

Transition in Matthew 24 from A.D. 70 to the Final Coming of Christ¹

Introduction

Thesis Statement

Is there evidence of a transition in Matthew 24 from events describing the fall of Jerusalem in the first century to a description of Christ's *parousia* or final coming at the end of the age? This paper will argue that there is evidence for a transition in the response of Jesus to the questions of his disciples, specifically at verse 36. While certainly not dealing with all the issues or difficulties of Matthew 24, this paper will look at the issues surrounding the question of a transition and provide arguments, primarily from Matthew 24, that such a transition is exegetically reasonable.

General Introduction to the Problem

To say that there is not general agreement among Christians concerning Matthew 24 would be a major understatement. This is not merely a modern problem either. Luz notes five main interpretations of Matthew 24 that have developed over the years and remain today, sometimes in modified form. These five interpretations of Matthew 24 are the eschatological, historical, mixed, church or world history, and spiritual.² Wilkins notes that probably the most common interpretation among evangelical Christians is an interpretation that finds a mixing of historical and eschatological fulfillment. Separating the two may not always be possible and there is disagreement on exactly how the discourse can be so divided.³ Some have taken the position that the entire discourse was fulfilled in the events

¹ P. Calvin Lindstrom, Spring 2008.

² Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28: A Commentary (Hermeneia: a Critical and Historical Commentary)* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2005), 185-189.

³ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew: From Biblical Text to Contemporary Life (NIV Application Commentary Series)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 790.

of Jerusalem's destruction by Titus and the Romans in A.D. 70. Scholars such as N.T. Wright have argued for such an interpretation.⁴ Wright states:

We must, however, stress again: as far as the disciples, good first-century Jews as they were, were concerned, there was no reason whatever for them to be thinking about the end of the space-time universe. There was no reason, either in their own background or in a single thing that Jesus had said to them up to that point, for it even to occur to them that the true story of the world, or of Israel, or of Jesus himself, might include either the end of the space-time universe, or Jesus or anyone else floating down to earth on a cloud.⁵

Others have argued an even more radical position, believing not only that Matthew 24-25 was fulfilled in A.D. 70 but also that the resurrection, judgment, and 2nd coming were completely fulfilled. Such an extreme position has been called hyper-preterism or pantelism by its critics.⁶

Modern postmillennial interpretation, the theological background of this author, has varied on its view of Matthew 24. Some such as Gary DeMar also believe that Matthew 24-25 was fulfilled entirely in A.D. 70. without holding to a hyper-preterist position.⁷ Others such as Kenneth Gentry⁸ believe that there is a transition in Matthew 24 from events fulfilled in A.D. 70 to events that will be fulfilled in the future at the return of Christ. This is not exclusively a postmillennialist interpretation, but it has been one of the challenges for modern postmillennial thought, influenced and shaped by preterism as opposed to a more historical postmillennial position.

⁴ Nicholas Thomas Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 341-346.

⁵ Wright, 345. See also John Bray, *Matthew 24 Fulfilled*, 2nd Edition (Lakeland, FL: John L. Bray Ministry, Inc., 1998). Bray argues that all of Matthew 24 has been fulfilled. Later in life Bray came to accept that all prophetic events were fulfilled in A.D. 70, a position known as hyper-preterism or pantelism.

⁶ C. Jonathin Seraiah, *The End of All Things* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1999) and Keith A. Mathison, *When Shall These Things Be* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2004).

⁷ Noted by Stanley Toussaint in "A Critique of the Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 2004: 469-490.

⁸ Kenneth L Gentry, *The Transition Text in Matthew 24: An Answer to Full Preterism*, 2000, www.preteristarchive.com/Modern/2000_gentry_transitional-verses.html (accessed March 3, 2008).

The Evidence for a Transition

Arguing for a transition in Matthew 24 is a challenge. David Chilton and Gary DeMar both end their discussion of Matthew 24 before verse 36.⁹ Kenneth Gentry, Jeffrey Gibbs,¹⁰ and R. T. France¹¹ have presented similar arguments for a transition at verse 36. A summary of their arguments for understanding a transition at verse 36 are as follows:

