

Historical Problems for a First-Century Fulfillment of the Olivet Discourse¹

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Jesus' prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple and His explanation to His disciples in the Olivet Discourse has produced a tremendous volume of scholarly interpretations, most of which fall into the historicist camp and interpret Jesus' words as a threat or curse on the sacrificial institution represented by the Temple.² Most of these interpreters assume that Jesus' statements of destruction are pronouncements, as though He Himself were judging and condemning the city and sanctuary. This is generally because they view the Temple's removal as marking the end of the Jewish age and symbolizing the removal of Israel as God's Chosen People. Preterism as a subset of Historicism agrees with this interpretation but must also find historical correlation between actual events in the first century, principally the events of the First Jewish Revolt (AD 66-70), and the text of the Olivet Discourse in order to prove a fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy within the same generation as His disciples. The problem, however, is that many of the specific historical details do not fit with those of the biblical text. For example, such a detail as the direction of Christ's advent [to Jerusalem], in Matthew 24:27 is compared with lightning flashing from *east to west*, whereas the Roman army, which Preterists interpret as fulfilling this prophecy, advanced on Jerusalem from *the west to the east*. Even if we take this simply to mean the Roman army advanced "like lightning" (i.e., quickly), the historical record reveals a very slow assault on Jerusalem, the war being for several years before Jerusalem was even besieged! For this reason in many cases a "correlation" can only be made through the eschatologically biased interpretation of Josephus (such as associating divine signs with the Roman army's impending conquest), reinterpreting the text to fit the preferred historical data (such as taking "the clouds of heaven" as the dust kicked up by the Roman army's advance), or by taking statements that do not fit the historical events of the great Jewish revolt as hyperbole (such as the unprecedented and unsurpassed nature of the Tribulation), in order to claim first-century fulfillment. In this chapter, building on the work of a previous chapter in this book that considered the Preterist's misuse of the historical sources, I will specifically examine the way this affects the Preterist's interpretation of the Olivet Discourse.

The Disciples' Questions

Preterists interpret Jesus' answer in the Olivet Discourse as having a *single* temporal reference - the end of "this generation" which they define as the generation which crucified Jesus

¹ This paper was published in edited form as chapter 15 in the book *End Times Controversy*. Edited by Tim LaHaye & Thomas Ice (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2003).

²Cf. e.g. Lloyd Gaston, *No Stone Upon Another: Studies in the Significance of the Fall of Jerusalem in the Synoptic Gospels*. NTSup 23 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), and James Calvin de Young, *Jerusalem in the New Testament: The Significance of the City in the History of Redemption and in Eschatology* (Amsterdam: J. H. Kok N. VanKampen, 1960).

and “the present [Jewish] age,” which they understand to have terminated in AD 70. However, when interpreting the Olivet Discourse it is important to remember the disciples asked Jesus three questions: (1) “when will these things [i.e. the destruction of the Second Temple] happen?”, (2) “what will be sign of your coming?”, and (3) “[what will be the sign] of the end of the age?” Since Jesus was asked three questions, He gave three answers. The desire for a discernable timetable of events evoked the disciples' questions and the content of their questions indicates they understood the prophetic program (particularly as outlined by Zechariah) which connected an end-time attack on Jerusalem by Gentile armies with the coming of the Messiah to rescue Israel and reign as universal King (Zech. 14:2-9). The disciples thinking probably followed these lines: If Jesus announced the destruction of the present Temple it must mean that the end of the age was at hand and that it was the time for Him to be revealed in Jerusalem as the Messianic King. If these events were imminent, they wanted to know when they would occur and how Jesus' messianic appearance would be announced to the Jewish Nation. However, Jesus realized that the immediate rejection of His messiahship (as witnessed by His miraculous works) would result in the Nation being judged according to the disciplinary provisions of the Mosaic Covenant (Deut. 28:15-68). Since the means of this judgment was invasion and exile by a foreign power, Jesus understood that the Romans would carry out the divine sentence and that it would be enacted on Jerusalem and the Temple in accordance with the previous discipline in 586 BC. Jesus also understood that Daniel 9:24-26 prophesied His death and soon afterward the destruction of the City and Sanctuary. Jesus also saw in the near political events of the Roman invasion the type of scenario that would again be present in the end-time at His return, namely, a geographical setting in Jerusalem and its attack by Gentile armies. Jesus used the similarities in the coming conflict to answer both the disciples their immediate concern about Jerusalem and the Temple and to instruct them concerning the events that would occur at the end of the age.

Jesus' Purpose in the Olivet Discourse

The purpose of the Olivet Discourse as interpreted by the schools of Historicism³ and Preterism⁴ is exclusively as a judgment text in which Jesus' denunciations of the Temple find their final fulfillment in the Temple's destruction by the Romans in AD 70. As with the previous passage, this text has been understood to have had a past fulfillment resulting in an irreversible abandonment of the Jewish People, Jerusalem, and the Temple by God. For Preterism in particular, the basis for this interpretation rests upon understanding the phrase “this generation” as only and always having reference to the first-century generation to whom Jesus spoke. Futurism, by contrast, accepts some uses of “this generation” as having reference to those to whom Jesus spoke and other uses as having reference to those about whom Jesus spoke, with context being the

³Historicism is an eschatological school of interpretation that holds the fulfillment of prophetic events in the Old and New Testaments, and especially those in the Olivet Discourse, while originally future at the time of their being revealed, took place in *past history* (usually sometime during the time of the Roman empire, though some interpret events in later times).

⁴Preterism is a subset of Historicism and holds in that either all (Extreme or Consistent Preterism) or most (Moderate Preterism) prophetic fulfillment, both in the Old and New Testaments (and especially the Olivet Discourse) took place by and in the event of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Extreme Preterism sees the Second Coming of Christ as already fulfilled in the Roman invasion, while Moderate Preterism sees two Second Comings: one in the Roman invasion and a final at the end of the age. For a popular defense of the position see, R.C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus: What the Bible Really Says About When Jesus will Come* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998).

determining factor. For example, the use of “this generation” in Matthew 23:36 is applied as an indictment (in context) to the generation of the “scribes and Pharisees” (Matthew 23:29) whose actions against Jesus demonstrate their affinity with previous persecutors of the Prophets (verses 30-35). Jesus’ then pronounces sentence with the words “all these things shall come upon this generation.” The phrase “these things” must also be interpreted in its context. In this case, the next verse (verse 37) describes “these things” as the future experience of Temple desolation. It is important to observe here that even though now historically past, “this generation” in context was a *future* generation at the time of its being originally spoken by Jesus and being recorded by Matthew. It was future from the perspective of the sins “this generation” (in context) would yet commit (complicity in the crucifixion) and the judgment they would receive (the Roman destruction in AD 70; see Luke 21:20-24).

The future sense of “this generation” in a judgment context sets a precedence for its interpretation in contexts that are both judicial and eschatological. If the desolation experienced by “this generation” in Matthew 23:36 can be understood as a future fulfillment that came some 40 years later, it should not be a problem to understand the Tribulation judgment as a future fulfillment that will come on the generation that will experience it at the end of the age. However, the difference is not simply a span of time, but the nature of that time as eschatological. For the “this generation” of Matthew 24:34, Mark 13:30, and Luke 21:32, “all these things” (Matthew 24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:28) must refer contextually to the events of the “Great Tribulation,” the conclusion of “the times of the Gentiles,” the coming of Christ in glory, and the regathering and redemption of Israel, all of which are not only declared to be future by Jesus at the time of speaking (Mark 13:23), but also cast in typical eschatological language (for example, “end of the age,” “such as not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, *nor ever shall*,” “powers of the heavens will be shaken”). Even though in context Jesus may refer to the future “this generation” as “you,” this is a conventional usage of language with respect to reference and does not have to ultimately apply to a present audience.⁵ In the Old Testament, it is common to find in prophetic sections such address. For instance, Moses uses language similar to Jesus when he says “So it will be when *all of these things* have come upon *you* ...” (Deuteronomy 30:1a). Even though he is speaking to the present generation (“you”), it is evident from the context that his words speak about a future generation that will live thousands of years later and into the eschatological period. “This generation” (the “you”) are those who will have already suffered the judgment of exile (verse 1b), captivity (verse 3), been regathered and restored (verses 4-5), and received spiritual regeneration (“circumcision of heart,” verse 6).

