

DEFENDING PREMILLENNIALISM IN MATTHEW: A STUDY OF KEY VERSES IN THE GOSPEL

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The basis of Premillennialism is to be found in the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants. “From these covenants God promised land, seed, and blessings for Israel as well as the whole world.”¹ Premillennialism affirms that OT prophecies regarding Israel, such as its salvation and restoration, will be fulfilled in the future by ethnic Israel.

Belief in the salvation of the nation Israel means that in the last days the Jews as a group will believe in Christ and be saved The concept of *restoration*, on the other hand, includes the ideas of Israel being saved and replanted in their land and given a unique role and mission to the nations Those who are nonsupersessionists believe in both concepts. They believe Israel as a nation will be *saved*, and they believe Israel will be *restored* as a national entity.²

Premillennialism is explicit in the teachings of 1 Cor 15:20–26 and Rev 20:1–7 regarding the intermediate or millennial kingdom which follows the Second Coming of Christ and precedes the New Heaven and the New Earth. Romans 11:25–27 clearly teaches that Israel as a whole will be saved. Acts 1:6 and 3:19–21 affirm that God will restore the kingdom to Israel. Matthew’s Gospel also in several key verses provides parallel and additional support for the premillennial position.

Amillennialists and Postmillennialists generally believe that Israel has been permanently replaced by the church in God’s plans. The church is said to be the new Israel and there is no

¹ Harold W. Hoehner, “Evidence from Revelation 20,” in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*, ed. Donald K. Campbell & Jeffrey L. Townsend (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992): 262.

² Michael J. Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010): 19.

distinction between Israel and the church.³ In contrast, Matthew's Gospel consistently distinguishes between the church and the nation of Israel and thus supports the premillennial position.⁴

Most of this study will focus on the teachings of select verses in Matthew regarding Israel's future salvation and restoration. Then in a brief section, specific proofs will be provided from Matthew against Postmillennialism. The conclusion of the study will argue that Matthew, a Jewish Christian,⁵ had a keen interest in Jewish evangelism. Like Peter at Pentecost, Matthew was brutally honest concerning the Jewish rejection of Christ, yet strongly passionate about the evangelism of the Jewish people. Matthew includes a great deal of content on the compassion of Jesus toward Israel throughout his ministry. While those who reject Christ will be judged and will not escape hell, Jesus (and Matthew) holds out hope based on the faithfulness of God and the compassionate ministry of Jesus and his followers, that Jews en masse would be converted in

³ Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989): 383. David K. Lowery, "Evidence from Matthew," in *A Case for Premillennialism*, ed. Donald K. Campbell & Jeffrey L. Townsend (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992): 178 notes "Interpreters may refer to the church as a 'new Israel' or 'True Israel' but Matthew and other NT writers did not do so."

⁴ Israel occurs 12 times in Matthew as follows: 1) 2:6 "shepherd my people Israel"; 2) 2:20 "go into the land of Israel"; 3) 2:21 "the land of Israel"; 4) 8:10 "in no one in Israel have I..." 5) 9:33 "like this has been seen in Israel"; 6) 10:6 "sheep of the house of Israel"; 7) 10:23 "through all the towns of Israel"; 8) 15:24 "sheep of the house of Israel"; 9) 15:31 "they praised the God of Israel"; 10) 19:28 "the twelve tribes of Israel"; 11) 27:9 "from the sons of Israel"; and 12) 27:42 "He is the King of Israel."

⁵ Matthew was a Jewish Christian writing to a Jewish audience. This is seen in a number of ways, e.g., 1) by more than 50 OT quotations emphasizing the fulfillment of the OT especially by using distinctive formula quotations that point to Jesus as the Jewish Messiah; 2) by omitting Mark's explanation of Jewish customs such as washings before meals and phylacteries and tassels; 3) by leaving Aramaic words such as *raca*, *mammon*, *korban*, and *Beelzeboul* untranslated; 4) by having an apologetic against early Jewish claims that Jesus was illegitimate and that the disciples stole the body of Jesus; 5) by presenting Jesus as sending the disciples only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel; and 6) by stressing a future for Israel in spite of its current rejection of Christ.

the future. Matthew would concur with Paul that one day “all Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:26 cf. Matt 23:39).

Matthew 1:21

“She will give birth to a son and you will name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” (NET)

Osborne asserts that “people” λαός in Matt 1:21 is not limited to Israel. Rather it means all those who will respond to the salvation Jesus brings.⁶ Davies and Allison say the majority of commentators equate “his people” with the church consisting of Jew and Gentile.⁷ Hagner agrees that “his people” is the church of Matt 16:18.⁸ Carson says that although to Joseph “his people” would be “the Jews,” the progressive unfolding of the rest of Matthew shows it to mean the remnant of Israel plus Gentiles who join with them.⁹

However, the context in which Matt 1:21 falls and the use of λαός “the people” in Matthew argue that “his people” means the Jews. Λαός in its 14 uses throughout the entirety of Matthew’s Gospel is only used in reference to the people of Israel (see 1:21; 2:4, 6; 4:16, 23; 13:15; 15:8; 21:23; 26:3, 5, 47; 27:1, 25, 64).¹⁰ France notes that λαός in the LXX and in later Jewish usage was associated with Israel as God’s chosen people. This is its primary meaning and

⁶ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010): 77.

⁷ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, ICC, 3 vol (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 198–97): 1:210.

⁸ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33A (Dallas: Word Books, 1994): 19.

⁹ D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984): 76. See also Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004): 77.

¹⁰ David K. Lowery, “Matthew,” in *The Bible Knowledge Key Word Study: The Gospels* (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2002): 41.

how it is used in the quotation of Mic 5:2 and 2 Sam 5:2 at Matt 2:6. He says that “his people” in relation to a mission of a “Son of David” must first of all denote Israel.¹¹ The location of 1:21 after the genealogy and birth shows Jesus to be the divine Son of David, heir to David’s throne over the people of Israel.

While the Jews in Jesus’ day predominately looked for a liberator from Rome, Matthew makes it clear that Jesus (“Yahweh is salvation”) would save his people from their sins.¹² The OT spoke often of the need of Israel to have salvation from sin (Ps 130:8 “And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.” See also e.g., Isa 53:4–12; Jer 31:31–34; Ezek 36:25–31). Jesus has authority to forgive sins (9:6) and he gives his life as a ransom for many (20:28), but Matthew shows that Jesus was rejected by most of Israel during his first advent. Yet God has not finally rejected Israel. The verb “will save” in 1:21 is a predictive future. Since this message was delivered by “an angel of the Lord,” and since Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and is God’s Son, it will surely come to pass. Not just a remnant will be saved. One day Israel en masse will be saved. One day Israel will welcome Jesus as her Messiah (see Matt 23:39).

¹¹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007): 53, 53 n.47. Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary*, 3 vols., Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2001–2007): 1:121 says “his people” refers to the OT people of God, Israel. Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999): 97, 97 n.68 says that Jesus’ acts of salvation or words about salvation in Matthew point to his ultimate redemption of his people Israel (e.g., 9:22; 10:22; 16:25; 19:25). He says many of the quotes in the infancy narratives in Matthew are taken from passages that emphasize God’s deliverance of his people from slavery. Matthew “evokes the Old Testament hope of the salvation of God’s people, including the justice and peace of God’s kingdom.”

¹² Gustaf Dalman, *The Words of Jesus* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902): 297 says that the Jews did not take the Messiah as a merely political character, but as the redeemer or the prince of the redeemed people.