1. The use of *peri de* at the start of verse 36. This argument will be noted in greater detail later in this paper.
2. "That day and hour" – here is the first singular 'day' or 'hour' in contrast to 'those days' found in vv. 19, 22, 29. Day – 24:42; hour – 24:44, and both 'day' and 'hour' in 24:50; 25:13.
3. Vv. 4-35 have spoken of an event that can be predicted. Signs have been given. From this point on, Jesus starts to speak of an event that cannot be predicted. It will come without warning. Jesus' confession that he does not know that 'day and hour' shows that the subject has changed.
4. Vv. 4-35 have used the participle *erchomenos* found also in the vision of Dan. 7:13-14. *Parousia* was used in this section (v. 27) but only in contrast. Now in the following verses *parousia* is used in vv. 37 and 39. "Since this was the term used in the second part of the disciples' question, it is clear that the second issue is now being addressed."
5. In vv. 4-35 there are repeated uses of the temporal connections – 'then,' 'in those days,' 'immediately after,' 'it is near.' No temporal connection is used at the beginning of this new section starting in verse 36.
6. There are a number of references to the long time before the *parousia* takes place – 24:48; 25:5, 19. However, there is also the warning of imminence.¹²
7. Verse 34 appears as a concluding statement dealing with events that would happen in the first century. If all of the chapter were to be fulfilled in A.D. 70, it would make more sense for this concluding statement to be placed at the end of the discourse.
8. There is a contrast in the descriptions of life before and after verse 36. The first part of the chapter is noted by chaotic and difficult conditions – wars, famines, earthquakes, persecution, etc. After verse 36, Jesus presents a more tranquil scene, with men and women carrying out life in a normal fashion.

⁹ For example note David Chilton, *Paradise Restored* (Tyler, TX: Dominion Press, 1994) and Gary DeMar, *End Times Fiction* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001).

¹⁰ Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2000).

¹¹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007).

¹² These first six arguments come from R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 936-938.

This is the difference between the events leading to the judgment in A.D. 70 and the unexpected coming of Christ at the end of history.¹³

9. The warning in the first half of the discourse is to not be deceived. After verse 36, the emphasis is on readiness. “No one is deceived about the Parousia when it happens, just as no one could mistake the flood or thief breaking in or the return of a master who both rewards and punishes. The danger is that some might not be ready.”¹⁴

10. There are imperatives in 24:4-35, but this section cannot be described as being paraenetic. However, 24:36-25:46 is much more strongly paraenetic.

11. A transition is also noted by vocabulary used before verse 36 and following verse 36.

a) Words that appear in the first part of the discourse do not appear in the 2nd half: *πλανάω, όταν ἴδητε, πάντα ταῦτα, ἐκεῖναι αἱ ἡμέραι, αἱ ἡμέραι ἐκεῖναι*. None of these phrases appears in 24:36-25:46.

b) In the second half, there is the repeated use of ‘lord’ which is not found in the first half. The singular nouns *ἡμέρα, ὥρα, γρηγορέω*, are found only in the second half.

12. Understanding verse 36 as a transition verse provides a better way of understanding how Jesus could speak with assurance of the destruction of Jerusalem and yet not have knowledge of his final return.¹⁵

The listing of these points of evidence seems on one hand very impressive, though it should be noted that the case is not decided merely on the basis of compiling supporting evidence. The arguments rather suggest that this is a topic worth further investigation.

Matthew 24:36 reads, “But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.” My own investigation of whether this verse serves as a transition will focus on four different areas. This investigation is not exhaustive, but these four different areas are essential to the idea of whether verse 36 can serve as a transition.

1. The questions the disciples ask in Matthew 24:3 in comparison with Mark 13:4 and Luke 21:7.

¹³ Points 7-8 taken from Gentry, *The Transition Text in Matthew 24: An Answer to Full Preterism*.

2. The use of *peri de* as a marking a transition.
3. The use of *parousia* in Matthew 24.
4. A comparison of Matthew 24 with Luke 17.

1. The Disciples' Questions

A chart will be helpful in showing the questions asked by the disciples as presented by Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Matthew	Mark	Luke
Matt. 24:3 As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?" (ESV)	Mark 13:4 "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?" (ESV)	Luke 21:7 And they asked him, "Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?" (ESV)
Καθημένου δὲ αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τοῦ ὄρους τῶν ἐλαιῶν προσήλθον αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ κατ' ἰδίαν λέγοντες· εἶπε ἡμῖν, πότε ταῦτα ἔσται καὶ τί τὸ σημεῖον τῆς σῆς παρουσίας καὶ ¹⁶ συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος;	εἶπὸν ἡμῖν, πότε ταῦτα ἔσται καὶ τί τὸ σημεῖον ὅταν μέλλῃ ταῦτα συντελεῖσθαι πάντα;	Ἐπηρώτησαν δὲ αὐτὸν λέγοντες· διδάσκαλε, πότε οὖν ταῦτα ἔσται καὶ τί τὸ σημεῖον ὅταν μέλλῃ ταῦτα γίνεσθαι;

All three of the gospel writers present the disciples asking two questions. However, there are at least two important differences in Matthew's presentation. First, in Mark and Luke the questions are parallel. Note the use of ταῦτα in both parts of the question.¹⁷ This is not the case in Matthew, rather the questions, which certainly may be related, are expressed to bring out two different things. Second, Matthew's second question has two related parts

¹⁴ Gibbs, 171.

