

Matthew's Two-Age Eschatology: Toward Bridging Systematic Theology and Biblical Studies

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Abstract

This article surveys Matthew's use of two-age eschatology. Particular attention is given to the passages that reference "this age" or the "age to come." It is argued that a comparison of the synoptics indicates that Matthew had a unique theological agenda in his use of two-age language. After surveying his use of this eschatological framework it is argued that Matthew's two-age eschatology is characterized by an unrealized dualism. However, this unrealized dualism acts in concert with an inaugurated Kingdom eschatology. Both eschatological schemas are present at once and work together to engage the implied reader.

Introduction

While most agree that Matthew's gospel is characterized by an inaugurated eschatology, addressing the "here and now," it is not clear how Matthew's repetition of two-age eschatological language fits into his view of history and time.¹ The difficulty of answering this question is compounded by the nature of the secondary literature. On the one hand, many biblical studies are too atomistic and lose a canonical and redemptive-historical perspective. On the other hand, systematic studies often presuppose that all biblical corpora are using the same theological notion, making it difficult to find a way to develop the diversity of the biblical material or to focus on a particular author's distinctives. In addition, there is a visible lack of engagement between systematic theologies and Matthean studies. This study seeks to re-examine Matthew's two-age eschatology from the perspective of Matthew as

¹Carl G. Vaught, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Theological Investigation* (Waco, TX: Baylor, 2001), xii.

historian and theologian.² While this necessarily weakens the focus of the study to some degree, the interaction between the disciplines is aimed at broadening the range of implications.

Two-Age Eschatology in Systematic Theology

Two-age eschatology plays an important role in the context of systematic theology because of the movement of dispensationalists and covenantalists toward each other in the area of inaugurated eschatology.³ Although the recognition that the New Testament Kingdom motif is characterized by already /not yet eschatology, there are those from the covenantalist side who aver that an inaugurated two-age eschatology is antithetical to, and eliminates the possibility of, a future chiliastic (Millennial) Kingdom.⁴

Covenantalists such as Kim Riddlebarger, Robert Reymond, and Don Garlington deny a literal, earthly Millennium is possible because of the overarching structure of two-age eschatology.⁵ While also denying the possibility of a dispensational-type Millennium, Robert Reymond is an exception to Riddlebarger and Garlington's position on the nature of the two-age schema. Reymond argues that Mt 12:32 demonstrates there is no "overlap" or inaugurated eschatology between "this age" and the "age to come."⁶ Ironically, Reymond, Garlington, and Riddlebarger draw on the inaugurated Amillennialism in the classic work by Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*.⁷ While all three move from Hoekema's position toward denying the plausibility of an earthly Millennium, covenantalist Vern Poythress uses Hoekema's inaugurated eschatology

² Donald Senior, "Directions in Matthean Studies," in *The Gospel of Matthew in Current Study*, ed. David Aune (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 13.

³ Russell D. Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 4; also 61, 150, 156.

⁴ All Scripture references are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

⁵ Don Garlington, "Reigning with Christ: Revelation 20:1-6 and the Question of the Millennium," *Reformation and Revival* 6:2 (1997): 66; Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 66; Kim Riddlebarger, *The Man of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 65; Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 1008.

⁶ Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 1008 n43.

⁷ Hoekema has been described as "trailblazer" in Reformed theology for appropriating the inaugurated (already/ not yet) eschatology of G. E. Ladd. Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 15-20; Russell D. Moore, 46.

to arrive at an opposite conclusion. Poythress states that it may be a “comparatively minor dispute as to whether this renovation of earth, following the Second Coming, comes in one stage or two, that is, in a one-thousand-year millennium followed by a fuller renewal or by total renewal all at once.”⁸

Thus, two-age eschatology is being used, with varying success, to turn back the clock on a consensus for an evangelical inaugurated eschatology that can be appropriated by dispensationalists and covenantalists alike. But it is clear that not all covenantalists agree that two-age eschatology can achieve what some amillennialists would like. This position on two-age eschatology is marked by methodological and theological problems.