However, as an examination of the prophecy will reveal, Jesus’ purpose was not exclusively determined by thoughts of God’s vengeance on Israel or a prophetic compulsion to denounce the Temple, but guided by specific questions that arose from His disciples as a result of contextual statement’s concerning the Temple’s future. Matthew and Mark are generally parallel accounts, however, Luke’s account has significant differences. These differences are explained by Jesus’ answers to three separate questions posed by the disciples: (1) “Tell us when these things [destruction of the Temple] will be?,” (2) “What will be the sign of your [Messiah’s] coming?,” (3)

⁵That the scope cannot be limited to a present audience is obvious from the fact that such usage cannot mean only those who heard the message or who were currently part of the present generation, since others who were not present and who were yet to be born must be included while some would certainly have died before the events were fulfilled and no longer be part of that generation, especially since it is still *future* from the perspective of the speaker.

“What will be the sign of the end of the [Gentile] age?” From the Futurists perspective, it should be observed that while all three questions are asked in Matthew 24:3 and Mark 13:4, Jesus’ only answers questions two and three in these contexts. Luke may have only asked the first question (Luke. 21:6-7a), which explains Jesus’ answer concerning Jerusalem’s desolation being included only here (verses 20-24). However, there are also exegetical reasons for supposing that Luke alone deals with the nearer destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by Titus in AD 70.⁶

What is common to these questions in each account is that they come in response to Jesus’ unsolicited statement concerning the Temple that “not one stone shall be left upon another, which shall not be torn down” (Matthew 24:2; Mark 13:2; Luke 21:6). Whether or not we accept the preceding interpretation of the differences between these accounts, each contain Jesus’ *predictions* concerning the desecration of the Temple (either in AD 70 or at the end of the age).⁷ In every question and every account, it is the *future* that concerns the disciples, both immediate and especially in terms of the Old Testament prophecies. Matthew in particular reveals that Jesus’ preview of the future was to answer His disciple’s questions concerning His [second] coming, and the end of the age (Matthew 24:3). Jesus’ here explains why His coming is necessary (for divine intervention and national repentance, verses 27-31; compare Zechariah 12:9-10) and when it will occur: “*after* the tribulation of those days” (verse 29). According to Matthew,⁸ the events described in this period prior to the Messianic advent could not have been fulfilled in AD 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem, since these events usher in and terminate with the coming of Messiah.⁹

Moreover, the Olivet Discourse predicts a victorious outcome for Israel and a fulfillment of restoration, rather than a defeat that ends its prophetic hopes. This is seen in the provisions of “protection” (Matthew 24:16-17, 22; Mark 13:15-16, 20), the promises of “regathering” (Matthew 24:31; Mark 13:27), and “redemption” (Luke 21:28) at the return of Messiah. These are in

⁶A comparison of the Greek texts of the three accounts reveals, e.g., that while Matthew and Mark use the term “great tribulation,” Luke uses the term “great distress.” This is because “tribulation” may serve as a technical expression of “the time of Jacob’s trouble,” an eschatological event, while “distress” may refer to a less specific time of persecution, such as that attending a military conquest. Cf. further on this Lukan distinction, J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Dunham Publishing Co., 1958), pp. 276-277. As we will see below, this permits Luke’s chiasmic structure to have both an historical series and an eschatological series, whereas Matthew and Mark’s chiasm is strictly eschatological.

⁷Cf. Desmond Ford, *The Abomination of Desolation in Biblical Eschatology* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1978), pp. 75-76, has purposed an alternative solution to the question. He argues that Jesus linked the destruction of Jerusalem with the end of the age and promised *both* to his generation. Was Jesus, therefore, wrong, for the end of that age (70 AD) did not bring the predicted coming of Messiah? Ford responds negatively, because he believes that Mark 13:30 can be understood as belonging to the same genre as Jonah’s “Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown,” (p. 75). He says: “We submit that the exegesis of Mk. 13:30 is only complete if we allow for the possibility that Christ, as a Hebrew of the Hebrews, may have used an absolute statement with less than an absolute meaning, in harmony with those Scriptures He so implicitly trusted. It is possible that he believed that if the early church proved faithful to its missionary commission, and if the chastened Jewish nation repented, the end would transpire in that same Age. It is the linking of the gospel proclamation to the world with the end of the Age that provides the hint of the contingent element,” (p. 76).

⁸Luke’s omission of this signal event is one of the reasons it is believed that at this point in his narrative he is presenting the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD rather than the eschatological end of the age.

⁹For this reason consistent preterists must interpret Christ’s coming as having occurred in AD 70. To do so, however, requires the employment of a non-literal and historical hermeneutic, since the events cannot be reconciled with either the literal interpretation of the Old Testament citations and allusions in the Olivet Discourse or the actual events of the destruction.

harmony with other positive expectations of Israel attending Messiah's coming (see Acts 1:6; 3:20-21; Romans 11:26-27). To interpret these positive references as something else or for someone else requires the text to be read in a non-literal way. For Preterism, whose case is argued on the basis of a literal historical fulfillment (in and around the events of AD 70), such an approach is inconsistent and fails to reckon with Jesus' eschatological method of interpretation, which is consistently literal and Jewish in character.¹⁰

The Destruction of the Temple in AD 70 - a Final Judgment of Israel?

Preterist Gary DeMar cites P.W.L. Walker in support of his view that the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 symbolized a final judgment of Israel in Matthew: "There is nothing Jesus' teaching in this Gospel which suggest that after this period of judgement there will be a restoration; the 'seven evil spirits enter and live there' (Matt. 12:45), 'the vineyard is leased to others' (21:41), the city is 'burnt' (22:7), the Temple is 'abandoned' (23:38); the Apocalyptic Discourse (ch. 24) moves away from Jerusalem to focus on the coming of the Son of Man."¹¹ However, it would be incongruous for Matthew to begin his gospel ("good news") by announcing that the purpose of Jesus' coming was to "save His people from their sins" (1:21), only to conclude by predicting that Jesus coming at the end of that generation was to *destroy* them because of their

¹⁰Jesus handling of the biblical text followed the exegetical methods common to Judaism and drew its perspective and presuppositions from Jewish backgrounds Jesus use of both quotations and allusions from the Old Testament reveal that he was skilled in these various forms of rabbinic exegesis that were normative in his day (literalist and midrashic)," E. Earl Ellis, *The Old Testament in Early Christianity : Canon and Interpretation in the Light of Modern Research* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), p. 121. Ellis in a discussion of Jesus' method of interpretation, demonstrates examples in the Gospels of Jesus' use of Hillel's Rules, *proem* and *yelammedenu*- type midrash, cf. appendix I, pp. 130-138. Furthermore, because the Judaism of Jesus' day was Torah-centric, to gain a hearing among his people Jesus' teaching had to also be Torah-centric. The distinctive difference in Jesus' methodology was his employment of a creative element in his hermeneutics that arose from his concept of the Old Testament as a pre-messianic Torah, for examples of this messianic interpretive paradigm in application to Jesus' parabolic style have been ably demonstrated by Robert H. Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teachings* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1978), pp. 112-147. In this regard, Jesus' eschatology, which followed the literalist approach of the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, and Qumran in looking for a future fulfillment of the restoration of Israel in a millennial Age, following the judgment of the Gentile nations, served as the basis for the Johannine, Pauline, and Peterine epistles see E. Earl Ellis, *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), pp. 147-172, and Pasquale De Santo, *A Study of Jewish Eschatology with Special Reference to the Final Conflict* (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1957), pp. 397-402. We should add here the statement of Lamar Cope, "'To the Close of the Age': The Role of Apocalyptic Thought in the Gospel of Matthew," *Apocalyptic and the New Testament: Essays in Honor of J. Louis Martyn. JSNT Supplement Series 24* (Sheffield, 1989), p. 123: "so it seems to me that we need to acknowledge that Christian faith did arise out of the seedbed of late Jewish apocalyptic movements, but we should also recognize that its finest insights about God, human life, and discipleship are anchored in a radical understanding of the grace of God which negates the dark side of apocalyptic." In response to Cope, I would say that the Christian faith, especially as reflected in the early Jewish-Christianity of the New Testament, is better recognized as a continuation of the eschatological thought of the biblical Prophets, sharing with apocalyptic literature where it has also drawn from this same source. The "darker" side of apocalyptic, i.e., divine retribution/punishment, is essential to the formation of the "grace" theology, which Cole would have it eclipse. Both of these elements are part and parcel to the prophetic message, and thus indispensable ingredients to the eschatological faith of Christianity. Therefore, it is essential in understanding Jesus' eschatological treatment of the Temple, to underscore his continuity with a Torah-centered Judaism whose eschatological hope was primarily drawn from the biblical Prophets, and whose influence governed the hermeneutical development of the early church.