Matthew 2:5–6

⁵ **"In Bethlehem of Judea," they said, "for it is written this way by the prophet:**
⁶ ***'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are in no way least among the rulers of Judah, for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'*" (NET)**

The final phrase of the fulfillment quotation in Matt 2:6 comes from 2 Sam 5:2 (1 Chron 11:2) and it contains God's promise to David at his installation as King: "you shall shepherd my people Israel." Being a shepherd "implies guidance, pastoral care, and a sense of compassion."¹³ In Matt 9:36 Jesus had compassion on the crowds because they were like "sheep without a shepherd." They were "harassed and helpless." This echoes Ezekiel 34 about the false shepherds of Israel who fed themselves and had no care for the flock. God himself becomes the shepherd of his people. Jesus is the true shepherd of his people Israel.

To the Jew in the time of Jesus the reference to the one who would "shepherd my people Israel" would have evoked "the eschatological expectation of the ingathering of the twelve tribes of Israel" (cf. Ezek 34:4–16; 37; Hos. 2; Mic 5:1–6).¹⁴ This expectation of the restoration of Israel is shared by Matthew in 19:28. "Israel's blindness then would only be for a season."¹⁵ The OT promises of restoration would have prohibited the thought that the church had supplanted once and for all the place of Israel in salvation-history and that repentance is no longer a possibility for Israel.¹⁶ If Paul could write in 1 Thess 2:16 that "God's wrath has come upon them

¹³Craig L Blomberg, *Matthew*. New American Commentary, ed. David S. Dockery, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992): 64.

¹⁴ John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005): 115. See also Davies & Allison, *Matthew* 1:243.

¹⁵ Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 1:243.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

[the Jews] at last” and still hold out hope for their final redemption in Romans 11, the same applies to Matthew.¹⁷

The prophecy that Jesus “will shepherd my people Israel “found only limited fulfillment in Jesus’ ministry on earth” (Jesus was the shepherd of his disciples [26:31]).¹⁸ Although Jesus was a compassionate and able shepherd (e.g., 9:35–36; 14:14; 15:32; John 10:11; Heb 13:20; 1 Pet 5:4), Israel was unwilling to accept Jesus as their Messiah. However, the future tense of the verb ποιμαίνει “will shepherd” like the future tense verb σώσει “will save” in 1:21 shows that Matthew believes in God’s faithfulness to fulfill the prophecy.¹⁹ One day Jesus will save his people, the Jews, from sin and he will shepherd his people Israel.

The fulfillment quotations in Matthew show how God’s plan was carried out in the life and ministry of Jesus. His birth, the flight to Egypt, the return to Galilee, and the later desertion of the disciples are some examples of many where events happen in accordance with the fulfillment of Scripture. The fulfillment quotation in 2:6 says that Jesus will shepherd his people Israel. Even though in Matt 27:25 Israel says “His blood be on us and our children,” the fulfillment quotations show that the plan of God toward Israel will not be thwarted; instead it will be fulfilled.²⁰

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Lowery, *Key Word Study*, 43.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Lowery, “Evidence from Matthew,” 176.

Matthew 10:5–6

⁵ Jesus sent out these twelve, instructing them as follows: "Do not go to Gentile regions and do not enter any Samaritan town. ⁶ Go instead to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (NET)

The sole focus of the disciple's first mission is the people of Israel. "Lost sheep" refers to all Israel. As the son of David, the Messiah of Israel, Jesus must go first to Israel in the plan of God. The Pauline perspective of "to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom 1:16) follows the pattern of Jesus. The mission to the Jews emphasizes the faithfulness of God to his covenant promises and it underscores the compassion and love of Jesus toward the people of Israel who are "sheep without a shepherd" (9:36).²¹ Having travelled through the towns of Israel (9:35), Jesus knows the condition of the people—they are lost.²² The priority of the mission to the Jews is necessary if Israel is to be a light to the nations. Israel must be gathered and renewed so it can carry out its task for the nations.²³ "Go" is a present imperative meaning "keep going."²⁴ They are to keep going to Israel. The Israelites have wandered far from God and Jesus may here have recalled the price God would pay through him (Isa 53:6).²⁵ In Matthew's view the continued evangelization of the Jews is vital to the church.

²¹Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 270.

²² Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:147.

²³ David E. Garland, *Reading Matthew* (New York: Crossroad, 1995): 112.

²⁴ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1992): 245; Osborne, *Matthew*, 377.

²⁵ Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999): 315.

Matthew 10:23

23 “Whenever they persecute you in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through all the cities and towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.” (NET)

The straightforward interpretation of this verse is that the mission to Israel is to continue until the Son of man comes. Succeeding references in Matthew to the “coming” of the Son of Man using the verb ἔρχομαι (16:27–28;²⁶ 24:30, 44; 25:31; 26:64 cf. 24:42, 46; 25:10, 19, 27) refer to a future eschatological event, the Second Coming of Christ in glory. The same is true for the use of the noun παρουσία in 24:3, 27, 37, and 39.²⁷ It is difficult to see the coming of the Son of Man being related to Rome coming in judgment in A.D. 70 (preterists), as Jesus’ resurrection (Barth), as the Spirit coming at Pentecost (Calvin), as Jesus’ reunion with the disciples at the end of their first mission (Chrysostom), or especially as Jesus wrongly believing the end would arrive before the disciples completed their first century mission (Schweitzer).²⁸

Matthew 10:23 is often misinterpreted when it is seen as limited to the immediate mission of 10:5–16, referring to the cities the disciples will visit in their first missionary journey (v.6).²⁹

However, it occurs in a series of verses that address future missions to the wider Gentile world and is linked to the coming of the Son of Man which elsewhere is associated with the end of the age (13:43; 24). For Jesus to tell the disciples that they will not finish going to the cities of Israel until the end of the age means that even though future missions will be extended to all people (28:19), the mission to Israel remains an ongoing part of that endeavor (cf. 23:34).³⁰

²⁶ 16:27–28 refer to a foretaste of the Parousia, the transfiguration of Christ.

²⁷ Dorothy Jean Weaver, *Matthew’s Missionary Discourse*, JSNTSS 38 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990): 100, 202 n. 139.

²⁸ Osborne, *Matthew*, 391.

²⁹ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 176.

³⁰ Lowery, *Key Word Study*, 69. See also Ed Glasscock, *Matthew*, Moody Gospel Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press): 231; Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 2d ed (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988): 107–113, demonstrates that Jesus in Matthew often speaks past his stipulated audience of the A.D. 30’s to a future audience or a different situation. He says: “At 10:18, 22, Jesus warns the disciples that they will be dragged before governors

Matthew 10:23 reflects the evangelist's concern that the mission to God's people, Israel, not be abandoned and that missionaries continue evangelizing the Jewish people no matter how intense the opposition or how difficult the situation. Matthew did not envision that the mission to Israel was completed. It must continue until the Son of man comes.³¹

Matthew 19:28–29

28 Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth: In the age when all things are renewed, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (NET)

Jesus' words in Matt 19:28–29, to those who employ a literal or normal hermeneutic, are clear evidence that Jesus expected the salvation and restoration of national Israel.³²

Supersessionists using a symbolic hermeneutic argue instead that Jesus here is referring to the church. Mounce writes: "The symbolism of the twelve tribes is carried over into the New Testament to represent the Christian church."³³ Blomberg too states: "Both the Twelve and Israel seem respectively to represent believers and lost humanity in general . . . the comparison of the Twelve with the twelve tribes of Israel again highlights the theme of the church replacing Israel . . ."³⁴ Osborne agrees, writing that the language of the Twelve judging Israel is a symbol

and kings, "to bear testimony before them and the Gentiles," and be "hated by all." The anomaly of these words is that they presuppose a mission on the part of the disciples among Gentiles within a speech in which Jesus sends them solely to Israel and expressly forbids them to go to Gentiles (10:5b–6).