¹⁵ Points 9-12 taken from Gibbs, 171-172 and 207-208.

¹⁶ D W 0102 f¹³ m̄ add της – The NA²⁷ reading is supported by ⳑ B C L Θ f1 33. 565. 892. ℓ 2211 pc. Interesting that a Byzantine lectionary reads differently than the Majority Text.

¹⁷ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 506. France notes that the two questions are not two different subjects but a "double angle to the disciples' concern over Jesus' words about the temple."

not found in Mark and Luke – your *parousia* (coming) and the end of the age.¹⁸ It is likely the case that the disciples, when they asked the question, thought that the *parousia* and the end of the age were to be directly associated with the first part of the question, the predicted destruction of Jerusalem mentioned in verse 2.^{19 20}

It could be and has been argued that Matthew's second question should be read as essentially the same question as found in Mark and Luke, but clearly it is significant that Matthew has introduced not only a different second question but also one that includes new vocabulary. Both Wright and Bray argue that, since the disciples likely linked the destruction of Jerusalem with the *parousia* and the end of the age, we as readers and interpreters we should also. But Gibbs, I believe, correctly argues that the disciples do not have a good track record for understanding the ministry of Jesus and the things that He teaches to them. One only needs to turn back to Matthew 17:9-13 or 20:20-23 to see examples of this. The reader should not align himself with the disciples but with Jesus and the narrator.²¹ Since there are two questions that Matthew raises, noted by two interrogatives (*πότε* & *τί*), the reader has good reason to expect Jesus to give a twofold answer. This suggests that Matthew 24 can be understood as dealing with both questions, and that a transition in the chapter is to be expected.²²

All commentators have certainly not accepted this argumentation. Luz notes four different interpretations of the relationship of the questions the disciples asked Jesus.²³ So certainly the questions Matthew presents in verse 3 is not sufficient reason alone to believe

¹⁸ We should not see three questions here, because the second question has only one article. This is an example of Granville Sharp's rule.

¹⁹ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28 (Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 33B)*, Electronic Edition by Oak Tree Software (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 688. John Bray also agrees with this. Bray, 16.

²⁰ Matthew 24:2 - But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."

²¹ Gibbs, 178-179.

²² Luz also believes that Jesus is dealing with both the historical judgment on Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and the final return of Jesus. Though he states that Jesus in a sense rejects both questions. Luz, 190-191.

²³ Luz, 191.

that there is a transition in Jesus' answer much less that verse 36 is the transition verse. However this is a good place to begin. Further arguments will have to follow.

2. The Use of *peri de* as Marking a Transition

Before looking at this second point, it is helpful to briefly examine the immediate context of verse 36.

³³ So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁴ Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. ³⁵ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. ³⁶ "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. ³⁷ For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Verses 34 and 35 are very strong statements of Jesus. Without getting into the exact meaning of *this generation* (ἡ γενεὰ αὐτή),²⁴ it is clear that Jesus is making a summary statement concerning what he has just stated and is confirming it with oath-like language. The authority of Jesus to make such a statement should also not be missed. It is also evident that verse 36 is either returning back to the previous discussion or that Jesus is moving to a new topic. Verse 37 then should either be linked back with what Jesus has said previously concerning the destruction of Jerusalem or taken to be discussion on a new but related subject. Part of the way that this can be determined is by looking at the different occurrences of *peri de* in the New Testament and similar literature.

Peri de is used with the genitive 14 times in the NT.²⁵ Some of the occurrences are parallel with others so that leaves 12 different examples of its usage in the NT. The following chart lists the uses and the nature of the transition.

	Passage	Use of <i>peri de</i> .
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²⁴ Niel D. Nelson Jr., "'This Generation' In Matthew 24:34: A Literary Critical Perspective," *JETS* 38, no. 3 (1996): 369-385. Nelson argues that 'This generation' is not a term of chronology but a term of identification. It refers to wicked people who witness the events leading to the end, not to the final generation of people in general. 'This generation' represents an evil class of people who will oppose Jesus' disciples until the day he returns. Other commentators feel that Jesus is definitely speaking about the generation he was speaking to.