Methodologically, this view of two-age eschatology is unsound. There is no warrant given for absolutizing one eschatological schema to the exclusion of another. Garlington explains, “Once the overarching pattern of salvation history has been determined, it follows that only with some difficulty can there be another time period which effectively amounts to a third epoch or phase in the outworking of God’s purposes.”⁹ However, the methodology of systematicians who want to use a two-age eschatological framework to eliminate the possibility of a future millennium may be winning too much. If a two-age eschatology eliminates the possibility of a millennial “dispensation” wherein the Kingdom takes on an “earthly” character, such a method would also apply to the past as well as the future. This would eliminate all the contours of the history of redemption except for the two “ages” within the two-age schema. Such a pattern would eliminate the difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, as they would introduce other epochal structures. This absolutizing methodology also turns back the clock on the work by covenantalists such as Geerhardus Vos who sought to integrate the contours of redemptive history.

Theologically, the character of an inaugurated eschatology (already/not yet), is by definition marked by progress. Whereas Garlington argues that, “it is the ‘already’ which defines and delineates the ‘not yet’ of the eschatological timetable,” he does not take into account the implications of “overlapping” between the two ages.¹⁰ To argue from the basis of inaugurated eschatology that there can be no further development in the

⁸ Vern Poythress as quoted by Moore (2004, 52).

⁹ Garlington, “Reigning with Christ: Revelation 20:1-6 and the Question of the Millennium,” 66.

¹⁰ Garlington, “Reigning with Christ: Revelation 20:1-6 and the Question of the Millennium,” 54-5.

history of redemption is paradoxical. The very idea of eschatological overlap is crucial to G. E. Ladd's contention that there will be an earthly millennial age.¹¹ Those covenantalists who understand the promise of a "new earth" to mean that the eternal state will be characterized by new bodies that reflect the resurrection of Christ's body should agree that eschatological overlap and development cannot (as Poythress notes) preclude an earthly millennium.

Charles Scobie makes an important move that is distinctive from Garlington and Riddlebarger. Scobie contrasts *prophetic eschatology* from the OT (anticipating a series of ends within history) with *apocalyptic eschatology* in the NT (looking for the end of history).¹² His distinctive move is to qualify apocalyptic eschatology by stating, "It expects God to act in judgment and salvation in one great future event (or series of events) that will bring history as we know it to an end."¹³ For Scobie, a series of ends is different from a series of events. Indeed, Scobie notes, "the NT looks forward to various events that will happen *within* history and prior to the *end* of history."¹⁴ Whereas Garlington and Riddlebarger absolutize the two-age schema, effectively eliminating other epochal events and redemptive contours, Scobie allows for such.

This overview of two-age eschatology has sought to locate its importance in the grid of systematic theology. The two biggest issues are unwarranted absolutizing of the two-age schema and, correspondingly, a flattening out of the contours of redemptive history. This overview has been necessary to demonstrate that there is a need to hear the distinctive voices of the New Testament authors before moving to a theological synthesis. If Russell Moore is correct, that an inaugurated eschatology is essential for an eschatology that both covenantalists and dispensationalists can embrace, then both parties have a stake in pursuing the objections of Reymond, Riddlebarger, Garlington, and others. The Gospel of Matthew is an ideal place to begin a study of two-age eschatology because the narrative uses theology to "schematize history."¹⁵ The book contains a clear reference to a two-age schema and refers to it several times throughout the gospel.

¹¹ G. E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, revised ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 680.

¹² Charles Scobie, *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 124.

¹³ Scobie, *The Ways of Our God*, 124.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 179. Emphasis his.

¹⁵ Donald Senior, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1997), 13.

Two-Age Eschatology in Biblical Studies

The discussion of Matthean eschatology is worlds-apart from its locale at the forefront of amillennialism in systematic theology. To be fair, there is little interaction with systematic theologians by those who specialize in gospels. Furthermore, within biblical studies there is a lack of a consensus about the nature of two-age eschatology in Matthew. Most would agree with James Dunn that αἰῶνες in the NT denotes time and is understood as part of a sequence of ages.¹⁶ Attempts at more specificity are fraught with disagreement, resulting in approximately three views.