³¹ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:192.

³² See also the parallel idea in Luke 22:29–30.

³³ Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew*, New International Biblical Commentary, ed. W. Ward Gasque (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1985): 185.

³⁴ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 301.

for all the saints judging the nations.³⁵ But Matthew always makes a distinction between Gentiles and Jews.³⁶ “Israel” always means Israel, the physical descendants of Jacob, every time this term occurs in the NT. Lowery writes: “This authority is to be exercised in relation to Israel, which means the Jews and not the church. Interpreters may refer to the church as a ‘new Israel’ or ‘true Israel’ but Matthew and other NT writers did not do so.”³⁷ Boring agrees, saying: “The concept of the church as the ‘new Israel’ is foreign to Matthew . . . the church is not simply identified with Israel.”³⁸ Passages such as Matt 8:10; 10:6; and 15:24, for example, speak of Israel in contrast with 16:18; 18:17; and 21:43 which speak of the church.³⁹

The details of the text confirm the conclusion that Matt 19:28 teaches the restoration of Israel. The word *παλιγγενεσία* (literally “a becoming again”) ⁴⁰ only occurs twice in the NT. In Titus 3:5 it carries the meaning of the personal experience of regeneration or rebirth (“the washing of regeneration”).⁴¹ Here in Matt 19:28 it refers to the “renewing of the world in the

³⁵ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010): 722.

³⁶ See footnote 4 above.

³⁷ Lowery, “Evidence from Matthew,” 178. Also see C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979): 2:448.

³⁸ M. Eugene Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995): 8:392.

³⁹ Gundry, *Matthew*, 393, says one should notice the distinction maintained between Israel and the church in 8:11, 12; 21:43; 22:7; 23:32–36; and 27:25.

⁴⁰ J. M. Robinson, “Regeneration” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 1962 ed., 4:24–29. The background of “regeneration” or “renewal” as used in Matt 19:28 is not to be found in the Stoic idea of cosmic conflagration ending one of the universe’s periodic cycles (Contra Blomberg, *Matthew*, 300–301; See Keener, *Matthew*, 479–80). The word rather has a Jewish background and was used by Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 11.66 of the restoration of the land of Israel after the exile and Philo *Moses* 2.65 uses it of the restoration of human life or the regeneration of the world after the great flood.

⁴¹ BDAG, 752 (*παλιγγενεσία*).

time of the Messiah.”⁴² It is a future time of renewal fitting the Jewish hope and expectation of a future, national restoration—a time when Israel will be restored to the land and the Twelve will reign and rule with Jesus the King.⁴³ It speaks of the end-time conversion of Israel and the apostolic rule over Israel in a Messianic kingdom on the earth. Gundry says “regeneration” . . . refers to Israel’s renewal when God fully establishes his kingdom on earth.”⁴⁴

Sanders, after studying relevant Jewish literature around the time of Christ, saw that the most repeated Jewish hope was that of the restoration of the people of Israel.⁴⁵ He said “the kingdom expected by Jesus . . . Is like the present world—it has a king, leaders, a temple, and twelve tribes.”⁴⁶ Lowery says the repetition of the number twelve (12 thrones, 12 tribes) is a type of emphasis speaking of the whole nation of Israel⁴⁷ and it is especially significant because Jesus of course knew that Judas, the betrayer, was no longer a disciple. In Matt 28:16, Matthew says the eleven disciples went to Galilee. So the repeated reference to twelve draws attention to the twelve tribes, the restoration of the now scattered nation of Israel. The number twelve symbolizes the inclusion of all Israel in the coming kingdom.⁴⁸

The throne in Matt 19:28 is the Davidic throne and it belongs to Christ, who as Son of David will occupy the throne of David (cf. 1 Chron 17:11–14). Jesus coming to earth and being

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Wilkins, *Matthew*, 654.

⁴⁴ Gundry, *Matthew*, 392.

⁴⁵ E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985): 87.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 232.

⁴⁷ Lowery, *Key Word Study*, 88.

⁴⁸ Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 104.

seated on his glorious throne portrays his rule in the millennial kingdom (25:31–46; cf. 26:64).⁴⁹ In that time “all things are renewed” and the disciples will share in Christ’s authority to rule.⁵⁰ They will specifically rule over the twelve tribes of Israel.⁵¹ “Judging” Israel here does not mean condemnation of the Jewish people by the Twelve.⁵² In Matthew’s Gospel the focus is on Jesus alone as the eschatological judge (e.g., Matt 7:21–23; 25:31–46). Instead κρίνοντες means the Twelve will have a ruling or governing role like that which was exercised in the time of Israel’s judges (cf. Judges 8:22–23 on Gideon).⁵³ In the OT the ruler or governor could be described as functioning as judge (e.g., 2 Kings 15:5; Ps 2:10 and Isa 1:26). Davies and Allison say that sitting on the throne “designates the exercise of authority over time.”⁵⁴ For Matthew κρίνοντες has the range of meaning that the Hebrew *šāpat* שָׁפַט has, perhaps including the ideas of deliverance and grace.⁵⁵ Davies and Allison assert: “There is no parallel to the idea that Israel will be gathered only to be condemned . . . The restoration of the lost tribes was a great eschatological hope, beginning with the OT itself. It was to be a proof of God’s power and faithfulness, a joyful

⁴⁹ There is probably a reference to Dan 7:9–27 in Matt 19:28 with the dominion given by the Ancient of Days to one like a Son of Man described in 7:13–14 and the giving of all the kingdoms to the people of the holy ones of the Most Highest in 7:22, 27.

⁵⁰ The teaching that the disciples will share with Jesus the rule of the coming kingdom based on Dan 7:9, 13–14, 18, 22, 27 is also to be found in Rev 2:26; 3:21; 20:4, 6. See Turner, *Matthew*, 475–76.

⁵¹ Compare the twelve phylarchs directing the twelve tribes under Moses in Num 1:1–16. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:55.

⁵² Contra David C. Sim, “The Meaning of *παλιγγενεσία* in Mt 19.28,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 50 (1993): 3–12 and France, *Matthew*, 744. Wilkins, *Matthew*, 652 says: “Condemning Israel would bring no great pleasure to the disciples, but reward would, which was the point of Peter’s request” in 19:27.

⁵³ The reference to ruling in 19:28 was clearly understood by James and John in Matt 20:20–21, but the model they were to follow in their leadership was the servant leadership of Jesus.

⁵⁴ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:55.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 55; 55 n. 119.

miracle of reunion.”⁵⁶ This ruling will be specifically in the Millennium. Lowery states: “Jewish literature also reflects the idea of an earthly messianic reign which precedes the eternal state (though of varying duration) and it seems to be with reference to such an era that the disciples’ future role as judges is referred to at Matthew 19:28.”⁵⁷ Jesus was speaking of “the time that all things are restored” (Acts 3:21 NET), which refers to the earthly kingdom described in Rev 20:1–6 when believers will sit on thrones with Christ (Rev 3:21; 20:4, 6). Those who sit on thrones in Rev 20:4 reign with Christ for a thousand years.⁵⁸

Jesus, by the certainty of his words (“when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne...you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones ...”), “is saying to His disciples that He will not fail to accomplish the task ordained for Him.”⁵⁹ The promise Jesus makes to the disciples in Matt 19:28 coheres with his teaching earlier in Matthew. The message of the kingdom will continue going to the Jews (10:23). Jesus will save his people from their sins (1:21) and he will become shepherd of all Israel (2:6). Israel will repent (23:39) and the twelve

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁵⁷ Lowery, “Evidence from Matthew,” 178.