²⁵ Determined using Accordance Bible Software.

1	Matthew 22:31 (Mark 12:26 is a parallel passage).	After an initial rebuke to the question of the Saducees concerning the resurrection, <i>peri de</i> notes that Jesus is returning to the main subject and issue. ²⁶
2	Matthew 24:36 (Mark 13:32 is a parallel passage). ²⁷	This is the main passage under discussion.
3	John 16:11	In this passage, Jesus is speaking of the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will bring conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment. <i>Peri de</i> stands at the beginning of verse 11 marking the Jesus' comments on the issue of judgment. The use of <i>peri de</i> here is not so much transition as part of a listing of points.
4	Acts 21:25	In verse 19, we have Paul's testimony about God's work among the Gentiles. In verse 21, the issue is discussed concerning an exaggeration of Paul's message to Jews, that they should turn away from the law. Instructions were then given. Then in verse 25, the subject turns back to the Gentiles marked by the use of <i>peri de</i> .
5	1 Cor. 7:1	<i>Peri de</i> is used at the beginning of 7:1 to mark a new topic for discussion. The basic context is still the same, sexual issues that were discussed in chapter 6, but here Paul is referring back to a letter that the Corinthians had written to Paul. This Gibbs says is the most dramatic example of reaching back. ²⁸
6	1 Cor. 7:25	<i>Peri de</i> is used at the beginning of the verse to mark a shift in subject. Paul has dealt with the theme of marriage and singleness earlier in the chapter. In verses 17-24, he dealt more generally with the idea of calling, applicable to a variety of circumstances. Then in verse 25, Paul deals specifically with the case of the unmarried or betrothed (παρθένων). ²⁹
7	1 Cor. 8:1	<i>Peri de</i> marks a major shift in Paul's letter, dealing now with the subject of food offered to idols.
8	1 Cor. 12:1	In chapter 11, Paul has dealt with the subject of the Lord's Supper. <i>Peri de</i> used at the start of chapter 12 marks a shift now to the subject of spiritual gifts. There is a relationship certainly between the two chapters, but <i>peri de</i> is used again to note a change in subject.
9	1 Cor. 16:1	Here <i>peri de</i> again marks a fairly significant change in subject. Chapter 15 is the glorious chapter concerning the resurrection. It ends with powerful words of encouragement. At the start of chapter 16, Paul shifts to the subject of the collection for needy believers in Jerusalem. No doubt this collection is related to Paul's words of encouragement at the end of chapter 15, but

²⁶ Gibbs, 173. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 840. Hagner, 641.

²⁷ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 541-542, believes that the use of *peri de* in Mark 13:32 also signals a shift in Jesus' answer. Mark does not use the word *parousia*, but he is referring to the same thing.

²⁸ Gibbs, 173.

²⁹ The NET Bible notes three different interpretations of the meaning of the word here.

		chapter 16 does introduce a new subject.
10	1 Cor. 16:12	In this section of the chapter Paul has already been discussing his visit to the Corinthians (5-9). He then discusses Timothy's visit (10-11). Finally, <i>peri de</i> marks the brief discussion of Apollos and his visit (Apollos is mentioned earlier in 1:12; 3:4; 4:6). ³⁰
11	1 Thess. 4:9	1 Thess. 4:1-5:24 comprise Paul's exhortation to the Thessalonians. ³¹ Verses 1-12 are the first part of this exhortation. <i>Peri de</i> used at the beginning of verse 9, denotes a change in subject to that of brotherly love. Bruce states that it is unlikely that this suggests that Paul has received a letter from the Thessalonians on the subject. ³²
12	1 Thess. 5:1	In 4:13-18, Paul has dealt with the <i>parousia</i> , the coming of the Lord. <i>Peri de</i> used at the start of 5:1 notes a change to a related subject, now dealing with the day of the Lord. Mathison argues here that Paul is speaking of two temporally separate events in 1 Thess. 4 and 5. ³³ Gibbs also notes the similarity of this passage to Matthew 24:36. "In 1 Thess. 5:1, the effect of 'but concerning' is to reach back and bring into focus a question that has been heretofore present only in the background." ³⁴

In summary, in 10 of the 11 passages, *peri de* + genitive marks a transition to a new but often related topic. Its usage in John 16:11 is not comparable to its usage in Matthew 24:36. *Peri de* + genitive is also found 4 times in the *Didache*. In three of its uses, it also denotes the transition to a new topic, two of the transitions being quite strong. In one case it is used in part of the discussion in one subject.³⁵

The examples found in the NT and the *Didache* do support the idea that the use of *peri de* in Matthew 24:36 is evidence of a transition from a discussion of events surrounding

³⁰ D. A. Carson, et. al., ed. *New Bible Dictionary*, Electronic Edition by Oak Tree Software Version 1.0 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 1185.

