

## **A Defense of (Reformed) Amillennialism**

(Part V)

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### **Matthew 24**

(Continued)

The apparent difficulty with Jesus' words in Matthew 24:34 is that they seem to predict the end of the world in the lifetime of His disciples. He has been instructing the disciples concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world (v.3). He has just spoken of His visible, bodily coming in the clouds (v.30). Then, in verse 34, He declares, "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled."

In fact, of course, He did not return, nor did the world end, in the lifetime of the generation to whom He was speaking.

Various erroneous solutions have been proposed for this seeming difficulty. Theological liberalism finds in the text evidence that Jesus Himself, like His apostles later, mistakenly supposed that His personal, glorious, perfected, Messianic rule over all the world would occur within a few years. This is unbelief.

Others interpret "generation" as referring to the Jewish race, to believers, or to the human race. On this view, Jesus merely affirmed that there would be Jews, or believers, or humans yet alive when He would return. This is a forced and unnatural reading of the text. It is an effort to escape the difficulty posed by the words of Jesus. It does not do justice to the vehement assertion by Jesus in verse 35 concerning the truth of His words.

As was pointed out in the previous editorial, the postmillennial Presbyterian J. Marcellus Kik limited the reference of "all these things" to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Implied is that verses 3-31 speak exclusively of the destruction of Jerusalem. There is nothing in these verses that applies to the days leading up to the second coming of Christ. There is nothing in these verses, therefore, that applies to the church at the end of the 20th century. All was exhaustively fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem. All is past. Kik is followed in this exegesis by the postmillennial Christian Reconstruction movement.

This explanation is obviously false inasmuch as it ignores that Jesus' teaching answers the question of His disciples about His coming and the end of the world, not only about the destruction of Jerusalem (v. 3). Also, Jesus speaks in verses 3-31 of events that

cannot by any stretch of the imagination be restricted to the destruction of Jerusalem. Such is the mention in verse 14 of the coming of “the end” (Greek: to *telos*) after the gospel of the kingdom has been preached “in all the world” (literally, ‘in the whole inhabited earth’) “for a witness unto all nations.” Such also are the events spoken of in verses 29-31: the catastrophic signs in the heavens; the sign of the Son of man; the visible coming of the Son of man in the clouds; and the gathering of the elect by the angels with the great sound of a trumpet.

How then is verse 34 to be explained?

The natural sense of “this generation” is the normal lifetime of those to whom Jesus was speaking. If a generation is of some 40 years duration, “all these things” spoken of in verses 3-31 would, and did, take place within 40 years of Jesus’ having foretold them.

“All these things” would *happen, or take place*. The King James translation, “be fulfilled,” might be misleading, as though these things would occur fully and exhaustively during the span of that generation. The Greek is simply, “...till all these things *happen*” (*geneetai*).

“All these things” are the things that have to do with the destruction of Jerusalem, the (second) coming of Jesus Christ, and the end of the world. These were the things about which the disciples asked Jesus in verse 3. These were the things that Jesus prophesied in verses 4-31.

All these things would happen before the generation addressed by Jesus would pass away. They would happen within about 40 years. They would happen in the destruction of Jerusalem by the then risen and ascended Lord Jesus Christ through the Roman army in A.D. 70.

All these things would happen *typically, or in the historical type*.

The destruction of Jerusalem was a God-ordained historical type of the deliverance of the elect church at the second coming of Christ through the judgment of tribulation. The New Testament church was delivered by the destruction of Jerusalem. It was delivered from the persecuting hatred of the Jewish nation. It was delivered also from the clinging, entangling Jewishness of the now transcended Old Testament worship: the temple service; the civil and ceremonial laws of the nation of Israel; the earthly forms of the promises and hopes of the people of God. The grand temple had to be thrown down, to the last stone, so that the mature church of believing Jew and Gentile might flourish in her New Testament spirituality.

This deliverance took place only by way of struggle, affliction, and tribulation.

Indeed, all these things took place in A.D. 70.

- Typically!
- Merely typically!
- Not exhaustively!
- Not in the reality!

The reality was yet in the future from the vantage point of the church standing on the ruins of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The early church understood this well, as is evident from her exegesis of Matthew 24 and related passages after A.D. 70.

The reality is still in the future from the vantage point of the church in A.D. 1996. The reality, as the question of the disciples in verse 3 plainly shows, is the coming of Christ and the end of the world.

As is always the case with types, the destruction of Jerusalem came far short of complete fulfillment of the deliverance of the saints in the way of judgment. Verses 29-31 of Matthew 24 make this failure of the type clear beyond any doubt. These events await the reality: the end of the world.

But this coming reality typified in the destruction of Jerusalem is certain.

The happening of the type according to Jesus' words which cannot pass away assures it.

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