⁵⁸ Sim, “παλιγγενεσία,” 3–12 sees Matt 19:28 as talking about a re-creation of the cosmos after the existing world has been destroyed at the eschaton citing verses such as Isa 65:17; 66:22; Rev 21:1 (all mentioning the new heavens and the new earth); Matt 5:18 and 24:35 (when heaven and earth pass away). This same view is held by Blomberg, *Matthew*, 301. Toussaint, *Behold the King*, 228–229 approvingly quotes C. G. Montefiore, *The Synoptic Gospels*, 2 vols., rev. ed (New York: KTAV, 1969): 270 that “The new birth here denotes the world or Israel at the time of the second advent—at the Parousia. The Son of man is Jesus, who sits upon his Messianic throne.” Toussaint says that the apostles are to be rulers over Israel in the kingdom. But Toussaint also says that the “regeneration” is the belief of the Jews that the Messiah would create a new heaven and a new earth cf. Isa 65:17; 66:22.

⁵⁹ David K. Lowery, “A Theology of Matthew,” in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994): 46.

tribes will be restored (2:6; 19:28).⁶⁰ This did not occur at his first coming, but it will happen at his Second Coming, when he comes in power and glory.⁶¹

Matthew 23:34

³⁴ "For this reason I am sending you prophets and wise men and experts in the law, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town." (NET)

This statement reaffirms the continuing mission to Israel spoken of in 10:16–23: “they will deliver you up to councils, and flog you in their synagogues” [10:16]...”When they persecute you in one town flee to the next . . . you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel, before the Son of man comes” [10:23]). The verb “I am sending” is present tense speaking of continuing action.⁶² Matthew here is looking forward to the continual sending of Christian missionaries,⁶³ disciples of Jesus, likened to prophets (5:12), wise men (7:24–25), and scribes (13:52). Jesus is sending “prophets to those who honour [sic] only dead prophets (v. 29), wise men to those whose wisdom is in name only (11.25), and scribes to those who have failed in their scribal duties (v.3, etc.).”⁶⁴ The future response of Israel (see the future tense verbs in 23:34) to the disciples will be like the past response of Israel to the prophets God sent to them. The religious leaders of Israel and Jerusalem representing Israel itself will keep on “killing the

⁶⁰ Vlach affirms: “Even after forty days of kingdom instruction, the apostles were still thinking of a restoration of Israel (see Acts 1:3, 6).”

⁶¹ Lowery, “A Theology of Matthew,” 45–46.

⁶² Lowery, *Key Word Study*, 98.

⁶³ Carson, “Matthew,” 484.

⁶⁴ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:315.

prophets and stoning those who are sent to you” until Israel repents and the Lord returns (cf. 10:23 and 23:34–39).

Matthew 23:39

³⁹ “For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’” (ESV)

France declares that the indefinite phrasing of ‘until you say’ “gives no assurance that such a welcome will ever be forthcoming.” There is nothing in this passage that tells us that Matthew “holds out any hope for the future repentance and return of Israel . . .”⁶⁵ However, the quotation “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,” is from Psalm 118:26, “which celebrates the faithfulness of God to Israel (e.g., 118:1 and 118:29, the first and last verses of the Psalm both say: “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.”)⁶⁶ Though Israel may have rejected God, he has not rejected them, “Until you say” means “until that time when you will say.”⁶⁷ “Blessed is he” is a joyful cry of a repentant Israel undergoing restoration, not the woeful cry of a condemned Israel undergoing judgment.⁶⁸

Also the general emphasis in the Gospel, of the faithfulness of God to his word, suggests this is a statement of assurance regarding the future of Israel.⁶⁹ Jesus has a profound love for his

⁶⁵ R. T. France, *Matthew*, 885.

⁶⁶ Lowery, “A Theology of Matthew,” 46.

⁶⁷ Lowery, *Key Word Study*, 98; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 3:323*.

⁶⁸ Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?*, 188; Craig A. Evans, “Prophecy and Polemic: Jews in Luke’s Scriptural Apologetic,” in *Luke and Scripture*, ed. Craig A. Evans (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993): 179 n. 33 says, “The rabbis understood Ps 118:26 in reference to the day of redemption.”

⁶⁹ Lowery, “A Theology of Matthew,” 46.

people and a deep desire that they be saved evidenced in his palpable words of lament, “O Jerusalem, O Jerusalem . . .” (23:37).

In Matt 21:9, which also quotes Ps 118:26, the city of Jerusalem was shaken when Jesus entered and they questioned who he was. The accompanying crowds said he was a prophet. Neither group saw Jesus as the Son of God, the divine Messiah, and their savior from sin. They lacked understanding of who Jesus was and they lacked faith in Jesus as the one who would give up his life as a ransom for many (20:28). Later the crowds called for his crucifixion. In Matt 23:39 the Jews in contrast as a whole will understand who Jesus is and exercise saving faith in him. One day Israel will acknowledge that Jesus is the Christ. The mission to Israel must continue until Jesus returns (cf. 10:23). At that time Jesus will save his people Israel and he will become their good shepherd. The mission in the end will be thoroughly successful.

Matthew 24:14

¹⁴ “And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” (ESV)

The future tense verb “will be proclaimed” makes it certain—despite deception, trials, and even death, that the message of the kingdom will go to *all* nations, both Israel and the Gentile nations (cf. 10:23; 28:19). When the message goes to every part of the globe, the end will come. “The whole inhabited earth” (NET) and “to all nations” stresses the universality of the proclamation. Davies and Allison say that the background is the OT motif of the nations end-time conversion to Yahweh (e.g., Isa 2:2–4; 45:20–22; 49:6; 55:5; 56:6–8; Mic 4:1–3).⁷⁰ As in

⁷⁰ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:343.

the prophets (e.g., Ezek 36:24–29), the end will accompany Israel’s repentance (See Matt 23:39).⁷¹

Hindson and Borland believe that the events in 24:4–14 relate to the entire inter-advent age. General characteristics of the present age are intensified as the age moves to its conclusion. Matthew 24:15–31 then speaks of more specific signs of the great tribulation and the return of Christ.⁷² “Then the end will come” in 24:14 “points to the completion of the church’s worldwide mission as well as the final aspects of global evangelism by the remnant during the coming Tribulation.”⁷³

Matthew 24:15–31

¹⁵ "So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place . . .¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. . . .

²¹ For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. ²² And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. . . .²³ Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. . . .²⁷ For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man, . . . ²⁹ Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ³⁰ Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ³¹ And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” (ESV)

⁷¹ Keener, *Matthew*, 572.

⁷² Edward Hindson and James Borland, *The Gospel of Matthew: The King Is Coming* (Chattanooga, TN, 2006): 210.

⁷³Ibid., 212. France, *Matthew*, 908–910, as a preterist thinks that 24:14 means that the Roman Empire, which was considered the inhabited world at the time, heard the good news of God’s kingdom before the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70. However, people knew of the existence of Parthia, India, and other distant nations at that time. Also A.D. 70 was not the end. The Jewish War was one of the wars throughout this age that explicitly does not mark the end (“the end is not yet,” 24:6); it is but “the beginning of the birth pangs” (24:8 cf. Rom 8:22).

Preterists⁷⁴ believe that Matt 24:15–31 was fulfilled in the first century, especially in the judgment of God upon Jerusalem, while futurist interpreters believe these events are yet to be fulfilled.⁷⁵ The preterist view, being largely antithetical to futuristic interpretation, is more consistent with the amillennial and the postmillennial views rather than with Premillennialism.⁷⁶ Both preterist amillennialism and preterist postmillennialism replace God’s program for Israel with the church.⁷⁷

There are significant problems with the preterist (and preterist-futurist) view of Matt 24:15–31.⁷⁸ First, the abomination that causes tribulation in Matt 24:15 does not fit an A.D. 70 fulfillment.