³¹ F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians (Word Biblical Commentary vol. 45)*, Electronic Edition by OakTree Software (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982), 77.

³² Bruce, 89.

³³ Keith A. Mathison, *Postmillennialism An Eschatology of Hope* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1999), 225.

³⁴ Gibbs, 173.

³⁵ Stronger Transitions: 7:1; 9:1; 11:3. The other passage where the transition is not as strong is 6:3. *The Didache, or Teaching of the Apostles*,

http://www.orthodox.cn/patristics/apostolicfathers/didache_en.htm (accessed April 1, 2008).

Wieland Willker, *Didache - Greek*, <http://www-user.uni-bremen.de/~wie/texteapo/didache-greek.html> (accessed April 1, 2008).

A.D. 70 to the *parousia* at the end of time. This argument would be stronger if there were more cases in the Matthew or the gospels. 1 Thessalonians 5:1 as noted above may be evidence of a similar transition in the writings of Paul, though in the reverse of Matthew 24 (from *parousia* to perhaps A.D. 70). I don't believe that this argument alone is proof of a transition, but I believe it does fit with the other evidences that verse 36 is an important transition. Certainly not all have been convinced by such an argument. Bray rails against any idea of a transition at verse 36, but he does not really deal with the grammatical issues involved.³⁶ The evidence that we do have suggests that *peri de* most often does mark an important transition or a reaching back to an earlier topic, in this case to the second the disciples asked in verse 3.

Along with this more grammatical argument, I believe that verse 34 strengthens verse 36 as being the hinge verse of the chapter. "Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place." While there is not agreement on the meaning of 'this generation' (γενεὰ αὕτη), if one understands it as referring to the current generation that Jesus was addressing, then it does it make sense that following this Jesus would move to a discussion of things that would not take place within one generation.³⁷

3. The Use of *Parousia* in Matthew 24

Another challenge in interpreting Matthew 24 and especially in believing in a transition in the chapter 24 is dealing with the usage and meaning of the word *parousia* (παρουσία). N. T. Wright, though he deals with Mark 13, dismisses the idea that *parousia* in the gospels can be understood as a technical term for the second coming of Christ. He writes:

³⁶ Bray, 256-259.

³⁷ Nelson's article mentioned earlier presents a strong argument for understanding 'this generation' not in terms of chronology but as a negative description of those who will reject Jesus' disciples until the day he returns. Nelson's argument though is in part based on his view that the current generation did not witness the events of verses 15-28. I agree that they did not witness verses 27-28, but I think that generation did see the events described in v. 15-22.

“*Parousia* means ‘presence’ as opposed to *apousia*, ‘absence’; hence it denotes the ‘arrival’ of someone not at the moment present; and it is especially used in relation to the visit ‘of a royal or official personage’. Until evidence for a different meaning is produced, this should be our starting-point.”³⁸

If Wright is correct in his understanding, then it would be very difficult to see that there is any transition nor any aspect of a future fulfillment of Matthew 24. The entire chapter would have to be understood as speaking of events fulfilled in the first century.³⁹ And indeed, as has been noted earlier, many have taken this position in understanding all prophecy to be fulfilled in A.D. 70.

The positions argued by Wright and others run contrary to the majority position in evangelical scholarship.⁴⁰ Hagner dealing with the subject of *parousia* writes:

In the discourse Jesus will three times refer to ἡ παρουσία τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, “the coming of the Son of Man” (vv 27, 37, 39; the word “coming” does not occur in the other Gospels). “Parousia” now refers not to the visit or presence of an earthly king, as in the Hellenistic world, but is used technically to refer to the return of Jesus.⁴¹

BDAG also recognizes that *parousia* can be understood as referring to the final return or coming of Jesus Christ, noting that it can be used in a special technical sense for the coming of Christ in glory to judge the world at the end of this age.^{42 43} The *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* also argues that *parousia* in ancient literature which described the glorious arrival of kings is used properly to speak of the Second Coming of Christ.⁴⁴

³⁸ Wright, 341. The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* seems to support Wright’s understanding. A. Oepke writes that *parousia* never has the sense of return. However he also states *contra* Wright that “all the Evangelists distinguish between the judgment on Jerusalem and the *parousia*.” See TDNT 5:865-867.