¹¹ P.W.L. Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City: New Testament Perspectives on Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 42 as cited by DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, p. 61.

sins. One cannot escape this difficulty by interpreting “His people” as any “people” other than the Jews, for this term is uniformly used in Matthew (13 times) for ethnic Israel. Indeed, the very focus of Jesus’ mission is identified with Israel (Matt. 2:6; 10:6; 15:24). It is generally conceded that Matthew’s gospel was written by a Jew to a largely Jewish audience with the intent of proving Jesus is Israel’s Messianic King. This appeal to a Jewish audience indicates that Matthew did not interpret Jesus’ Olivet Discourse preteristically, otherwise his purpose would have been to prove the rejection of Israel and that Jesus was the Savior of the Church. On the contrary, while Matthew certainly condemns the religious hypocrisy and apostasy within Judaism, he nowhere condemns the biblical Judaism which had preserved and practiced God’s commandments. As David Lowery has observed: “Matthew’s ... and his community’s ... relationship to Judaism [reveals that they] were unwilling to dissociate themselves completely from Judaism and some of its practices (such as the Temple tax). This is a further indication that Matthew does not regard Israel’s present plight as irreversible or irredeemable. In part this is related to his conviction that the promises of the OT made to Israel by God have not been rendered (nor will they become) null and void.”¹²

Moreover, the conclusion that the purpose of Jesus “at the end of the age” is to destroy Israel, contradicts the repeated call in Matthew’s gospel of a salvific mission to Israel (10:5-6; 23:34), a mission never rescinded, but said to continue until the coming of the Son of Man (10:23). However, as Preterism interprets 10:23, Christianity no longer has a mission to Israel, since this was only to last “until the coming of the Son of Man” and this occurred in AD 70. Yet, how can the mission to Israel be separated from the universal commission to “all nations” (28:19)? Where does Matthew imply that one would continue and the other is discontinued? However, if Jesus’ intention were to destroy Israel in AD 70, why would He bother to send His disciples to it up until this time? Why not simply abandon this mission in light of the national rejection of Jesus (as some interpret Matt. 21:43) that was to soon culminate with the punishment for this rejection in AD 70? If one argues that it was to confirm their rejection and further justify their condemnation in AD 70, then the purpose seems deceptive and certainly disharmonious with the general commission. However, such a conclusion flies in the face of the gospel’s purpose to authenticate Jesus’ messianic credentials to Israel. If Jesus came “only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (15:24), and His intent was to “shepherd My people, Israel” (2:6), then the lack of fulfillment of this purpose presents a problem to the prophetic proof of His messiahship. Further, the lack of correlation between historical events surrounding the Roman invasion of AD 70 and the text of the Olivet Discourse pose a significant problem for Preterism.

Preterism’s Difficulty with Historical and Textual Correlation

Preterists claim that the historical context for the fulfillment of the Olivet Discourse is exclusively the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in AD 70. If this is so, then why do not the accounts in Matthew 24 and Mark 13 unambiguously reveal this setting? Preterists insist that these gospels do reveal this, but only by first comparing their accounts with that of Luke 21:20-24 and then arguing that all three are reporting exactly the same chronological event. However, if we look at Matthew and Mark as independent accounts (and indeed they circulated within the first-century church as such), then we are forced to conclude that neither make mention of the destruction of Jerusalem or the Temple. This has been the very objection argued by conservative

¹² David K. Lowery, “Evidence from Matthew,” *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*. Eds. Donald K. Campbell & Jeffrey L. Townsend (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), pp. 172-3.

evangelicals against the liberal critics of predictive prophecy who claimed an AD 70 fulfillment as evidence of *vaticinia ex eventu* (“prophecy after the event”). Robert Gundry addresses this usage in his futurist defense of the prophecy:

From the disparity between destruction in the disciples’ question and profanation in Jesus’ answer, many have concluded to a prophecy after the event ... On the contrary, such a prophecy would have reiterated the destruction initially predicted in v 2 and would have set out the chronology and sign for which the disciples asked; for the chronology and precursive events would have been available to a historian posing as a prophet. The failure of this discourse to return to the destruction of the temple after the preceding, brief prediction in v 2, the failure of it to answer the four disciples’ questions in v 3 concerning the time and sign of the destruction, and the failure even of v 2 to say anything about the destruction of Jerusalem all make it unlikely that the discourse reflects the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 C.E. ...¹³

One example of a lack of historical correlation in this case is the lack of description concerning the distinct nature of the Temple’s destruction. Josephus especially emphasizes this destruction as a fiery conflagration, which engulfed the Temple: “You would indeed have thought that the Temple Mount was boiling over from its base, being everywhere one mass of flame” (*Wars* 6.5.1 §275). Yet, nothing about fire is even implied in Jesus’ prediction concerning the Temple in Matt. 24:15 or Mk. 13:15. In fact, fire is also missing from the Daniel citation of the “Abomination of Desolation” which was implicitly referenced by Jesus’ as a chronological marker and explanation of the event. Whether one contends that the closest citation is from Dan. 11:31 where the historical background is of Antiochus IV Epiphanes invasion of the Temple, or Daniel 9:26-27, in which context the city and Temple are said to be destroyed, or Daniel 12:11, there is still no allusion made to fire as the means of destruction. However, in Daniel 9 it is verse 27 that contains the reference to the “abomination,” and as Thomas Ice has argued in chapter _____, it may best be understood as chronologically distinct and eschatological. Daniel 12:11 is entirely eschatological as verses 9-10 and the eschatological time-marker “end time” attests. The omission of fire from Matthew and Mark is a strange in light of the fact that other verses about the Second Advent speak of Jesus’ being revealed “in flaming fire” (2 Thess. 1:7; 2; cf. Heb. 12:29), with “eyes a flame of fire” (Rev. 19:12), destroying the earth by “burning” (Pet. 3:10). This is also exceptional given the mention of fire in the near context of Matthew in relation to Jesus’ judgment (Matt. 25:41; cf. 1 Cor. 3:13). If Jesus wanted readers to “understand” (as He says He does in Matt. 24:13; Mk. 13:14) and connect His Second Advent as a “judgment-coming” with the event of AD 70, He could have been done by making a reference to fiery destruction. That He did not do so argues for His differentiating the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 from the desolation of the Temple at the time of the future Tribulation at which time His judgment is not centered on the Jewish Temple but on the Gentile nations.