Matthew declares that the abomination comes first, followed by the great tribulation and flight. The abomination *causes* desolation. However, in the siege of Titus in A.D. 70, the

⁷⁴Critiques of Preterism may be found in Richard L. Mayhue, “Jesus: A Preterist or a Futurist?,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 14 (Spring 2003): 9–22; Stanley D. Toussaint, “A Critique of the Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162 (October–December 2004): 469–90; Ron J. Bigalke Jr., “Preterism and Matthean Timing of Prophetic Fulfillment,” *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 11 (August 2007): 21–48; and Neil D. Nelson Jr., “Three Critical Exegetical Issues in Matthew 24: A Dispensational Interpretation,” *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 11 (August 2007): 49–67. Mild preterists hold that the Tribulation was fulfilled in the first 300 years of Christianity as God judged the Jews in A.D. 70 and the Romans by A.D. 313; Extreme or full preterists believe that all of the events in the Olivet Discourse were fulfilled at the fall of Jerusalem and that even the Second Coming (it occurred in A.D. 70), resurrection (believers have already been spiritually resurrected), and final judgment are all past events. Since they deny the bodily resurrection and the future Second Coming of Christ, this view is heretical. Partial or moderate preterists see Matt 24:15–31 as fulfilled in the events of A.D. 70, but they still hold to a future Second Coming, a physical resurrection of the dead, and a future new heaven and new earth. Most moderate preterists tend to believe that Matt 24:36–25:46 discusses the end of the age and the Second Coming. R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 66, 158, sees himself as a partial preterist, but believes that all of Jesus’ prophecies in the Olivet Discourse were fulfilled in the period between the discourse itself and A.D. 70. He believes in the Second Coming, the future resurrection, and the final judgment based on other Scriptures. This study will concern itself with partial/moderate preterism.

⁷⁵ There are two mediating positions. The traditional preterist-futurist position takes 24:15–26 as a “double reference prophecy” referring in the near view to the events of A.D. 70 and in the far view to the end of the age. The revised preterist-futurist view of Carson sees 24:15–21 referring to AD 70 and the church being addressed in 24:22–28. See Carson, “Matthew,” 499–504.

⁷⁶ Bigalke, “Preterism,” 22 n. 4.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 22 n. 5.

⁷⁸ Much of the information in this section of the paper may also be found in Nelson, “Exegetical Issues in Matthew 24,” 53–57.

tribulation preceded the abomination. In Daniel, the abomination is always linked to the Temple. The abomination of desolation takes place “in the holy place”; that is, in the Temple. However, when the Romans entered the Temple with their standards, it was too late to escape and for flight into the mountains.⁷⁹

The “abomination that causes desolation is found in Dan 9:27; 11:31; 12:11 cf. 8:13.

“Abomination” speaks of what “defiles a sacred place and causes it to be left desolate.”⁸⁰

Originally it referred to Antiochus Epiphanes IV and his actions of outlawing Jewish religious practices and slaughtering swine on an altar devoted to Olympian Zeus. But Jesus by his words in Matt 24:15 foresaw a future fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy shortly before the end of the age. The reference to Daniel in Matt 24:15 points the reader of Daniel to Dan 9:27 and 12:11 which both look specifically at the consummation and the end of the age. Daniel 12:2–3, 11, 13 speaks of the time of the end and the resurrection of the righteous. Daniel 9:27 speaks of Daniel’s seventieth week and the future antichrist who will establish himself as “God” in the Temple in the middle of the seven years that precede Christ’s Second Coming (see also 2 Thes 2:3–4; Revelation 13). Matthew’s use of the word “standing” in Matt 24:15 points to a person, and in the Markan parallel in Mark 13:14, the masculine participle “standing” indeed refers to a man standing where he should not.

A further difficulty for the preterist view is that A.D. 70 was not “great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be” (Matt 24:21 ESV cf. Dan 12:1). Though Josephus reported terrible atrocities and the death of over a million Jews,⁸¹ the tribulation Jesus was predicting here had to have been greater than the devastation of

⁷⁹ Ibid., 55. See also Toussaint, “Preterist View,” 480.

⁸⁰ BDAG, 172 (βδέλυγμα).

⁸¹ Josephus *Jewish War* 5.420–6.212. Other scholars believe that the population of Jerusalem during the feast time was closer to 150,000 (Nelson “Exegetical Issues in Matthew 24,” 56 n. 24).

the universal flood in the days of Noah (Matt 24:37–39), to which it is compared in the context of the discourse. Matthew 24:22 says “if those days had not been shortened, no human being (no flesh) would be saved.” “All flesh” is a technical term for “all humanity” nine times in the NT (Matt 24:22; Mark 13:20; Luke 3:6; John 17:2; Acts 2:17; Rom 3:20; 1 Cor 1:29; Gal 2:26; 1 Pet 1:24 cf. 1 Cor 15:39).⁸² “All flesh” is not limited to the Jews who died in Judea in A.D. 70. It rather implies that all humanity would perish in the “great tribulation” as happened in the flood (except for Noah and his family) if God did not intervene by limiting the time of the tribulation for the sake of his elect. Both humanity in general (e.g., World War 1 & 2) and the Jews themselves (the Holocaust) have experienced greater tribulation than occurred in the Jewish War.⁸³

Matthew’s words “cut short” in Matt 24:22 and “immediately” in 24:29 provide additional proof that Matt 24:15–26 speaks of a great tribulation in the future. Carson, a preterist-futurist, understands 24:22–28 to refer to the whole interadvent age of tribulation because of the word “immediately.” But then the word “immediately” which invariably carries its full meaning in Matthew (in all 18 occurrences in Matthew it means “immediately,” “at once,” “without delay”) seems to have lost all effect and it is hard to see how God has “cut short” the days.

Jesus said that immediately after the great tribulation the Second Coming would occur. Futurists have no difficulty in seeing that the Second Coming occurs immediately after the abomination that cause desolation and the great tribulation. The tribulation lasts about three and a half years according to Dan 9:27; 12:7, 11; Rev 11:3; 12:6, 14. God limited the days to three

⁸² Toussaint “Preterist View,” 481.

⁸³ Keener, *Matthew*, 581–82 mentions that the virtual obliteration of Egyptian Jewry after the revolt in Egypt and the devastation accompanying the revolt under Hadrian in A.D. 132–35 proved no less devastating than the Jewish War.

and a half years. Preterists who use the word “immediately” to tie the siege of Jerusalem to a symbolic “coming” of Christ in a first century judgment on Jerusalem err because “immediately after the tribulation of those days” (24:29) explicitly refers to “those days” in 24:22 of the future great tribulation.

Perhaps the most serious problem with the preterist view lies in their interpretation of Matt 24:29–31. They take these verses to refer to Jesus’ coming in judgment on Jerusalem in A.D. rather than at the Second Coming.⁸⁴ However, in the context of the discourse forms of the verb ἔρχομαι “come,” which is used in 24:30 (“they will see the Son of man ‘coming’ on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”) and in 24:27 (“as the lightning ‘comes from’ the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of man,”) is used throughout the rest of Matthew 24–25 in passages that clearly speak of the Second Coming (24:42, “your Lord is coming”; 24:44, “the Son of man is coming”; 24:46 “when he comes”; 25:10, “the bridegroom came”; 25:19, “the master of those servants came”; 25:27, “at my coming”; and 25:31, “When the Son of Man comes in his glory”). Clearly, “coming” in Matt 24:30 speaks of the same coming as the rest of the verses in the Olivet discourse, the Second Advent of Christ.