Defining the Ages

The first view is relatively technical and is primarily seen within both exegetical and systematic contexts. The period of “this age” begins with the inauguration of the Kingdom by Jesus and continues until the inauguration of the “age to come” at his return. Put another way, “this age” is composed of the *inaugurated* Kingdom while the “age to come” is the *fullness* of the Kingdom. This position is based on an already/not yet schema. For Jesus to announce the nearness of the Kingdom “was to signal the initiation of the end events.”¹⁷ This is the position taken by Garlington who states, “By distinguishing ‘this age’ and ‘the age to come’ (e.g., Matt. 12:32; Eph. 1:21; cf. 4 Ezra 7:50), it informs us that God has acted in His Son at the ‘end of these days’ (Heb. 1:2) to bring to fulfillment the promises made to the fathers.”¹⁸ Likewise, for Edward E. Anderson, “this age” is not an evil age so much as it is an eschatological age begun by the coming of Christ and his Kingdom.¹⁹ David Hill’s position differs only slightly, arguing that “this age” is the period from “the Resurrection and enthronement of Christ till the final consummation.”²⁰ For Hill, “this age” is the Church age or the “era of

¹⁶ James Dunn, *The Epistle to the Colossians and Philemon* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 119.

¹⁷ I. H. Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel*. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), 202.

¹⁸ Garlington, “Reigning with Christ: Revelation 20:1-6 and the Question of the Millennium,” 56.

¹⁹ Edward E. Anderson, *St. Matthew's Gospel* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1909), 92.

²⁰ David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972), 362.

the Church's life and mission."²¹ This, however, is anachronistic and does not take into account the usage of two-age eschatology before the church had been fully constituted (Mt 12:32). Furthermore, Matthew characterizes "this age" as sinful. It is a period when the disciples will need the presence of Jesus in order to carry out their mission (Mt 28:20). The problem with this view is that it denies that a real sense of dichotomy exists between the ages such as appears in two-age logion of Mt 12:32. If this view is applied to the two-age logion Mt 12:32, it would destroy the rhetorical pattern characterized by radical opposites.

The second view, taken by Stanley Hauerwas and John Howard Yoder, is characterized by "this age" and the "age to come" coexisting but representing "different directions."²² This too is an already/ not yet approach. The period of "this age" begins at the fall and is characterized by sin while the "age to come" was inaugurated with Christ's coming but will ultimately be consummated when all of God's will is accomplished in the eschaton. As Hauerwas states, "The new age has yet to reach consummation, but it has clearly already begun to supersede the old."²³ This view suffers from the same difficulty the first view faces in that it posits too much continuity between "this age" and the "age to come."

The third view presents Matthew's two-age eschatology as referring to "this age" (past, present, and future) as an evil age inaugurated at the fall (creation) and anticipating a change in the future that will usher in the "age to come."²⁴ Leon Morris calls "this age" the "whole time of life on earth."²⁵ Although "this age" is characterized by sin, it is not a time of judgment. Because this period begins at the fall (creation), it can be described as a "vast period of time marked by the form and the condition of the things that now fill it."²⁶ In the context of Mt 12:36-37, it is clear that "day of judgment" (ἡμέρα κρίσεως) and the time of justification (δικαιωθήση) and condemnation (καταδικασθήση) will be in the future – in the "age to come." This would comport with the intertestamental worldview that posited a former age, which began with the fall and

²¹ Ibid., 362.

²² Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2006), 87, cf. 122.

²³ Hauerwas, *Matthew*, 87.

²⁴ David C. Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew* (SNTSMS 88; Cambridge/NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 35.

²⁵ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 320 n82.

²⁶ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg, 1943), 483.

would end with a “direct intervention by God within history.”²⁷ Norman Perrin notes that, “The ‘age to come’ occurs regularly in the apocalyptic literature as a designation of the end time, e.g. Enoch 71.15; Slav. Enoch 65.8; Syr. Bar. 14.13; 15.8; II (4) Ezra 4.27; 7.13; 7.47; 8.1.”²⁸ This interpretation views Matthew’s two-age logion in 12:32 as directed toward the *Sitz im Leben* of the Pharisees who saw themselves as still within the “former age” or “this age” which did not recognize the presence of the kingdom (12:28). Matthew would have wanted to appropriate this “strict dualism” to the Matthean audience who expected an “end-time” apostasy (Matt 24:9-10).²⁹ This view differs from the former views by denying that (at least in this logion) the entrance of Jesus has changed the status of the “ages.” Harvie Branscomb argues that Jesus spoke in this instance (Mt 12:32) in a way that was axiomatic for himself and “for others of his day.”³⁰ This position views two-age eschatology as beginning “this age” with the fall and looking toward “the age to come” when God will act with judgment in the second coming of Christ.