Another lack of correlation between the events of AD 66-70 and the description in the Olivet Discourse (in all three gospels) are missing details that distinctly attended the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Josephus describes in detail accounts of cannibalism, pestilence, internecine conflict, and supernatural events (see *Wars* 5.1.1-5 §§1-38; 5.10.2-5 §§424-45; 5.13.1

¹³ Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993), p. 754.

§§527-33; 6.3.1-6.5.3 §§177-309; 7.1.1 §1). Why would the gospel writers have omitted these details when they are so explicit about other details that they say accompany the end such as false christs, false prophets, widespread warfare, persecution, and the desecration of the Temple?

Further problems in correlation result from Preterists attempting to make historical events from the first-century fit the Olivet Discourse. For example, the Zealot-led revolt against the Romans scarcely fits the “many will come in My name, saying ‘I am the Christ’ and mislead many” (Matt. 24:5; Mk. 13:6). True, the Zealots occupied the Temple precincts used it as a military fortress, positioned their own high priest, desecrated the minor vessels and plundered the resources of the Temple (wine, oil, etc.), interrupted the sacrificial service, and even shed blood in the Temple (*Wars* 4.3.7-10 §§151-192; 5.13.6 §§562-66; 6.2.1 §§93-110). But as Gundry properly observes “none of these crimes against the temple caused it to be deserted” for the sacrificial services continued to the end and the Jews demonstrated zealous devotion to the Temple defending it even with their lives (see *Wars* 4.3.11-14 §§193-223). However, it is possible, as we have seen, and Martin Hengel has proposed, that Josephus falsely accused the Zealots in his account because of his anti-nationalistic bias.¹⁴ Preterist Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. likewise interprets the “Abomination of Desolation” in light of the Jewish Zealots’ actions in the war:

The A.D. 70 stone-by-stone dismantling of the temple surely involves its ‘desolation.’ And ... it includes abominable acts ... Well then, what *is* this ‘abomination of desolation’ that befalls the city and temple? The holy city *and* the temple are both desecrated and desolated in the Jewish War. During the Roman siege, the Zealots hole up in Jerusalem, and stir up factional infighting between the parties ... Even while Jerusalem’s mighty walls resist the Romans, this internal strife brings war into the holy temple itself ... As Titus begins his final march toward Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the Zealots ‘seize upon the inner court of the temple ... so that the temple was defiled everywhere with murders’ (*Wars* 5:12).¹⁵

However, Gentry also explains the “Abomination of Desolation” in light of the invading Roman army’s actions. He views the presence of these attacking soldiers in military regalia carrying standards that bore images of Tiberias Caesar in Jerusalem and in the Temple precincts, as “an abomination leading to desolation.”¹⁶ However, with this explanation any one of a number of similar events could also fit the historical fulfillment. Examples would include Pontius Pilate’s orders to soldiers to march with their standards into Jerusalem, Gaius Caligula’s order to place his statue in the Jewish Temple, the illegitimate service of the Zealot-sponsored high priest Phanni in the Temple, Titus’ and his general’s entrance into the Holy Place of the Temple, and the erection of Roman standards in the Temple court and Roman sacrifices proclaiming Titus as emperor. All of these acts might qualify as “abominations of desolation.” But, the problem with a non-specific reference of Temple desecration is that Jesus’ hearers would left to chose from just such an assortment of desecration senarios, each of which has been the argued as fulfilling Jesus’ prophecy

¹⁴ Martin Hengel, *Zealots* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), pp. 185-86, 209-10, 217-24.

¹⁵ Kenneth L. Gentry, “The Great Tribulation is Past: Exposition,” in Thomas Ice and Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Great Tribulation: Past or Future?* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999), pp. 46-48.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 48.

of the “Abomination of Desolation” by modern preteristic commentators!¹⁷ Yet, most of these aforementioned “abominations” leading to “desolation” never even occurred or have been seriously misrepresented! As Craig Evans explains:

None of these events, however, fits well the context of Jesus’ warning in [Mark 13] v 14. Pilate’s attempted sacrilege did not take place. The temple was not in any way desecrated or left desolate. Caligula’s order to erect his statue was never carried out, so again there was no abomination and the temple was not left desolate. Josephus’s discussion of Phanni’s appointment as high priest reflects Josephus’s own bias against the Zealots, as well as his bias in favor of the non-Zadokite priestly aristocracy. It is very probable that many Jews, including Christians, would not have viewed Phanni’s appointment as an outrage and certainly not as “the abomination that makes desolate” (note well *J.W.* 4.3.9 §160, where according to Josephus, the priestly aristocracy found it necessary to upbraid the people for their apathy against the Zealots!). And finally, Titus’ stroll through the sanctuary occurred after the temple had already been seriously damaged and was in fact in flames, and after Jewish sacrifices had ceased. Moreover, the “abomination of desolation” of which Daniel speaks and to which Jesus alludes envisioned the cessation of sacrifice in the Jerusalem temple, not its destruction (Gundry, 741). Thus, none of the four events often cited as an explanation actually offers a parallel to v 14.¹⁸

However, in order for Jesus’ warning to flee because of the sign of the “Abomination of Desolation” to be viable, only *one* clearly identifiable desecration must be understood. Otherwise, Jesus’ first-century audience might have taken flight at every rumor of attempted desecration. However, unless Jesus’ interpretation is unique, Jews of His time apparently held a futurist, rather than a preterist view of the fulfillment of the “abomination of desolation.” The prediction in Daniel 11:21-35 had already been fulfilled 200 years previously (in 167 BC) when the Syrian-Greek ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes placed a statue of Zeus Olympias next to the Great Altar of the Temple and forced the Jewish priests to offer sacrifices to pagan gods. Despite this well-known historical fulfillment, one which Jesus probably commemorated (see Jn. 10:22), He cites Daniel with an understanding that the fulfillment is yet future. From this it is clear that Jesus’ could have only understood the phrase in light of the event of 167 BC - a literal desecration by idols and pagan worship in the Temple. However, just as He sees the Tribulation (also a term found in Daniel 12:1-2) as future and unprecedented, so He sees this “Abomination of Desolation” as future and unprecedented. Israel had experienced many past “tribulations,” but it had not yet experienced “the Great Tribulation.” In like manner, Jerusalem and the Temple had seen (and would see) “abominations” that led to “desolation,” but they had yet to see Daniel’s “Abomination of Desolation” which served to signal the advent of this greatest of all tribulations.

The Meaning of “Abomination of Desolation”

In my own study of the phrase in the context of Temple desecration I discovered the phrase served as a technical reference to the introduction of an idolatrous image or an act of pagan sacrilege within the Sanctuary that produces the highest level a of ceremonial impurity, Temple

¹⁷ For a list of these see Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20* . Word Biblical Commentary 34b (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), pp. 318-19.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 319.