In Matt 25:31, the word “glory” δόξα is used twice of the Lord’s glorious presence at his return (“When the Son of man comes in his ‘glory’” . . . “he will sit on his ‘glorious throne’”). This is the same glorious return as is referenced in Matt 24:30 (“they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great ‘glory’”). The word παρουσία “coming” also consistently speaks of the Second Coming throughout the discourse (24:3; 24:27; 24:37;

⁸⁴ Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 235–39; R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days according to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998): 41–65; Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia: Jesus’ Eschatological Discourse in Matthew’s Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 2000): 187–204; France, *Matthew*, 919–26.

24:39) .To see “coming” in 24:27 as a spiritual or symbolic coming would be to use the word in a way unprecedented not only in Matthew, but in the entire NT.⁸⁵

The event described in Matt 24:27–31 is portrayed here as both universal and unmistakably visible to all the earth. This is not the case in the local judgment on Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Jesus repeatedly warns of deceptive reports of a secret coming in 24:23–36. But he says that his coming at the end of the age will be as visible as lightning that flashes from east to west across a night sky (24:27). It will be even more visible than this. Jesus in 24:29–30 says that against the backdrop of an absolutely pitch dark sky (no sunlight, no moonlight and no starlight), “all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” The sign of the Son of man is Jesus himself in his full glory (24:30).⁸⁶ Jesus here is alluding to Daniel 7:13–14. In that passage one like a son of man comes with the clouds of heaven and receives authority over all the nations from the ancient of Days. Matthew 24:29–31 is speaking of Christ, the Son of man whose kingdom will be over all the earth and who will reign forever with all authority.

Therefore the futurist interpretation of Matt 24:15–31 best explains these crucial verses. In 24:15 “therefore when” signals a shift to the important event prophesied in Dan 9:27 and 12:1–12 when Antichrist erects his image in the Temple to be worshipped in the place of God. This in turn commences the never-to-be-equaled, great tribulation of three and one half years. God limits the time of this tribulation for the sake of his elect, tribulation saints. The tribulation

⁸⁵ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 363.

⁸⁶ “Sign of the Son” is an appositional genitive and it means “sign which is the Son.”

then ends immediately when Christ returns in his full glory at his Second Coming to judge the nations and to gather his elect into his kingdom.

There may be further proof concerning the future salvation of Israel in the words “all the tribes of the earth will mourn and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven . . .” (24:30). Zechariah 12:10 NASB-U says: “I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.” If Matt 24:30 alludes to the mourning in Zechariah 12:10 and if “tribes of the earth” refers to “tribes of the land,” the reference could be to the twelve tribes of Israel. In Zechariah the tribes are mourning in repentance. Then this verse would line up with Matt 23:39 and speak of Israel’s conversion at the return of Christ (cf. Rev 1:7; John 19:37).⁸⁷ However, it is more likely in the context that this coming judgment causes all the peoples of the earth to mourn since Jesus’ return means judgment. The coming of the Son of man with his angels to divide humanity at the judgment accompanying the Second Coming is emphasized in Matt 13:41 cf. 13:49 and in 25:31 cf. 24:44; 26:64. The reward of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked at the Second Coming is a major theme of the Olivet Discourse (24:40–44, 45–51; 25:1–13, 14–30, 31–46). So it is likely that this is the same event spoken of in Matt 24:27–31.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 362; Toussaint, “Preterist View,” 477–79.

⁸⁸ Tom Constable, “Dr. Constable’s Notes on Matthew” (Notes on 24:30) www.soniclight.com. Accessed Aug 14, 2014. Constable says: “Zechariah prophesied that all the tribes of Israel in the land would mourn in repentance (Zech. 12:12). Jesus identified this prediction with His coming, and broadened it to include ‘all the tribes of the earth.’ Probably the unsaved ‘will mourn’ because of the judgment they anticipate.”

Matthew 24:34

³⁴ **“Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.” (ESV)**

Perhaps the most difficult verse to interpret in the Olivet Discourse is Matthew 24:34.⁸⁹ The view of preterists is that “this generation” in Matt 24:34 must refer to Jesus’ contemporaries. Since Jesus’ contemporaries then had to experience “all these things” (24:33–34) including “the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (24:30), this coming must have happened in the first century A.D. To protect the veracity of the Lord and the authority of Scripture, Matt 24:29–31 cannot refer to the Second Coming, but instead to a coming in judgment on Jerusalem in A.D. 70. However, as has been shown, “all these things” in Matt 24:34 includes the future abomination that cause desolation, the future great tribulation, and the Second Coming itself.

The most likely views of the meaning of Matt 24:34 are both futurist views. The first is that “this generation” is an evil kind of people who oppose Christ and his messengers throughout this age until they “pass away” at the judgment when Christ returns.⁹⁰ The negative connotation of the phrase, as consistently referring to ungodly people united in their opposition to God’s messengers, is found in all previous Matthean uses of ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη (Matt 11:16; 12:39, 41, 42, 45; 16:4; 17:17; 23:36, where adjectives such as “evil,” “perverse,” “adulterous” and “faithless” are used by Jesus to characterize “this generation”). The reader of the Gospel would understand the phrase to carry the same meaning in 24:34. This was the view of Darby who wrote:

⁸⁹ Much of the information in this section may also be found in Nelson, “Exegetical Issues in Matthew 24,” 58–64.

⁹⁰ Neil D. Nelson, Jr., “‘This Generation’ in Matt 24:34: A Literary Critical Perspective,” *JETS* 38 (1996): 369–85. R. Morgenthaler, “Generation,” γενεά, in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 2:35–38; Evald Lövestam, *Jesus and “this Generation”* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1995): 81–87.

The difficulty as to “this generation shall not pass away” is a prejudice flowing from the English use of the word “generation.” It is quite as much used for a moral class in scripture, as for the period marked by human life; and if Deuteronomy 32:5, 20 (where this very subject is treated of) be referred to, the sense is plain.⁹¹

The Hebrew word “dor” דֹר was used widely to indicate a class of men distinguished by certain moral or spiritual character, such as in the “generation of the righteous” or the “generation of the wicked.”⁹² This non-chronological use of the word becomes the basis of Jesus’ use of γενεὰ in the Gospels.⁹³

The use of ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη in Matt 23:36, immediately before the discourse, has Jesus’ prophetic judgment falling on “this generation” for murdering righteous men in the OT from Abel, the first martyr, to Zechariah, a martyr at the end of the Hebrew canon in 2 Chronicles. Note in 23:35–36 Jesus says of Zechariah, “whom you murdered.” He also said that “this generation” would kill and crucify and scourge the disciples he would send to them until Jesus comes (23:34 cf. 10:23; 24:9–14). However, the contemporaries of Jesus did not murder Zechariah, nor will they murder Jesus’ disciples until the end of the age. Therefore the phrase “this generation” here and in 24:34 extends beyond Jesus’ contemporaries to also include both murderers of the prophets in the OT and forward to those who will persecute Jesus’ followers until Jesus’ return. The point in Matt 24:34 is that until the all the events of Matthew 24 occur, including Second Coming, the disciples of Christ will continue to endure the persecution and opposition of “this generation” as Christ also endured its hostility and unbelief. But the saints

⁹¹ John Nelson Darby, *The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby*, ed., William Kelly, 34 vols (London: G. Morrish, n.d.; reprint, Sunbury, PA: Believer’s Bookshelf, 1972), 9:277. See also 11:372.

⁹² R. D. Culver, “dor,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. Robert L. Harris, Bruce K. Waltke, and Gleason L. Archer, 2 vols (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 1:187.

⁹³ Ibid.

have a sure hope that Jesus will return and gather them into his kingdom and vindicate them by judging “this generation.” Then “this generation” will pass away.