³⁹ See also J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985).

⁴⁰ I can’t give a statistic here, but I think my observation is correct.

⁴¹ Hagner, 688.

⁴² Frederick William Danker, ed. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (BDAG)* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2000).

⁴³ A survey of the uses of *parousia* in the NT shows that it is used both for people, the antichrist, and then for Jesus. This paper is dealing with its use in describing the presence or coming of Jesus.

⁴⁴ Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, trans. James D. Ernest, Vol. 3, 3 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 53-55.

There is then substantial disagreement among different branches of modern NT scholarship concerning the meaning of *parousia* in reference to Jesus Christ. There seem to be three basic opinions on the matter.

1. *Parousia* can be a reference to either the judgment on Jerusalem in A.D. 70 or the final Coming of Christ. We distinguish between the two based on other contexts – judgment and resurrection being associated with the final coming.^{45 46}

2. *Parousia* is only A.D. 70 and therefore all has been fulfilled – resurrection, last judgment, etc.⁴⁷

3. *Parousia* is only the final coming.⁴⁸

If position 2 is correct, then much of Christian theology as well as the creeds are in need of a serious overhaul.⁴⁹ Positions 1 and 3, though not in total agreement, do find agreement in that, no matter how significant was the judgment of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, our ultimate hope is still in the future with the final coming of Christ. Both positions 1 and 3 can also handle the idea of a transition in Matthew 24 at verse 36. Additionally, neither positions 1 and 3 are in conflict with the historic creeds of the church.

Briefly, I would like to discuss how either position 1 or 3 can be part of an argument for a transition, and specifically at verse 36.

First, the word *parousia* as has been noted earlier is only found in Matthew's account of the Olivet Discourse. Along with Matthew's fuller questions in verse 3, he has included the term *parousia*. If Matthew is writing at a later date in the first century, then this word has

⁴⁵ The position of at least some preterist, post-millennial writers and others. In a conversation with Ken Gentry, a representative of this position, on April 26, 2008, he confirmed this was his understanding.

⁴⁶ See also the comments of Ralph P. Martin, *James (Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 48)*, Electronic Edition by OakTree Software 1.0 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988), 188. Martin notes that A. Feuillet argued that in James 5, *parousia* could refer to the judgment on Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Martin notes, "But there is no certainty about this conclusion, attractive as it is. Yet the variant meaning of 'Parousia,' different from the sense of Christ's ultimate manifestation to consummate history, is to be noted."

⁴⁷ The hyper-preterist or pantelist position as noted earlier.

⁴⁸ The dominant evangelical position seemingly both historically and presently.

⁴⁹ Seraiah points out that if Jesus really was teaching that all was to be fulfilled in A.D. 70 that somehow this teaching was missed by the early church. Seraiah, 17-31.

already taken on meaning through the letters of Paul.⁵⁰ Matthew's usage of this term then should alert his readers to expect something both for the first century and for an unknown time.

Second, the word *parousia* is used 4 times in the chapter, in the disciples question in verse 3 and then also in verses 27, 37, and 39. The usage in verse 27 seems to be a problem for understanding verse 36 to be the transition verse. If only after verse 36, does Jesus speak of his final return, how do we understand its usage in verse 27? This is one difficulty of placing a simple transition at verse 36. But there are two ways of dealing with this difficulty. One way of handling this issue is to understand that *parousia* depending on the context can refer to either the judgment in A.D. 70 or to Christ's final return (position #1 as noted above). Just as there were multiple days of the Lord in the OT, so it is argued that there can be more than one *parousia*.⁵¹ In contrast, a better interpretation may be that verses 25-28 are not referring to the judgment in A.D. 70 but rather are distinguishing the *parousia* and the judgment that befell Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Signs are given pointing to the coming destruction on Jerusalem, but no signs need to be given to identify the *parousia*. It will be as evident as a lightning bolt that shoots across the sky and as noticeable as vultures circling around carrion.⁵² This argument makes more sense here; otherwise, you have two different uses for *parousia* in close proximity (v. 27 and v. 37) which would be potentially confusing.