Larry Helyer agrees that the eschatological framework of Second Temple Judaism and the NT is composed of two ages. The period of “this age” begins with the fall after creation and the “age to come” begins with “the mighty intervention of God and his holy angels at the great Day of the Lord.”³¹ Helyer goes on to say, in agreement with the second position cited above, that “the age to come has already begun for believers in Jesus the Messiah.”³² This may indeed be true for other New Testament and first century writers, but the crucial question is whether this is compatible with Matthew’s presentation of two-age eschatology. The third position seems to be the best option for precisely this reason: the Pharisees whom Jesus is addressing (such as in the two-age logion of 12:32) refuse to accept presence of the Kingdom and thus they continue to operate in the typical dualism of Second Temple Judaism. However, this cannot explain the role that dualism plays as Matthew writes not to

²⁷ J. Julius Scott Jr., *Customs and Controversies: Intertestamental Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 272.

²⁸ Norman Perrin, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1963), 164.

²⁹ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20* (trans. James E. Crouch; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001), 249.

³⁰ Harvie Branscomb, *The Teachings of Jesus* (NY/Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1931), 133.

³¹ Larry Helyer, *Exploring Jewish Literature of the Second Temple Period* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2002), 88.

³² *Ibid.*, 88.

blaspheming Pharisees, but to the implied reader. This aspect is discussed below in the section entitled “Two-age Eschatology and Kingdom Eschatology.” This study argues that the best view of two-age eschatology in Matthew keeps the two ages in “opposition” to each other.³³ Not only does this interpretation keep the *Sitz im Leben* intact, but it also does justice to the literary structure of the gospel.³⁴

Approaching a Complex Eschatology

The structure of Matthew forces two-age language into broader questions of eschatology including the nature of the *Parousia*. The last occurrence of two-age language occurs in the Great Commission passage of Mt 28:19-20, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age (τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος).”³⁵ Janice Anderson cites 28:20 as part of Matthew’s narrative web which includes the commission to proclaim the Kingdom as Jesus and John the Baptist (3:1-2; 4:17; 10:7) and the instruction to go into the cities and villages of Israel (10:11; 23).³⁶ Anderson finds that the only discontinuity of 28:20 with these prior mission passages lies in its reference to “teaching.”³⁷ This suggestion may help to locate the reference to two-age eschatology within the narrative plot, but it also introduces a host of issues related to broad issues of eschatology and the long-standing debate over the nature of the *Parousia*.

For example, in 10:23, the mission of the disciples is connected to an eschatological event, “When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.” The question is whether there are parallels between the mission that will end with the coming of the

³³ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg, 1943), 484.

³⁴ This is not to argue that Jewish eschatological expectation was uniform in nature, but that the Pharisees would have rejected the notion that Jesus brought about a change in the two-age schema. For a discussion of the variegated nature of Jewish eschatological expectation and extra-biblical literature see Dale Allison Jr., *The End of the Ages Has Come* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1985), 25.

³⁵ All Scripture references are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

³⁶ Janice Anderson, *Matthew’s Narrative Web: Over, and Over, and Over Again* (JSNTSS 91; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 151.

³⁷ Anderson, *Matthew’s Narrative Web*, 151.

Son of Man in 10:23 and the mission that will end with the close of the "age" in 28:20. If one begins with the assumption that these two passages are parallel in meaning, the conclusion one makes about the nature of the *Parousia* will have some determination in understanding the nature of "this age" and the "age to come."

Hagner suggests, due to the history of interpretation and the difficulty this poses for understanding Matthew, that each passage must be handled independently.³⁸ In other words, it is precarious to begin with a different aspect of Matthew's eschatology and then try to make references to two-age eschatology match it. While not denying the unity of Matthew's gospel, a text-by-text examination of Matthew's eschatology will carry the weightiest conclusion.