A second futurist interpretation is that “this generation” in the context of the Second Coming and the end time events, refers to all the people who are alive when Jesus returns. This is a popular dispensational view.⁹⁴ The emphasis of this interpretation is that when the end comes, it comes quickly. The generation that experiences the great tribulation will also witness the end. The major problem with this view is that it ignores the pejorative force of the phrase ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη “this generation” throughout the NT and Matthew in particular, and the moral, non-chronological use of the phrase in the OT. This view also misses the implication that “this generation” will “pass away” at the Second Coming. Only the wicked belong to this type of people. This evil generation will be “swept away” in judgment and placed into hell (24:39, 51). The righteous in contrast will inherit the kingdom and enter into eternal life in the presence of the Son (25:20–23, 34, 36)

Therefore “this generation” in Matt 24:34 is a kind or type of evil, faithless people guilty of opposing the messengers and the message of Christ. This pejorative view of Matt 24:34 best aligns with the use of ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη throughout Matthew, and the purpose of Jesus in the discourse and the Gospel to prepare followers to endure the rejection of unresponsive humanity as they obediently serve Christ and others, and ready themselves for the Lord’s glorious return. Neither

⁹⁴ This view is held by e.g., Toussaint, *Behold the King*, 279–80; Paul N. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995): 319; J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981): 405; Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996): 1688–92.

of these futurist interpretations fits with the optimistic view of Postmillennialism concerning this age.⁹⁵

Matthew 26:29

29 “I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.” (ESV)

Jesus here is speaking of the joys of the Millennial kingdom on earth after the return of Christ.⁹⁶ Toussaint writes: “By these words, the Lord looks forward to the time when the kingdom will be on earth. Finally, by these words the Lord indicates that the disciples are to live and labor in anticipation of seeing the Messiah with them in God’s millennial kingdom.”⁹⁷ “With you” points back to Matt 1:23 (Immanuel, “God with us”).⁹⁸

“Until that day” means until Jesus comes again in glory (24:30). Hindson and Borland place the event near the beginning of the millennial kingdom.⁹⁹ Then again it might encompass the entirety of the millennium. Elsewhere in Matthew the kingdom in its consummation is spoken of as a banquet (Matt 8:11; 22:1–14; 25:10).¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Toussaint, “Preterist View,” 484 points out that the view that ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη refers to the Jewish race would imply that Israel would cease to exist as a nation after the Lord’s return, hardly a dispensational premillennial view.

⁹⁶ Cf. also Luke 22:30, “You may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom.” The messianic feast was a common theme in Judaism. See e.g., Isa 25:6. Rev 19:9 speaks of the “marriage supper of the Lamb.”

⁹⁷ Toussaint, *Behold the King*, 303.

⁹⁸ Osborne, *Matthew*, 969.

⁹⁹ Hindson and Borland, *Matthew*, 229–30.

¹⁰⁰ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:476. Robert L. Thomas, “Marriage Supper of the Lamb,” in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996): 248 notes that the marriage supper of the Lamb in Rev 19:9 is closely associated with and an integral part of the marriage of the Lamb in Rev 19:7. He writes: “Following the initial presentation of the bride to the Lamb will ensue a long celebration, which in NT times was a component of the marital occasion. This wedding feast will transpire during the earthly kingdom of God, the bride being the church and the invited guests (Rev. 19:9) the saints of other ages.”

Matthew 28:18–20

18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (ESV)

Hare and Harrington are examples of those who interpret Matt 28:19 to exclude Israel from the Church's task to disciple all nations.¹⁰¹ This type of interpretation sees Jesus and Matthew as believing that God has "once-for-all" rejected the Jews.¹⁰² However, Matthew himself thought the gospel was for all people, Jews and Gentiles.¹⁰³ He stresses the priority of the mission to Israel in 10:5–6 and this mission is never rescinded.¹⁰⁴ Matthew never records the return of the disciples from this mission; instead in 10:23 he tells the disciples that they will not finish their mission to Israel until the Son of man comes back.¹⁰⁵ Also, in 23:34, Matthew uses the present tense verb "I am sending," a futuristic present, to show that Jesus will be sending witnesses (prophets and wise men and scribes) to the Jews until the end of this age." The Gentile mission extends the Jewish mission, it does not replace it.¹⁰⁶

The following are additional evidences that "all the nations," πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, includes Israel: 1) The comparable πάντα τὰ ἔθνη in Luke 24:47 includes Jews ("repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning from

¹⁰¹ Douglas R. A. Hare and Daniel J. Harrington, "'Make Disciples of All the Gentiles' (Mt 28:19)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 37 (July 1975): 359–69.

¹⁰²Blomberg, *Matthew*, 431.

¹⁰³ Lowery, *Key Word Study*, 112.

¹⁰⁴ Davies and Allison, *Matthew* 3:684; Lowery, "Evidence from Matthew," 177.

¹⁰⁵ Lowery, "Evidence from Matthew," 177.

¹⁰⁶ Keener, *Matthew*, 719.

Jerusalem”);¹⁰⁷ 2) In Matthew’s time and place there were still Christian missionaries to the Jews;¹⁰⁸ 3) πάντα τὰ ἔθνη is comprehensive just like “all authority,” “in heaven and on earth,” “all that I have commanded you,” and “always, to the very end of the age”;¹⁰⁹ 4) In Dan 7:14, which provides a background to Matt 28:18–20, the phrase “that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him” includes Israel;¹¹⁰ 5) In Matthew’s recent uses of ἔθνη in 24:9 (disciples will be hated by all nations, Jew and Gentile, for Jesus’ name sake; Matthew is not excluding Israel as a source of hate that his followers will have to endure), and in 24:14 (“this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations”), it has a comprehensive meaning including both Israel and the Gentile peoples.¹¹¹ God is not turning his back on his people here. Just as in 1:21; 2:6; 10:23; 23:34; and 24:14 Matthew speaks of a future mission to the Jews till the end when Jesus returns and Israel receives him as Savior and Lord and King.

Part 2: Matthew Does Not Support Postmillennialism

Postmillennialists have an optimistic view concerning the present age. They believe:

the kingdom of God is now being extended in the world through the preaching of the gospel and the saving work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of individuals, that the world eventually is to be Christianized and that the return of Christ is to occur at the close of a long period of righteousness and peace commonly called the millennium.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:684.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 431–32; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:684.

¹¹² Lorraine Boettner, “Postmillennialism,” in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977): 117.

However, Matthew presents the interadvent age as a time of persecution and difficulty for the followers of Christ. In Matt 5:11 Jesus said: “Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.” In the Missionary Discourse of Matthew 10 Jesus warned, “Beware of men; for they will deliver you up to councils, and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake...” (10:17–18). Disciples on mission will be hated by all, delivered by their own family members to death and persecuted from town to town (10:18–23; 10:35–39). Jesus warned: “If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household” (10:25b). Jesus did not “come to bring peace on earth.” He said, “I have not come to bring peace, but a sword” (10:34). The fierce opposition Jesus’ disciples will face between now and the end is repeated in Matt 24:4–14. Disciples will be delivered up to tribulation, put to death, and hated by all nations for the sake of Christ’s name. They will face the deception of false Christs and false prophets who lead many astray. It is an age of multiplied wickedness; most people’s love will grow cold. In contrast to the many who fall away, Jesus says: “the one who endures to the end will be saved” (24:13).

Matthew 24:37–39 says the condition of the world when Jesus comes again will be like the days of Noah. People will be absorbed in the pleasures of life and totally oblivious of the judgment to come. Many will be suddenly taken in judgment. Matthew 24:15–35 speaks of a great, unprecedented tribulation that will be immediately followed by the Second Coming. This passage depicts a world of great suffering and death. All flesh would be taken in death unless the Lord minimized the days of the great tribulation.