Third, the final two uses of *parousia* come after verse 36 in verses 37 and 39. Here these two references mark the connection between the *parousia* and Noah's flood. This specific connection to the *parousia* provides a strong argument for understanding that Jesus is not speaking about A.D. 70 but His final return. When the rain of Noah's deluge started to fall, it was already too late for those outside the ark. There was no hope of escape. In a similar

⁵⁰ 1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:1, 8

⁵¹ The validity of this argument is beyond the scope of this paper.

⁵² This is argued by both France in his commentary on Matthew and Gibbs.

way, when Christ comes the final time, there will be no hope of escape for those still in rebellion.

Similarly the other illustrations in verses 40-43 also show the suddenness of Christ's return. Two men, doing similar things, will be separated at Christ's final coming, one taken to blessing, the other left to judgment. This is repeated with a similar illustration involving two women. Unlike the warning signs that Jesus gave for the judgment that would befall Jerusalem, there are no signs that Jesus gives after verse 36, just as there are no signs before a thief breaks into a house. The challenge now is not to look for signs but to accept the message of the gospel and be prepared for Christ's return at any time.

The parables that follow, especially the parable of the wise servant (24:45-51) and the parable of the talents (25:14-30) illustrate and emphasize the importance of being ready.⁵³ While the final judgment (25:31-46) may not occur until the end of the age, the time to embrace Jesus and the messengers that He sends is now.

4. Comparing Matthew 24 and Luke 17

John Bray and others who argue against any idea of a transition point to Luke 17 as a parallel passage to Matthew 24 and also as evidence that no transition in Matthew 24 exists.⁵⁴ A reading of Luke 17 does indeed show that there are some parallels between the two passages. If Luke 17:31 is directly parallel to Matthew 24:17, then material that comes before Matthew 24:36 is used after the "parallel" transition verse in Luke 17:31. This would suggest that such a neat transition in Matthew 24 may not be possible. Note the following comparisons between the two chapters.

Matt. 24:17 Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, ¹⁸ and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak.	Luke 17:31 On that day, let the one who is on the housetop, with his goods in the house, not come down to take them away, and likewise let the one who is in the field not turn back.
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⁵³ Gibbs, 209.

⁵⁴ Bray, 256-257.

<p>Matt. 24:26 So, if they say to you, 'Look, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out. If they say, 'Look, he is in the inner rooms,' 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.</p>	<p>Luke 17:23 And they will say to you, 'Look, there!' or 'Look, here!' Do not go out or follow them. ²⁴ For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day.</p>
<p>Matt. 24:28 Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.</p>	<p>Luke 17:37 And they said to him, "Where, Lord?" He said to them, "Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather."</p>
<p>Matt. 24:37 For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.⁵⁵</p>	<p>Luke 17:26 Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. ²⁷ They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.</p>
<p>Matt. 24:40 Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left.</p>	<p>Luke 17:35 There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left." ³⁷ And they said to him, "Where, Lord?" He said to them, "Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather."</p>

On the surface this seems to be a very difficult problem.⁵⁶ However a closer reading of Luke 17 shows not only that the context is different but also that there is closer agreement than it might initially seem. Rather than just trying to line up parallel verses, we instead need to examine more closely the context of Luke 17.

Luke 17 is about properly recognizing Jesus. This is noted at the beginning of the chapter. There will be those who will stumble in not recognizing Christ (1). Jesus pronounces woe especially to those who then lead others astray (1-2). In contrast, the disciples have a great responsibility in reaching out to their brothers. This they must do in a very patient and forgiving way (3-4). Though this task seems so great, Jesus reminds us that even small faith will be sufficient. Lest we complain or think that we have accomplished much, Jesus reminds us that we are at best unprofitable servants (5-10).

⁵⁵ This language which is found after the transition verse (36) is found earlier in Luke 17.

⁵⁶ Neither Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992) nor David Chilton even discussed the parallelism between the two passages in their discussion on Matthew 24.

The story of the ten lepers that follows is an example of those who properly recognize Jesus and those who do not. Only one of the ten lepers whom Jesus healed showed true faith, in coming in thankfulness to Jesus. This Samaritan leper showed that he was more astute in recognizing the kingdom than did the Pharisees (11-17).

The Pharisees then are presented in asking Jesus about the nature of the kingdom. When is it coming? This is not simply a question about timing, but a question about epistemology. How will we know? Jesus says that it is not a reality that can be put under the microscope as it were. It is not coming with signs that can be empirically observed. The kingdom is in your midst (20-21).