Matthew's Distinct Two-Age Schema

A text-by-text examination of Matthew's two-age eschatology will demonstrate that his appropriation of this eschatological framework is distinct. The two-age eschatological schema appears in several other NT books, including Romans and Hebrews. But whatever source Matthew used (M, Q, etc) or, redacted or whatever Gospel priority one holds to, it is clear that his two-age language is distinctly his contribution.

The first distinctive feature of Matthew's two-age eschatology is that he includes it where other synoptic parallels do not. Not even the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas appropriates the language of two-age eschatology. The two-age logion in Mt 12:32 occurs within the Beelzebul controversy of Mt 12:22-37 and does not occur in the Lukan parallel (Lk 11:14-23), the Markan parallel (Mk 3:29), or even in The Gospel of Thomas' version of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (44).³⁹ It is unlikely that the two references in Mt 13:39-40 redacted any Markan passage although Gundry considers it a conflation of Mk 4:26-29 and 4:3-9.⁴⁰ Regardless, two-age vocabulary does not appear in the two Markan passages suggested by Gundry, highlighting the fact that Matthew had his own

³⁸ Donald Hagner, *Matthew 1-13, vol 33a* (WBC; Dallas, TX: Word, 1993), 278.

³⁹ George Aichele, "The Fantastic in the Discourse of Jesus," *Semeia* 60 (1992): 57. The Gnostics replaced Matthew's chronological dualism with a spatial dualism of heaven and earth. Harvey McArthur, "The Gospel According to Thomas," in *New Testament Sidelights: Essays in Honor of Alexander Converse Purdy*. Ed. Harvey McArthur (Hartford, CT: Hartford Seminary Foundation, 1960), 72.

⁴⁰ Robert Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 382.

source and his own distinct agenda. In addition, the Gospel of Thomas' reference (57) to this parable in Mt 13:39-40 does not use Matthew's "age" vocabulary.⁴¹ Matthew 24: 3 mentions two-age eschatology while the parallel passages in Mk 13 and Lk 21 do not.

The second distinctive feature of Matthew's two-age eschatology is his peculiar expression. The *locus classicus* of two-age eschatology in Matthew, indeed in the synoptics, is Mt 12:32: "And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age (ἐν τούτῳ τῷ αἰῶνι) or in the age to come (ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι)." Although both ages are mentioned elsewhere (e.g. Mk 10:30; Lk 18:30), this passage is the only close juxtaposition of both ages in the synoptics and perhaps reflects a formulaic usage. Likewise, the phrase "close of the age" in 13:39, 40, 49; 24:3, 28:20 is unique to Matthew.⁴² The redundancy of two-age language strengthens the idea that Matthew is appropriating two-age eschatological formulae.

Two-Age Eschatology as Unrealized Dualism

Dale C. Allison Jr. finds that, while Matthew contains an "already and not yet" eschatological pattern, compared to Mark, it falls on the "realized" end of the spectrum.⁴³ While this is true of Matthew's inaugurated Kingdom eschatology, it does not comport with his two-age eschatology which is characterized by an unrealized dualism between "this age" and the "age to come." Indeed, one could argue that because Jesus does not presently alter the stereotypical schema of Second Temple Judaism, it is, in one regard, at the opposite end of the spectrum as Allison suggests.

Matthew 12:32

The *locus classicus* of two-age eschatology in Matthew, indeed in the synoptics, is Mt 12:32 "And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will

⁴¹ James M. Robinson ed. *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (NY/Leiden: Brill, 1996), 132.

⁴² Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 319; Robert H. Smith, *Matthew* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1989), 177.

⁴³ D. C. Allison Jr. "Eschatology," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Eds. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1992), 535.

not be forgiven, either in this age (ἐν τούτῳ τῷ αἰῶνι) or in the age to come (ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι).”