profanation.¹⁹ With respect to the term “abomination,” two Hebrew nouns (*sheqetz* and *shiqqutz*) are derived from the Hebrew root *shaqatz*, the first always related to unclean animals (for dietary purposes), especially loathsome creatures such as “swarming things” (Leviticus 11:10) and “creeping things” (Isaiah 66:17),²⁰ and the second for idols as “detestable things” and with the idolatrous practices associated with them²¹ (Deuteronomy 29:17; 1 Kings 11:5, 7; 2 Kings 23:13, 24; 2 Chronicles 15:8; Isaiah 66:3; Jeremiah 4:1; 7:30; 13:27; 16:18; 32:34; Ezekiel 5:11; 7:20; 11:18, 21; 20:7-8, 30; 37:23; Nahum 3:6; Zechariah 9:7). The root *shaqatz* appears forty-five times in the Old Testament primarily as a technical term to denote animals and other things that rendered the Israelite “unclean.” The term is used of any detestable thing (Hosea 9:10; Nahum 3:6; Zechariah 9:7), but predominately in connection with idolatrous practices. In Jeremiah 7:30-32 the prophet decries the desecration of the Temple by the erection of “abominations” (*shiqqutzim*) in the Holy Place. Here the reference must be to the images of idols, referred to by hypocatasasis as “detestable, or horrible things.” In its verbal form (occurring only in the Pi’el as *shiqqetz*) it appears seven times (Leviticus 7:18; 19:7; Isaiah 65:4; Ezekiel 4:14) with the factitive meaning of “abhor, detest,” but since what is detested is that which defiles, it has a causative connotation of “contaminate” or “make abominable.”²² The phrase “abomination of desolation” or “desolating abomination” (Hebrew, *shiqqutz m^eshomem*) occurs in Hebrew only in Daniel (9:27; 11:31; 12:11). The form of the Hebrew term for “desolation” in this phrase is the *Pol’el* participle *shomem* or *m^eshomem*, which has a range of verbal meanings: “devastate, desolate, desert, and appall, with nominal derivatives: waste, horror, devastation, appallment. Hermann Austel in his study of this term says that “basic to the idea of the root is the desolation caused by some great disaster, usually as a result of divine judgment.”²³ Perhaps for this reason it has also been used to describe an attitude of appalling horror due to criminal and barbaric acts of idolatry.²⁴ The *Pol’el* here has a causative (or better, factitive) force similar to the use of the *Hiphil*, except that the *Hiphil* generally involves a physical devastation, while the *Pol’el* seems to put more stress on the fact that someone has caused (active) the Sanctuary or altar to be desecrated, thus rendering it unfit for the worship and service of God. In Daniel, two nuances of the term: “desolation due to war” and “desolation due to idolatry,” are combined in Daniel 8:13, which describes the condition of Jerusalem under foreign domination: “How long will be the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, and the transgression that causes desolation so as to permit both the Sanctuary and its vessels to be trampled?”²⁵ This is very similar to the description of Jerusalem in Daniel 12:11 where a foreign

¹⁹ Randall Price, *The Desecration and Restoration of the Temple as an Eschatological Motif in the Tanach, Jewish Apocalyptic Literature, and the New Testament* (Michigan: UMI Publications, 1994), pp.

²⁰The Hebrew term *taqehes sheqetz* is related to *pigul* in that the latter refers to *dead* carcasses (cf. Isaiah 65:4), while the former only to *living* animals (cf. Leviticus 7:21; 11:10-13, 20, 23, 41; Isaiah 66:17; Ezekiel 8:10).

²¹Cf. Herman J. Austel, “*Qevi*,” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* 2: 955, who argues for both a reference to the “idols” and “something associated with the idolatrous ritual.” He adds: “Not only are the idols an abomination, but they that worship them ‘become detestable like that which they love’ (Hosea 9:10), for they identify themselves with the idols.”

²²This association is expressed in Leviticus 11:43; 20:25 where the root *shqtz* is paralleled with *tame’*, and in its close association with the meanings of the *Pi’el* forms of both *tame’* (“make unclean”) and *ta’ab* (“abhor”) see Bruce K. Waltke, “Abomination,” *New International Bible Encyclopedia* I (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 19), p. 14.

²³Hermann J. Austel, “*µmev*,” *TWOT* 2 (1980): 936-937.

²⁴*BDB* s.v. “*µmv*,” pp. 1030-1031.

²⁵While *shomen* could here be translated as “the transgression that causes horror,” expressing the psychological nuance as a result of the idolatrous act, it seems preferable to retain the idea of cultic [or spiritual] “desolation” as a

invader has both abolished the regular sacrifice and substituted "an abomination that causes desolation." When combined with the Hebrew term for "abomination" (*shiqqutz*) the idea of the forcible intrusion of idolatry into a place of sanctity in order to defile is significantly intensified.

In the New Testament, the expression appears in Greek as *bdelugma tes eremoseos* (Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14; Luke 21:20). The first part of this phrase, the word *bdelugma* ("abomination"), is used by the NT four times (Luke 16:15; Revelation 7:4, 5; 21:27), and by the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) seventeen times, to translate the Hebrew *shiqqutz*.²⁶ The term *bdelugma* comes from a root with meanings "to make foul" and "to stink." Thus it has the basic idea of something makes one feel nauseous, and by transference, psychologically or morally abhorrent and detestable. As with the Hebrew meaning in Old Testament, the Greek term is applied particularly to idols or associated with idolatrous practices,²⁷ and in the Septuagint in the writing Prophets some usages are paralleled by the word "lawlessness" (Greek, *anomia*). This supports the allusion to the "abomination of desolation" in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 which describes the same figure by the phrase "man of lawlessness."²⁸ In this regard *bdelugma* appears as an expression of antithesis between the divine and human wills, as well as denoting the repugnance of the ungodly to the will of God²⁹ and is used in Luke 16:15 of the repugnance of God to human pride (i.e., to things highly esteemed by men, which is tantamount to idolatry).³⁰ The second member of our expression "desolation" (Greek, *eremoseos*) is the genitive feminine singular of a root which signifies "to lay waste, make desolate, bring to ruin" (see Matthew 12:25; Luke 11:17; Revelation 17:16; 18:17, 19). It is used most commonly in the Septuagint for *m^eshomem* or its cognates (cf. Leviticus 26:34, 35; Psalm 73:19; 2 Chronicles 30:7; 36:21; Jeremiah 4:7), generally of the condition of desolation of the Land as a result of desecration and exile. It is this sense that is most likely in the background of Daniel 9:27 in the Septuagint.

Preterism's Historical Interpretation of the Abomination of Desolation

Kenneth Gentry in a later book³¹ recognizes the technical distinction of the phrase "Abomination of Desolation" but continues to accept its fulfillment according to Luke's more general prediction of a "desolation" resulting from the Roman army surrounding Jerusalem (Lk. 21:20). However, such a general event does not meet the specific criteria for the full phrase, especially the requirement of an intrusion into the "Holy Place" (Matt. 24:15), "the place where it

result of idolatry, in keeping with the concept of *pasha'* as desecration, and allow *m^eremes* to carry the nuance of physical desolation.

²⁶Edwin Hatch and Henry A. Redpath, *A Concordance to the Septuagint*. 2 vols. (Graz: Akademische Druck V. Verlagsonstalt, 1954), 1:215.

²⁷Cf. *BAGD*, s.v. "bdevlugma," p. 134: (1) literally, anything that must not be brought before God because it arouses His wrath (cf. LXX Isaiah 1:13; Proverbs 11:1; Luke 16:15; Epistle of Barnabas 2:5), (2) as in the Old Testament of everything connected with idolatry (cf. LXX Deuteronomy 29:16; 21 Kings 11:6, 33; 1V Kings 23:13; 2 Chronicles 28:3; Revelation 17:4f), also cf., X. Léon-Dufour, *Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (1977), pp. 409-411.

²⁸W. Foerster, "bdevlugma," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 1 (1964): 598. His references for the "abominations" are: (LXX Jeremiah 13:27; 39:35; 51:22; Ezekiel 5:9, 11; 6:9, etc.), and for the parallel with "lawlessness": (LXX Jeremiah 4:1; Ezekiel 11:18; 20:30; Amos 6:8; Psalm 5:7; 13:1; 52:1; 118:163; Job 15:16).

²⁹See LXX Proverbs 29:27; Ecclesiasticus 1:25; 13:20.

³⁰J. Zmijewski, "bdevlugma," *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978-1980 1: 210).