Following this, Jesus then speaks with the disciples. Granted the language is similar in parts to Matthew 24, but the context is not exactly the same. Jesus here instructs the disciples that they also will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man (22). Unlike the Pharisees who don't understand the present significance of Jesus' ministry, the disciples may not properly understand the future dimensions of Jesus' ministry after his death, resurrection, and ascension. The disciples will be tempted to look for the wrong thing.⁵⁷

'One of the days of the Son of Man' can be understood as the time of the end when the Son of Man will be revealed.⁵⁸ "As the disciples look back with nostalgia, they look to the future for the fulfillment of their longings."⁵⁹ The disciples will be tempted to such misunderstanding because of the sufferings that they will have to endure. Because of this suffering they may be tempted by false reports.⁶⁰ This is again the theme of proper and false recognition of Jesus.

⁵⁷ Joel Green, *The Gospel of Luke (NICNT)* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 633.

⁵⁸ Green, 633. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, Vol. 2, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 1427, also sees the phrase equivalent to "the days of Messiah" and refers to the return of the Son of Man.

⁵⁹ John Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34 (Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33B)*, Electronic Edition by OakTree Software (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), 858.

⁶⁰ Green, 633.

Rather Jesus states that his day will be quite evident. It will be as lightning that flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other. But first Jesus will have to suffer many things and be rejected by this generation (25).

This leads into comparisons given in verses 26-30 about the days of the Son of Man. Comparisons are made with the time of destruction in the days of Noah (universal) and Sodom (local). The key characteristic is unawareness of the reality of Jesus. People were oblivious to God and his coming judgment. Instead they were consumed with eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting, and building. So it will be on the same day the Son of Man is revealed (30).

This leads to warning being given. Those on the roof must not go into the house and grab their things. Likewise the person in the field should not worry about his things. Don't turn back. Remember Lot's wife! (31-32). Jesus is warning here against misplaced values.⁶¹ Now if this is speaking about final judgment the point is not that there will remain a chance to get your things before Jesus comes in judgment. The point is that we must recognize and follow Jesus showing that he is more important than the things we have. Don't simply be like those during the day of Noah and Lot. Ironically Jesus declares, "Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it." This is the opposite of Jesus simply giving a warning about running for the hills.

Verses 34-35 complete the picture of judgment and separation. Two people may have been doing the same thing, but there will be a difference. Ten lepers were healed but only one returned. One will be taken, the other will be left. Taken here is a good thing. Noah and Lot were taken. The rest were left. This again doesn't seem to fit the situation around A.D. 70. Those who heed the words of Christ had advanced warning. So I don't think that Luke 17 can be made to fit a picture of judgment in A.D. 70.

⁶¹ Green, 635.

From here Luke concludes this section with a parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18:1-8. Do we have here a similarity with the parables that follow Matthew 24:36? There is perhaps a connection. The parable Luke states was to show them that they should always pray and not lose heart. The widow persisted in coming to the judge seeking for justice. Finally the unjust judge, likely who was looking for a bribe, granted justice to her. In a similar way, shouldn't we persist in asking the Lord for justice knowing that he will give justice to his elect who cry out to him day and night? Justice will come speedily. "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" This takes us back to 17:19 where Jesus praised the faith of the Samaritan leper who came to give thanks. His faith had made him well.

The differences between Luke 17 and Matthew 24, show that we cannot simply try to line up each verse that is similar. Therefore Luke 17 cannot be properly used to argue against the possibility of a transition in Matthew 24. On the other hand, the basic thrust of Luke 17:22-18:8 fits quite well with Matthew 24:36-25:46. One must be ready for the return of Christ. We must not be distracted by the ordinary patterns of Christ. By learning from OT examples of judgment, we can be ready for the return of Christ.

Conclusion:

While many Christians believe that in Matthew 24, Jesus speaks to both the events of A.D. 70 and his final return, there certainly has not been agreement in understanding which parts of the chapter refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and which parts refer to the final coming of Jesus. While some are more confident in their classification, others are more tentative or even agnostic. Certainly one must be humble in his or her assertions. But I believe this paper has shown that understanding verse 36 as being the transition verse provides a simple and defensible way for understanding the flow of the chapter. The

questions of the disciples in verse 3 prepares the ground for a discussion on two issues. The use of *peri de* in verse 36 alerts us to an important transition. The use of the word *parousia* in key parts of the chapter also fits in with verse 36 as being transitional. Finally, comparing Matthew 24 with Luke 17 shows that while there are differences in context, there is agreement in the basic message concerning the final coming of Christ. There are certainly other difficult exegetical points to be worked out which this paper has not discussed, but hopefully the reader has benefited from this discussion.

Soli Deo Gloria.

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