Matthew's point in the pericope is singular: it is possible to misunderstand, albeit innocently, the Son of Man but to assert that the source of his power is demonic (an evil spirit) rather than God (the Holy Spirit) is inexcusable.⁴⁴ However, the epochal framework for the comment cannot be dismissed as it plays a role in establishing the main point. Martin Emmrich indicates that the main verb of the clause is a future passive (ἀφεθήσεται) and concludes that this is “not meant to declare what is *forgivable* (or rather *unforgiveable*), but what *will happen* (i.e. οὐκ ἀφεθήσεται, ‘will not be forgiven,’ indicative).”⁴⁵ While Emmrich demonstrates the importance of the time element, a dichotomy between *when* and *what* does not follow because if there were no single, definable sin in view, the rhetorical weight of this statement would be lost to the original hearers. In addition, as Robert Gundry notes, the future tense of ‘will be forgiven’ is an imperfect tense in Galilean Aramaic, taking on a “virtual rather than future meaning.”⁴⁶ Thus, “what is forgivable” and “what will happen” should be kept together. As Douglas Hare observes, Matthew's redaction of attaching the blasphemy saying to the Beelzebul controversy achieves a certain “polemical force.”⁴⁷

This pericope contains several epochal dimensions that need to be held together. First, the kingdom is present and has been inaugurated by Jesus.⁴⁸ As the “Son of Man,” Jesus is addressing the Pharisees with divine authority. There is indeed an already/ not yet perspective present in this text. Second, there is a two-age schema that does not rely upon any overlapping of the “ages” and achieves its rhetorical force by contrast. The parallelism or contrast of the two negative phrases in 12:32 (οὔτε ... οὔτε ...) adds a “judgmental tone” to Jesus' rhetoric.⁴⁹ This two-age imagery serves as a way to heighten the warning that words will lead to condemnation or justification in verses 26-27. This reflects

⁴⁴ Daniel Harrington, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1983), 55.

⁴⁵ Martin Emmrich, “The Lucan Account of the Beelzebul Controversy,” *WTJ* 62:2 (2000): 276. Emphasis his.

⁴⁶ Gundry, *Matthew*, 237.

⁴⁷ Douglas Hare, *Matthew* (Louisville, KY: WJKP, 1993), 140.

⁴⁸ Contra Margaret Davies who differentiates between “kingdom of God” and “kingdom of heaven,” and argues that the “kingdom of heaven” is entirely in the future. Margaret Davies, *Matthew* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 96.

⁴⁹ Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*, 382.

Matthew's eschatological pattern that stresses an "imminent expectation of the end."⁵⁰ Third, Matthew indicates that a time will come when Jesus will no longer be *physically* present on earth, doing miracles that attack the kingdom of Satan and demonstrate he is operating in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Beelzebul controversy of Mt 12:22-37 cannot be used to isolate one epochal framework to the exclusion of the others.

In sum, the entire literary structure from 12:30-37 is based on a pattern of strong contrasts. With Reymond we can agree that it is simply not possible to read an already/not yet structure into Matthew's two-age logion. The eschatology of the two-age logion in 12:32 presents a dualism with no overlap. However, contra Reymond, this does not mean that there are no other eschatological dimensions or perspectives within Matthew's gospel.

Matthew 13:22

Besides the two occurrences in 12:32, the third occurrence of "age" (αἰών) is in the parable of the sower in Mt 13:22, "As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world (τοῦ αἰῶνος) and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful." This passage possibly reflects a redaction of Mark 4:3-20, especially v.19 ("but the cares of τοῦ αἰῶνος..."). It is important to keep in mind the context of the original parable. As Jesus is calling people to discipleship through his word or "seed," people are responding or rejecting his call to "absolute commitment."⁵¹ This is significant because the central issue is the individual's response to the "message of the kingdom."⁵² The primary eschatological framework is one of inaugurated eschatology: the kingdom is present, and those who hear the call to discipleship must respond. This is significant because of the presence of "two-age" vocabulary.

G. E. Ladd's reference to Mt 13:22 in his discussion on eschatological dualism helps to frame the issues surrounding this verse as they related to two-age eschatology. Ladd's paragraph is as follows:

The character of this age is such that it stands in opposition to the Age to Come and the Kingdom of God. This is shown in the parable of the soils. The sower sows the seed, which is 'the word

⁵⁰ Vicky Balabanski, *Eschatology in the Making: Mark, Matthew and the Didache* (SNTSMS 97; NY: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 2.

⁵¹ Donald Hagner, *Matthew 1-13, vol 33a* (WBC; Dallas, TX: Word, 1993), 381.