³¹Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Perilous Times: A Study in Eschatological Evil* (Texarkana, AR: Covenant Media Press, 1999).

must not” (Mk. 13:14). For this reason Gentry must try to prove that “the Holy Place” is a “reference [that] is broader, speaking of both the city and the temple.”³² But, as already recognized by Gentry, the phrase is technical and therefore cannot be broadened to include the city, since its original usage in Daniel is limited to the Temple and does not mention the city’s or the Temple’s *destruction* but only a desecration that interrupts the ceremonial service. Any serious study of the term “Holy Place” in Scripture will yield the conclusion that it primarily refers to the most sanctified areas of the Temple which include the *Hekal* (“the Holy Place) and the *Devir* (“the Most Holy Place”). Furthermore, as Craig observes, “the masculine gender of the participle *ejstkovta*, “standing” (in contrast to the neuter *bdevlugma*, “abomination”), may suggest that the abomination is a statute or image of a pagan deity or deified man. Probably related to this tradition is the Pauline prediction in 2 Thess 2:3-4: ‘for that day will not come, unless ... the man of lawlessness is revealed ... so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.’”³³ Thus, the grammar itself further limits the interpretation of the “Abomination of Desolation” precluding its broader reference to the city. In addition, Preterists cannot associate Paul’s prophecy in 2 Thess. 2:3-4 with the prophecy of the “Abomination of Desolation” in the Olivet Discourse since Nero, whom they identify as the “man of lawlessness” and who was being “restrained” by Claudius, never set up anything in the Jerusalem Temple! Moreover, when 2 Thessalonians was written (AD 51), Nero was only 14 years old and was hardly being “restrained” by the emperor from getting his hands on the Jewish Temple! Further, Nero certainly never performed the supernatural “signs and wonders” of the beast of Revelation (Rev. 13:11-15) as Preterists contend, despite the Nero *redivivus* tradition recorded by his Roman historian Suetonius (*Nero* 6.57).

The Question of an Historical Reference to the Temple in Olivet Discourse

An objection voiced frequently by Preterists to the futurist’s interpretation of the “Abomination of Desolation” is that the Temple spoken of by Jesus in this context could have had no other reference for the disciples than the Second (Herodian) Temple of their day. After all, it was Jesus’ prediction of this Temple’s destruction that originally provoked the disciple’s questions. However, Futurists do not doubt that the disciples understood only the Second Temple when they heard Jesus’ words. This understanding was appropriate as Jesus indeed addressed their concern for the Second Temple, a fact which Luke records (Lk. 21:20-24). However, if Luke’s straightforward description of the AD 70 “desolation of Jerusalem” was in fact Jesus’ signal warning about the “Abomination of Desolation” and the tribulation events following it at “the end of the age,” why was it not linked to Daniel’s prophecy as in Matthew and Mark? How could Luke omit this crucial reference to Daniel’s prophecy which Jesus stated was essential to understanding its interpretation and identification? Likewise, how would Luke exclude from his statement of the “desolation” the mention of the “Great Tribulation” as the unsurpassed event that would conclude the age? Such an inclusion would have removed any doubt of an AD 70 fulfillment for the prophecy. Conversely, how could Matthew and Mark fail to include the language of Luke’s description of Jerusalem’s desolation, if they understood the events they described were one and the same? However, it was not necessary that the disciples immediately grasp the full eschatological scope of Jesus’ prophecy concerning the Temple. It was sufficient for them to understand that the prophecies would be fulfilled when a Jerusalem Temple was standing (now or

³² Ibid, p. 60.

³³ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*. WBC 34b, pp. 319-20.

in the future, whenever the respective fulfillment was to occur) as the Former and Latter Prophets had proclaimed. However, it is possible that perceptive disciples did recognize a distinction, since Daniel in the context of his prophecy of the “Abomination of Desolation” had promised “those with insight would understand” (Dan. 12:11), and the prophecies concerning Jerusalem and the Temple predicted that “in the Last Days” the Temple Mount would “be raised above all the other mountains” (Isa. 2:2-3) and that a “greater Temple” (than the Second Temple) would exist at the time of the end (Hag. 2:6-9). Jesus certainly directs them to this eschatological interpretation by linking the events of the Great Tribulation and the subsequent revelation of the Son of Man to the signal event of Daniel’s “Abomination of Desolation.” By doing so He guided them (or those that would later seek the interpretation) to interpret the event within the eschatological context of the end time (Dan. 12:4, 9, 13), and to use this understanding as a guide for their interpretation of the rest of the Olivet prophecy.

This also implies that Jesus did not intend His prophecy to be exclusive to a first-century “generation” but for generations after the destruction of AD 70, who would consider that event in light of Jesus instruction concerning wars” that must take place, but [that are] not yet the end” (Matt. 24:6; Mk. 13:7). Such interpreters would then expect the future fulfillment of the “Abomination of Desolation” within a future (rebuilt) Temple as “naturally” as the disciples may have expected a fulfillment within the Second Temple before AD 70. If one should further ask why Jesus did not simply say it was a future Temple, the answer would be for the same reason He did not explain any of the other eschatological references in His prophecy (such as famines, earthquakes, false christs, false prophets, lightning, darkened sun and moon, falling stars, etc.). Such an explanation was unnecessary since a first-century reference to these things was sufficient for comprehension of the prophecy itself (a phenomenon typical of accommodation in prophecy). In addition, the events that would come in AD 70 (like that which came in 167 BC) followed a template of divine discipline which could be employed for both a near and far fulfillment. From the time God predicted Jerusalem would be the site of the central sanctuary (Deut. 12:11-32) its role as the symbol of both divine judgment and restoration was assured. Once the Temple was built every violation of the national covenant that called for divine discipline would thereafter be carried out on the visible symbol of the God's relationship with Israel, the Temple, in the chosen city of the Divine Presence, Jerusalem. Jesus' prediction of the Second Temple's destruction followed the established pattern of judgment pronounced and executed on the First Temple. And as Josephus and the rabbis point out, the proof of this pattern was the destruction of the Second Temple was burnt on the Ninth of Av (August 10) AD 70, the exact same day and month on which the First Temple had been burnt by the king of Babylon (*Antiquities* 20.100.11 §8). Jesus own statements concerning ritual abuses in the Temple precincts, were based on those of the prophet Jeremiah who had made similar accusations in the same place announcing the Temple's destruction (Jer. 7:1-8:3). Therefore, Jesus' pronouncement on the Temple no more required a fulfillment of the end of the age than did that of Jeremiah, for the Temple stands as the focal point of national judgment in any age in which Israel exists within a covenantal structure. Given this pattern, each event of judgment serves as a preview of the end of the age and as a pledge that the final judgment will be effected in the eschatological program. Darrel Bock recognizes this as the understanding of Luke when he focused on the Jerusalem destruction in AD 70 as a picture of the end-time Tribulation:

The different emphases are most clearly indicated by what Luke lacks: he does not mention that the tribulation in this period is the most intense ever to fall on humans; he does not

mention that no human would have survived if the Lord had not cut short these days; he does not note that the time should not be in winter; and he does not discuss the "abomination of desolation," only "its desolation." Conversely, Luke alone mentions "the time of the Gentiles." What do these differences mean? They indicate that Luke emphasizes a different element in Jesus' teaching at this point. He focuses on the nearer fulfillment in the judgment pattern described here, the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, rather than the end (which will he will introduce in 21:25). The end is directly alluded to by the language of 21:23-24, which shows Luke's linkage and concern. It would seem that Luke sees in Jerusalem's collapse a preview, but with less intensity, of what the end will be like. So the instructions he offers here are like those that appear in the description of the end in 17:23, 31. He wants to make clear that when Jerusalem falls the first time, it is not yet the end. Nonetheless, the two falls are related and the presence of one pictures what the ultimate siege will be like. Both are eschatological events in God's plan, with the fall of Jerusalem being the down payment and guarantee of the end-time.³⁴

Even if we allow for Luke's language to have a dual role encompassing both the near historical and the far eschatological fulfillment, it must be recognized that the *differences* between the gospel accounts of Matthew/Mark and Luke can only be explained by their *distinct* presentations of AD 70 and end-time fulfillments. This must be observed also when Preterist attempt a comparison between the Olivet Discourse and Old Testament prophetic texts such as Zechariah 12-14 that describe an end-time attack on Jerusalem. For example, Zechariah's prophecy states that half of the population of Jerusalem remains in the city after the attack to await the Lord's rescue (Zech. 14:2), whereas Josephus plainly states that Titus completely destroyed the city (except for the towers) and that the Jews were all killed or deported from the city (*Wars* 7.1.1). For additional discrepancies between Zechariah 12-14 and the Olivet Discourse see my chart³⁵ and for further problems between the historical account of AD 70 and the prophecy of Zechariah 12-14 see Arnold Fruchtenbaum's chapter in this book.