In spite of evangelistic efforts it seems that most will not come to Christ. Three out of four types of responses to the word of the kingdom in Matt 13:18–23 are ultimately negative. Jesus in Matt 7:13–14 said: “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.” Jesus is teaching that in contrast to the many who do not experience eternal life, those who are saved will be few in number. The optimistic view that postmillennialists have concerning this age—that the world will be Christianized—is not supportable in view of the teaching of Matthew regarding this age.

*Part 3: Jesus and God Will Not Give Up on Israel Evidenced
in the Compassion of Jesus toward His People*

The writers of all four Gospels stress evangelism (John 20:31: “so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God...”; Mark 13:10: “And the Gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations”; Luke 19:10: “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost”; Matt 28:19: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . .”). Yet, as this study has shown, Matthew displays a singular concern for reaching the Jews with the good news of the kingdom (1:21; 2:6; 10:5–6; 10:23; 23:34, 39; 24:14; 28:19, etc.). The other three Gospels are clear about Jewish rejection of Jesus, but Matthew’s portrayal of the rejection of Jesus by his own is particularly explicit. It seems that just like Peter in his preaching the gospel at Pentecost (Acts 2:36: “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, *this Jesus whom you crucified*”), Matthew is brutally honest in his portrayal of the obduracy of the Jews and the judgment that will be there’s unless they trust in Christ (e.g., Matt 23:1–39; 3:7–12; 8:11–12; 10:25; 11:20–24; 12:1–37; 21:43; 21:33–45; 26:64–68; 27:22, 25), yet with a goal to reach his people with the message of Christ and his kingdom.

The compassion of God and Jesus for God's people, Israel, is a major motif of the Gospel of Matthew. It is further evidence that the Jewish people to whom Jesus went first have a future in the plan of God. Verses showing this compassion supplement the verses already covered in this study that confirm the future salvation or restoration of Israel.

Matthew 1:1 shows Jesus to be the Son of David and the Son of Abraham. God has graced his sinful people with a sinless Savior born of the Holy Spirit. God has been faithful to his unconditional covenants and God has sent Israel her Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus will save his people Israel from their sins (1:21) and he will shepherd them (2:5–6). Jesus brought light to Jewish people in darkness through the preaching of the kingdom of heaven and through his ministry (4:16–17). He made fishers of men who would multiply his ministry to Israel (4:18–22). A major reason he invested three years into them is because of his love for Israel and his desire for their salvation. Jesus taught in the Jewish synagogues, preached the gospel of the kingdom and healed every disease and infirmity of the people showing his great compassion and power toward Galilean Jews, Judean Jews, Jerusalem Jews, and people in Syria and the Decapolis (4:23–25). He preached that the kingdom of heaven is near (4:17 cf. 3:2; 10:7; 24:14). If the Jews would receive him as their king, the kingdom promised in the OT would come to earth. The Jewish crowds and Jewish disciples in Galilee were taught the great truths of the Sermon on the Mount including the teaching of the narrow gate that leads to life in 7:13–14. The Son of David had mercy on Jewish blind men and mercy on two daughters of Israel who were respectfully, dead and as good as dead (9:18–31).

A great passage on the compassion of Jesus occurs right before the missionary discourse. Jesus saw the need and the lost-ness of the crowds and he taught them, preached the gospel of the kingdom to them, and healed them. Then 9:36 says: “When he saw the crowds, he had

compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.” He came to shepherd his people Israel. They needed to understand who he was and that they needed to submit to him. One day he will shepherd them (2:6). Jesus here is making provision to meet the spiritual needs of lost Israel. He is commanding his disciples to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest and he is sending the disciples as the answer to their own prayer (9:37–38; 10:5–8). The mission to Israel will continue throughout this age. Jesus’ disciples and Jesus himself will pay a high price to carry out this mission out of love for even those who hate them (10:23; cf. 5:43–48; 22:37–39; 26:39, 42). After Jesus’ instructions in the missionary discourse he continued on in Israel teaching and preaching in the cities of the Jews (11:1). He preached the gospel to the poor alongside his compassionate healing ministry (11:4–5). His compassionate acts and his preaching the good news show him to be the Messiah prophesied in the OT. The Son will reveal the Father to all that come to him in Matt 11:25–30. Jesus gives a merciful call to come to him all who labor and are heavy laden and he will give them rest for their souls. They can learn from the very Son of the Father who has all things revealed to him. This passage comes right after Jesus’ woes pronounced on cities where he did his mighty works because they would not repent (11:20–24). Jesus invites the Jewish people to repent. Harsh words of upcoming judgment and tender calls to come to him and rest can both lead to repentance.

The parable of the Sower teaches disciples about the various responses to the gospel and tells of the wonderful fruit bearing yield that God will produce in the lives of those receptive to his word whether they be Jesus’ first disciples or later “soils” that are also responsive to the word (13:18–23). Even though Jesus encountered closed eyes and ears in Israel, and unbelief and rejection from his home town, he still taught them in their synagogue. There would be those who had faith in him like those in Gennesaret (14:34–36). He had compassion on the 5,000 Jewish

men and their families and fed them and healed their sick in 14:13–21. In 15:24 He reaffirms that he was sent by God only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He would provide for them first, but then also to the believing Gentiles. The Gentiles of faith provide examples to the Jews of great faith and positive responses to Jesus.. His compassionate healing of the multitudes on the mountain in 15:29–31 brought glory to God in Galilee.

Jesus will build his church and he will use men like Peter to whom God revealed Jesus' identity as the Christ, the Son of God. This will be part of their message after the resurrection (16:13–20). Jesus foretells his death and resurrection, the good news, the gospel in 16:21; 17:12; 17:22–23; 20:17–19. The gospel is for Jews and Gentiles. He came to give his life as a ransom for many (20:28). This includes the Jews. It is not the will of God that one of the little ones who believe in him should be caused to sin. The good shepherd will leave the 99 and find the one that is lost (18:10–14). The Father does not want one of these who believe in him to perish (18:14).

Those who leave everything and follow Jesus like Peter, Andrew, James, John, and Matthew (4:18–22; 9:9) in the mission of fishing for men will be rewarded; they will be blessed a hundredfold and have eternal life. The Twelve (minus Judas) will sit on twelve thrones ruling over the twelve tribes of Israel. There is a future for Israel. Israel will be saved, the twelve tribes will be restored and the Twelve and Jesus will have a close connection to Israel in the Millennial kingdom.

In chapter 20 Jesus continues to show his compassion to the needy people of Israel, in this case two more blind men (20:29–34). These men “follow” Jesus as Jesus goes to Jerusalem. Jesus enters Jerusalem as the Son of David, as the Messiah, but the Jewish leadership continues to reject him and so does Jerusalem (23:37–38). Yet one day Israel will believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God and then Jesus will return and set up his kingdom on earth (23:39). In the

meantime Jesus will continue to send his followers to the Jews until his return even though they will be persecuted and even killed (23:29–37). Though all nations hate the disciples in this age, this gospel of the kingdom will be preached, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come (24:14). Jesus was willing to be forsaken by the Father, to be mocked and tortured, to be betrayed and abandoned, and to give up his life on a cursed cross to redeem Jews and Gentiles (26:26–27:50; esp. 27:46).

Jesus evidenced great love and compassion for his people the Jews while he was on earth. Jesus' priority in ministry was to preach the gospel of the kingdom to the Jews first. Yes the Jews as a whole did reject Jesus the first time he came, but his identity and his love will one day be understood by Israel. They will have a change of mind and trust Jesus as their Messiah, the Very Son of God.