

The first objection, that Christ seems to say He will “gather His elect” at the time of His return seems the strongest objection. Matthew 24:30,31 says,

“Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man arriving on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet blast, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven unto the other.”

On my theory, the Second Coming of Christ, when He defeats the Anti-Christ, is simply not distinguished here from a later Third Coming at the end of this creation with its resurrection and rapture. That sounds strange and like it makes Matthew 24 very cryptic in communication. That is true to an extent, however, it is completely typical of prophetic statements, and Christ is “the Prophet”.

Prophecy sometimes condenses two or more events, to make them sound one. I want to establish this in scriptures by a number of examples. Probably read at least the first one, but if you accept it, feel free to skip below to the discussion on the second objection. So the first example is,

Malachi 4:5

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD

Jesus taught that John the Baptist is the fulfillment of this prophecy, (Matthew 17:11) but while that does happen prior to the great and dreadful day of the Lord, a reader of Malachi might have expected it to be immediately preceding that great and dreadful Day. In fact the gap is at least about 2000 years. Remember that many of Christ's disciples expected that reign with an iron scepter to come immediately and condensation of scripture like this is a major reason Jewish people held that expectation. The gap between Matthew 24:30 and 24:31, which is the time I propose is collapsed in prophecy, is only 1000 years, thus also reasonable. Furthermore this is an example of cyclical prophecy, another prophetic mode, since Christ does return, (this is the theory at least), more than once. Now various scriptures lend intertextual support to the idea that “the” Coming of Christ will be the Second Coming. However, first of all, Malachi also strengthens the condensed view of that Dreadful Day in chapters 2:17-3:2. And secondly we will show that there is more intertextual support for a Third Coming.

Another example of prophetic condensation occurs in Acts 2:17 as Peter described these as the Last Days. In Peter's second epistle, the Apostle explained that what seems delay to us can be swift in the Lord's time.

A third example is Daniel 9:24-27. The prophecy is that there will be seventy weeks and many people find this to be an incredibly solid prophecy of Christ's birth and death. The final week almost all interpreters understand as the Tribulation but there is no clear indication of a gap in time in the text. We are presuming, rightfully, that the prophecy has condensed time, (between Jesus' death and the Tribulation).

The end of Isaiah, below, is a fourth example. Verse 23 speaks of the world worshiping God in Zion during the Peaceable Kingdom on Earth. Verse 24 portrays the witness of the defeated and slain

enemies of God as an eternal act of witness. However this eternal witness only takes place after the end of this creation (see Revelation excerpt beneath the one from Isaiah).

Isaiah 66:23,24

²³ And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the LORD.

²⁴ And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.

Revelation 14:10-11

The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he [any man who received the mark] shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.

A reader could get the idea that people on Earth will always be looking at these tormented dead. (Though admittedly this is not what it says.) In reality, Isaiah has condensed time; he has condensed this creation with the next so that the viewing of the slain Anti-Christ worshipers in eternity is declared certain.

The prophecies in Isaiah and Jeremiah concerning Babylon may also be a condensation. Those two prophets may be predicting the fall of the historical Babylon in a number of places, but this seems to blend into the distant perspective of a prophecy of the End Times. For we read in Revelation 18:21, “And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.”

Furthermore the typical way for Christ and the New Testament writers to characterize His return is a great condensation. One would tend to get the impression it would happen very soon. This is not failed prophecy. Christ explains in Matthew 24 that many things must happen first, and Paul explains in 2 Thessalonians that the “Son of Perdition” must be revealed first, and Peter explains in his second epistle that God has His own sense of time and thousands of years may be imminent to Him. But in many other places the Coming is given as very urgent. The actual time of prophetic fulfillment is much more distant than it naturally seems. Therefore a gap in the fulfillment of a prophecy between one verse and the next, as between Matthew 24 verse 30 and 31 is natural.

In Matthew 24 Jesus also condenses time in other places. In verse 20, speaking only to His disciples about the End Times, He says, “but pray ye that your flight be not in the winter.” This makes it sound as though they will be in those times. And reading Paul especially it sounds as though he was constantly expecting the end. Jesus also tells the Sanhedrin in Matthew 26:64 that they will see Him coming on the clouds of Heaven. The Sanhedrin must see Jesus once they are resurrected to see Him in His Coming yet the prophecy sounds as though it will happen before they die. It sounds very soon, but reason demands that the prophecy was intended for some time much later (around the resurrection).

The same is true of Matthew 24:30,31. The narrative sounds straightforward, but we know it cannot be because the general resurrection must occur before verse 31.

Matthew 24:30,31

And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Matthew 24:34

Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.

It sounds as though Jesus is saying "I will do A, then I will do B straightaway." But what He really says is, "I will do A, and I will do B, and in one generation all those things will be fulfilled." To understand the time period Jesus was indicating we might want to know how long a generation is. By the Second Century had Jesus' prophecy failed? The Greek word for "generation" is more complex than ours, but Christ seems to use it of people of a certain era or epoch, or of a certain type. (Luke 16:8) If a thousand years is as a day, how long is a generation?

We could complain that this is obscure and that we should take it more plain. But there may be no more plain interpretation if we take the various scriptures seriously and Jesus sometimes speaks in ways that are easier to misunderstand than to understand. For instance, **John 2:19**, "destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

So I have given 6 examples of condensation in prophecy:

1. Malachi 4:5, or better, Malachi 3:1,2
2. 2 Peter and the combustion of all
3. Daniel's 70 weeks
4. The end of Isaiah
5. The fall of Babylon
6. The return of Christ in the Gospels

And we could have added

7. The Old Testament prophecies of "the" Coming of the Messiah

I supplied these examples as evidence that scripture often portrays something relatively near in time and something far off as though they are one. Lacking outside information one could be unlikely to find the seam in the scripture to indicate there are two different narratives there. In Matthew 24, it is the Disciples who conflate these times in their response to Jesus when He says that the stones of the Temple will be thrown down. "And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (Matthew 24:3) They are asking three questions as though they are equivalent. Jesus gives them the essential information. Because prophetic condensation is typical in the scriptures it is reasonable, given strong supporting evidence, to allow that Matthew 24:31 could take place much later than Matthew 24:30. Another way to take Matthew 24:30 is that it points to both the Second and Third Coming.

The key argument that the verses are separated in time is that the general resurrection is not until “after the thousand years” (Revelation 20:5) and this event is the sine qua non of the rapture (2 Thessalonians 4:16,17). Paul’s writings also demand a rapture at the time of the end of creation as we see in 1 Corinthians 15:23,24,51-57.