Problems with Preterism's Historical Reference for the Abomination of Desolation

An additional problem for Gentry's interpretation is that he identifies the "abomination" of the Roman army's presence in the holy city as the "desolation." However, does Jesus mean that the "abomination" *is* the "desolation" or a *part* of the desolation, or that the "abomination" *causes* the "desolation?" The word "abomination" in Jesus' usage is singular (Greek *bdelugma*), and follows Daniel's two singular Hebrew uses of *shiqqutz* ("abomination") in association with *meshomem* ("desolation") in Daniel 11:31 and 12:11, both of which have the "abomination" *causing* the "desolation." In Daniel 9:27 the plural (*shiqqutzim*) is used, however, this is cryptic grammatical construction and has been explained by Daniel's desire to pattern the association of the terms "abominations" (*shiqqutzim*) and "desolation" (*shomem*) in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, well-known texts that decry covenantal violations such as Jeremiah 44:22 and Ezekiel 33:29 which state that

³⁴ Darrel L. Bock, *Luke (Volume 2: 9:51-24:53)*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), p. 1,675.

³⁵ H. Wayne House and Randall Price, *Charts on Bible Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), p.

“abominations” (plural) by the Jewish Nation will *cause* “desolation” to the land of Israel³⁶ If this is so, then Daniel may be attempting to load a theological summation of desecration into this expression, to convey in a single thought the entire corpus of prophetic doctrine touching on any future events earmarked by this phrase. This may be helpful in explaining why Jesus in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14a) used this expression to denote the signal event which would serve as warning of the arrival of apocalyptic fulfillment (Matthew 24:16-31; Mark 13:14b-27). One significance of this for the interpretation of the Olivet Discourse is that Daniel’s prophecy must be interpreted within the context of his contemporaries, who envisioned fulfillment in eschatological terms (see Jer. 31:27-37; Ezek. 37:23-28).³⁷ At any rate, Daniel 9:27 can be added as a further example.

The application of this understanding in the immediate discussion is that the Lord makes the land desolate because of the abominations of His covenant people. For a foreigner to be able to cause the Land to be desolated a majority of the people of the Land would have to support the desolator in some way. In the futurist’s interpretation the false covenant between the Jewish leaders (who represent the people) and the “prince that shall come” (the Antichrist), Daniel 9:27, that allows for the introduction of the “abomination that makes desolate” satisfies this criteria. However, in the Preterist’s interpretation of AD 70, the Jewish Nation did not support Titus, but fought against him to their deaths. Therefore, the Preterist’s interpretation of the “abomination” as a “desolating” event (the Roman invasion) does not meet the criteria of causation nor fit with the covenantal violation texts which require complicity with the desecrator for fulfillment.

Historical Problems with Preterism’s Interpretation of the Warning to Flee

Preterists also attempt to find a first-century fulfillment in the flight of those who correctly identified and heeded the sign of the “Abomination of Desolation”(Matt. 24:16-20; Mk. 13:14-18), in agreement with Luke 21:21, in the event of the Jewish-Christian flight to Pella (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.5.2-3; Epiphanius, *De mensuris et ponderibus* 15). In the first place the historicity of the Pella tradition is questioned by many ancient and modern scholars, significantly compromising its authority as a source for comparison with Scripture. However, even if we accept its historicity, fatal problems present themselves for any attempt at correlation. According to the fourth-century Church historian Eusebius Christians fled to Pella in AD 61-62, many years before the beginning of the Jewish Revolt in AD 66, and many more years before the “Abomination of Desolation” (according to the Preterist’s interpretation) occurred with the Roman army surrounding Jerusalem or entering the Temple precincts in AD 70. To this problem should be added the fact that the Romans controlled the Judean countryside (to which Jerusalem belongs) as well as its immediate environs for some time prior to their siege of the city, which would have made it practically impossible for either Jerusalemites or those in fields outside the city, to make an escape. Neither Jesus could have meant that a flight should take place once the siege began, for any escaping at this time would have run into the hands of the enemy! Moreover, as many

³⁶ For my arguments for this as well as alternative explanations see my *The Desecration and Restoration of the Temple as an Eschatological Motif in the Tanach, Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and the New Testament*, pp.

³⁷ Jacques Doukhan points this out when he states: “The seventy weeks’ prophecy must be interpreted with regard to history in as realistic a way as Daniel did for the prophecy of Jeremiah.”

Jacques Doukhan, “The Seventy Weeks of Dan. 9: An Exegetical Study,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 17 (Spring, 1979): 8.

commentators have observed, the biblical command to “flee to the *mountains*” (Matt. 24:16; Mk. 13:14; cf. Lk. 21:21) hardly agrees with the geographical setting of Pella in the low-lying foothills of the Transjordan valley on the other side of the River Jordan. Since Jerusalem is called “the Holy Mountain” (Psa. 48:1; cf. 87:1-2), “Mount Zion” (Psa. 74:2; 78:68-69), and is situated and surrounded by “mountains” (Psa. 125:1-2; cf. 48:2) “fleeing to the mountains” could not be interpreted as descending to a lower elevation and it is far more reasonable that “the mountains” of Jesus reference would be those that immediately surrounded the city (i.e., the Judean hills, cf. Ezek. 7:15-16), since Jesus’ command was not to flee *from* Judea but *within* it.

In like manner, Jesus’ unrestricted warning “to all who are in Judea” to quickly escape once the sign of the “Abomination of Desolation” was “observed,” extended even to the extreme of leaving behind possessions in order to flee in haste (Matt. 24:17-18; Mk. 13:15-17). The urgency of an immediate departure and of the threat of danger if delayed, does not accord with the prolonged condition of the war, especially before the siege (three years), which would have offered a prolonged opportunity to make a well-prepared escape. The same objection applies to the admonition to pray that the “flight might not be in winter or on a Sabbath” (Matt. 24:20; cf. Mk. 13:18). In the winter (especially in Jerusalem where temperatures are 10% colder than the rest of the country) stormy weather comes with torrential rains that make crossing wadis in the Judean hills treacherous, but this warning seems superfluous (or ill-informed) if the spring to summer siege and assault on the city and Temple in AD 70 was intended. Why would Jesus say they should pray for something He knew would not happen? In the case of the admonition concerning travel on the Sabbath, where rabbinic law prohibited going more than “a Sabbath days journey” (i.e. beyond the immediate vicinity of the city), why would this matter given the lengthy opportunity for escape in the prolonged war with Rome? Again, Jesus is predicting very different conditions than those that existed during the conflict that culminated in AD 70. More problematic still to the Preterist’s interpretation is Jesus’ statement that “unless those days had been shortened, no life would have been saved ...” (Matt. 24:22; Mk. 13:20). From the Preterist’s position the purpose of “those days” was to effect a final judgment on the Jewish people in fulfillment of Christ’s judgment-coming. Why, then, should any life be saved? The satisfaction of divine justice should require a complete accounting (although thousands of Jews did, in fact, survive the war). If the reason is to spare “the elect,” one must wonder who are these “elect?” Preterists would not identify them with Jews for the reason just stated, but if these are identified as “Christians” why had they not believed Jesus’ prophecy and fled to Pella with the rest of their brethren? Moreover, the language here cannot be restricted to a local population, but extends to the whole of the human race as the Greek *oujk avn ejswvfh pasa savrx* (“*all flesh* would not be saved”) reveals. Only an end-time conflict of global proportions could adequately satisfy the language of this unprecedented warning (in keeping with the nature of the Great Tribulation in the previous verse). Preterism can only explain this verse by hyperbole or minimizing the application of the term *savrx* (“flesh”). The same problem applies to the Preterist’s interpretation of the eschatological language of the climax of the Olivet Discourse with its cosmic catastrophes and supernatural signs.

