the structure of the entire discourse, and that it divides up neatly into alternating sections dealing with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Coming.¹⁷

Notes

* This is a creative article tackling a hard verse in a fruitful way. It will appear radical to many, and some may question whether *JATS* should publish it. We do not publish it as an attempt to change church doctrine or general SDA thought. Ray's fundamental point may be sound. Furthermore, while his thesis may be novel, it is not at odds with any fundamental belief of the church and is within the exegetical scope allowed to ATS members. This paper is a valuable attempt to solve the puzzle of a difficult text and give an exegetically sound answer to a question many of us have been asked. Readers are invited to critique the paper and discuss it. —The Editor

1 D. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), p. 33, and D. A. Hagner, "Matthew, Gospel According to," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (1986), 3: 287.

2 Guthrie, pp. 25-29, Hagner, p. 287 and E. F. Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), p. 174.

3 G. F. Hasel, *Biblical Interpretation Today* (Lincoln, NE: College View Printers, 1985), pp. 54-56 and Hagner, pp. 281, 287.

4 The fact that φωνῆς appears both before and after σάλπιγγος as well as in the combinations πεγᾶλης φωνῆς and σάλπιγγος καὶ φωνῆς in various manuscripts perhaps indicates its secondary character.

5 H. Zobel, "Hôy," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 3: 359-364.

6 There are only two Greek MSS which omit ἔρεμος. These are B and L. In addition, it is omitted by one lectionary (184), at least one MS from each of the following ancient versions: Old Latin, Syriac, and

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Coptic (both Sahidic and Bohairic), as well as by the Church Fathers Irenaeus^{1st}, Origen, and Cyril.

7 A. H. McNeile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980 reprint), p. 348.

8 Dan 9:27 LXX⁸⁸ φ βδέλυγμα τῶν ἐρημώσεων; Dan 11:31 LXX⁸⁸ βδέλυγμα ἐρημώσεως and LXX^φ βδέλυγμα ἡφανισμένον; and Dan 12:11 LXX⁸⁸ τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως and LXX^φ βδέλυγμα ἐρημώσεως.

9 One could hardly flee (verses 15b-20) from the Antichrist except in a spiritual sense.

10 W. H. Shea, *Daniel and the Judgment* (unpublished Manuscript, 1980), pp. 87-88; “The Prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27,” *The Seventy Weeks, Leviticus, and the Nature of Prophecy*, ed. F. D. Holbrook. (Washington, D. C.: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1986), p. 97.

11 C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures: The Sub-structure of New Testament Theology* (London: Collins, 1952), pp. 126-133.

12 F. F. Bruce, *The Hard Sayings of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), pp. 227-228.

13 Matt 24:48 χρονίζει and 25:19 χρονίζοντος all suggest a delay before the Second Coming. Thus, there seems to be a further emphasis on the separation between the events in this discourse.

14 J. S. Kidder, “‘This Generation’ in Matthew 24:34,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 21 (1983): 203-209.

15 H. K. LaRondelle, “Did Jesus Intend to Return in the First Century?,” *Ministry* 56 (May 1983): 10-13.

16 In Mark and Luke, the “this generation” in relation to “all these things” must contextually also relate to the question(s) of the disciples which refer to the destruction of Jerusalem. In Luke, this section is also removed from the previous one by its setting in narrative form (“and he told them a parable”).

17 It is recognized that the conclusions offered here differ from those of Ellen G. White. However, it should not be construed that this study is a repudiation of her thoughts on the subject. Since her comments on this discourse do not exhaust the meaning of the biblical text, the above is presented in the hope that it offers some additional light on a rather difficult section of Scripture. She writes, “At the close of the great papal persecution, Christ declared, the sun would be darkened, and the moon should not give her light. Next, the stars should fall from heaven. . . . he says of those who see these signs, ‘This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled’” (*Desire of Ages*, p. 632). The fact that those who saw the signs to which she seems to refer are long dead should lead us to question whether we have correctly understood her guidance. In harmony with this paper, she also writes, “Jesus did not answer His disciples by taking up separately the destruction of Jerusalem and the great day of His coming. He mingled the description of the two events. . . . In mercy to them He blended the description of the two great crises, leaving the disciples to study out the meaning for themselves” (p. 628). I agree with Mrs. White that “This entire discourse was given, not for the disciples only, but for those who should live in the last scenes of this earth’s history” (p. 628). This exegesis simply shows that the primary meaning of “this generation” was those who would see the destruction of Jerusalem. As Mrs. White writes of the entire passage, “But this prophecy was spoken also for the last days” (p. 631). In truth, the difference between her comments and my own are similar to the differences in the synoptic writers’ accounts of Jesus’ words about the future: differing slightly in emphasis and detail, but faithful and true and profitable.