Preterist’s Inconsistency in Eschatological Interpretation

As we approach the climax of the Olivet Discourse it is evident that Jesus’ eschatological (not apocalyptic) warning is of a judgment preceding His glorious advent and the establishment of His kingdom. This order is inescapable in light of Matthew 25:31: “But when the Son of Man

comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He shall sit on His glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before Him ...” Based on this verse, Christ’s kingdom will replace earthly governments. It follows, then, that judgment should be expected upon those nations that oppose its inauguration. This is what the verse confirms in its judgment of nations by Christ and indeed the reason Jesus messianic claim were a political threat to the Roman authorities (see Jn. 11:48; 18:36; 19:12, 15). Therefore, the judgment of God should have equally fallen on the Roman empire for its first-century opposition to Christ and not only on the first-century Jewish nation, as Preterists inconsistently argue. If it is contended that Rome was also finally judged, then the argument for a first-century fulfillment again breaks down, for why should God’s judgment fall on the Jews in the first century “at Christ’s Parousia,” but wait many centuries to fall on the Romans after “Christ’s kingdom has come” and especially long after that empire had adopted Christianity as its official religion?

Another inconsistency may be seen in the Preterists use the prophecy of the Seventy Weeks in Daniel 9:24-27 to support a first-century fulfillment for the Olivet Discourse and the Book of Revelation. Most Christian commentators would agree that the prediction of a coming Messiah (verse 25) that is “cut off” and of a city and sanctuary (Jerusalem and the Temple) that are destroyed (verse 26) were fulfilled with the death of Jesus and the Roman conquest forty years later, which Preterists see as the time of the “judgment-coming” of Christ. The problem in using Daniel 9 as a first-century fulfillment of this event is that it predicts the Temple will be destroyed *after* the Messiah has come, while in the Olivet Discourse and Revelation the Temple is “desolated” *before* the coming of the Messiah. Although Luke 21:20 accords with Daniel’s chronology at this point, as it has been pointed out, this verse is part of Jesus’ answer as to “when these things shall be” (i.e., the destruction of the Temple) and not part of His answer concerning His Second Coming.

Finally, there is remarkable inconsistency among Preterists when they interpret prophetic texts which speak of national Israel and the Temple. When they reference texts which speak of Israel or the Temple’s “desolation” they interpret them literally, that is, as having a historical fulfillment without replacement of the object, but when they deal with texts that speak of Israel or the Temple’s restoration, these are interpreted figuratively and applied by replacement to the Church. However, since the disciples asked pointed questions and Jesus answered them directly, can we doubt that if the disciples had not clearly understood any aspect of Jesus’ explanation in the Olivet Discourse that they would not have simply asked additional questions and received clarification? How is it then that these disciples still believed Jesus was “the Restorer of Israel” at the time of His ascension (Acts 1:6)? It is true that the disciples did not understand the prophecies concerning Jesus’ death and resurrection before these events occurred (Jn. 20:9), but this statement is post-resurrection and after the disciples had received an enablement from the Holy Spirit (Jn. 20:22). Moreover, after receiving the permanent and promised bestowal of the Spirit at Pentecost, Who would “teach you all things” (Jn. 14:26), Peter declared in Acts 3:18-21 concerning the coming of “the Christ appointed for you” (national Israel, not individual Jews) that His coming was predicated upon collective (national) Jewish repentance. This indeed appears as an enlightened comprehension of the Old Testament prophecies (as stated), but may also reflect the apostolic understanding of Jesus’ Olivet Discourse. At any rate, it repeats the conviction that Jesus’ is promised as Israel’s “Restorer.” Therefore, if Peter had understood a Preteristic interpretation of the Olivet Discourse, his declaration to that generation of Jews who were destined for final judgment in AD 70 would have been deceptive. Rather, these apostles, as the apostle Paul,

understood that repentance was a part of the divine plan and would be effected after “the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (Rom. 11:25-27), a text which also seems to understand Luke’s statement concerning the duration of Jerusalem’s desolation “until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (Lk. 21:24), and the promise of rescue from God’s wrath to redemption at Christ’s revelation (Lk. 21:28). The phrase “until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” in Matthew and Luke, when associated with the fall of the city of Jerusalem, at least implies that the fall is of limited duration. And as Bock notes, a contrast between Israel and the Gentile nations here is also implicit.³⁸ How, then, can Preterism adopt the interpretation that Christ came in AD 70 through the Gentile Roman army in a final (and irreversible) judgment against the Jewish nation when in this explicit context Jesus himself consoles the persecuted Jewish remnant with the words “but when these things begin to take place [to] straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near”? According to Preterism this verse should read, “but when these things begin to take place, bend low and bow your heads [in shame and sorrow]. because your destruction is drawing near.”

In like manner, since the geographical context for the Olivet Discourse was Jerusalem, Jerusalem would logically be the geographical referent for its predictions. This, of course is implied by reference to the Temple in Matthew and Mark or explicit stated as in Luke 21:20-24. Preterists, therefore, make much of Jerusalem as the object of the Roman wrath, since they can use this to parade an historical fulfillment of prophetic judgment texts. However, they are again inconsistent with statements of prophetic restoration in the *same* geographical context. For example, Jews are told to flee from Judea (Matt. 24:15-16), but then promised that God will gather them from one end of heaven to the other (vs. 31). If their exile was from the Land of Israel, and particularly Judea, where else would their return (i.e., their regathering) be than to that same place? When “the Son of Man comes [to Jerusalem] in power and great glory” (Lk. 21:27), those who are to “lift up their heads, because [their] redemption is drawing near” (vs. 28) must also be in the city. In like manner, Jesus cries out “Jerusalem, Jerusalem” with reference to those Jews whose “house is being left desolate” (Matt. 23:37-38), and then adds that they “will not see [Him] until [they] say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord’” (vs. 39). How else can we understand the place where these future repentant Jews will see Him as the “Blessed One” but the city of Jerusalem? And again, when the disciples on the Mt. of Olives ask the Risen Christ concerning the timing of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, the place assumed (and never corrected) for this restoration is Jerusalem. If the apostolic attitude toward a recalcitrant national Israel *before* AD 70 was not one of rejection without restoration, the theological position of the Christian community (of which they were the foundation) *after* the destruction of Jerusalem should not have been fundamentally different (see Rom. 11:28-29). Whether or not it consistently adopted the attitude of the apostles, there is no trace in the early history of the Church to support any interpretation of eschatological fulfillment in the first century as today taught by Preterism.

Conclusion

³⁸Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53, ECNT 3B* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), pp. 1680-81. This interpretation is also supported by D. L. Tiede, *Prophecy and History in Luke-Acts* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), pp. 87-96; Craig A. Evans, *Luke, NIBC 3* (Peabody, MA: Hendricksen, 1990), pp. 313-14, and John A. Jelink, “The Dispersion and Restoration of Israel to the Land,” *Israel the Land and the People*. Ed. H. Wayne House (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), p. 243.

We can only agree with the conclusion of Gundry concerning the Preterist's interpretation of a first-century fulfillment: "Whether writing just before, or right after 70 C.E., Mark [or any of the other gospel writers] is not liable to have suffered from very much ignorance of what went on. From beginning to end, then, the events and circumstances of the Jewish war disagree with the text of Mark [and also Matthew and in part, Luke] too widely to allow that text to reflect those events and circumstances."³⁹ If, then, the historical correlation with an AD 70 fulfillment for the Olivet Discourse fails, and Preterism depends on such a fulfillment for the maintenance of its eschatological system, Preterism itself fails as a viable eschatological interpretation.

³⁹ Gundry, *Mark*, p. 755.