⁵² Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 381.

of the kingdom' (Mt. 13:19). The word seems to take root in many lives, but the cares of the age (Mk. 4:19; Mt. 13:22) choke out the word and it becomes unfruitful. From this point of view, this age is not in itself sinful; but when the concerns of the life of this age become the major object of interest so that people neglect the message about the Kingdom of God, they become sinful.⁵³

On the one hand, "this age" is in "opposition" to the "age to come" but at the same time, Ladd states, 'this age is not in itself sinful.' This is similar to the tension expressed in the cliché, "in the world, but not of the world." In this instance, the use of the word "age" (αἰών) does not imply a rigorous black-and-white contrast as it did in Mt 12:32. The reason why the "cares of this world" choke the word is that they do not always appear to be antithetical to the kingdom of God. As Bruce Barton states, this danger is "subversive."⁵⁴ In both Mark and Matthew, this passage is best understood as referring to "cares brought on by life in the world."⁵⁵ Ladd's exposition finds discontinuity in the "opposition" (or dualism) of "this age" and the "age to come" as well as continuity because of the inaugurated Kingdom.

The eschatology of Mt 13:22 is multi-dimensional. The contrast or discontinuity is implied because the cares of the "age to come" will be nothing like the cares of "this age." With Jesus' *Parousia* comes total provision and the elimination of the possibility of creating idols out of the things of this world. In this sense there is a strict dualism with benefits unrealized in this age. Thus, the notion of "possibility" is not due to two-age language but to Kingdom language. It is *possible* to live out the values of the Kingdom in this world but it is also possible to let the cares (e.g. money or materialism) of the world choke out the word of God. The parable of the seeds presents a Kingdom that has begun and is in the process of growing through the spread of the gospel. As William Hendrickson points out, the "sowing and at a later time fruit-bearing, both of which are mentioned in this parable, presupposed a gradual and time-consuming process of development."⁵⁶

The parable of the sower uses two intertwined eschatological frameworks. First, the central point of the parable is the need to "understand" and not just "to hear" the word of Jesus and the call to discipleship. It is possible to resist the message of the Kingdom. However, because the Kingdom is in the "not yet" stage, it is not

⁵³ Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, revised ed., 45.

⁵⁴ Bruce Barton, *Matthew* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1996), 264.

⁵⁵ Holtz, "αἰών," *Expository Dictionary of the New Testament* 1:46.

⁵⁶ William Hendrickson, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1973), 557.

characterized by triumphalism. The two-age framework is subsidiary to the Kingdom framework and functions as a basis to demonstrate the fact that “this age” is a time of possibility.

Matthew 13:39-40

The next references to two-age eschatology occur in the explanation of the parable of the “weeds of the field” in Mt 13:24-30; 36-43. The two two-age references are in Matthew 13:39-40, “and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the close of the age (ὁ δὲ θερισμὸς συντέλεια αἰῶνός ἐστιν), and the reapers are angels. [40] Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age (οὕτως ἔσται ἐν τῇ συντελείᾳ τοῦ αἰῶνος).”

This parable is the second in a series of seven parables about the Kingdom. The phrase “close of the age” (συντέλεια αἰῶνος) is unique to Matthew and the reference to a “harvest,” “angels,” and “fire,” point to an epochal framework.⁵⁷ The parable of the “weeds of the field” deals the concern raised by the fact that the inaugurated Kingdom that Jesus is preaching is not characterized by triumphalism. Hagner suggests that the question about the continuing existence of evil was related to the continuing “Roman rule over the people of God.”⁵⁸

In this instance, Matthew places his Kingdom eschatology next to his two-age eschatology to illustrate God’s exclusive role in judgment over evil amongst the people of God. The inauguration of the Kingdom has come with Jesus. Likewise, the inauguration of “this age” is implied in the comments proleptic of its close – the disciples of Jesus are living in “this age.” However, it is not clear when “this age” was inaugurated. Outside of any indication to the contrary, it should be assumed that, although the explanation was directed to the disciples, at this point they understood “this age” to have begun at the fall or creation. As far as a point of inauguration, there is no explicit intersection of “this age” and the Kingdom. However, Matthew’s point of juxtaposing these two eschatological schema is to create an intersection of the two-age schema and the Kingdom schema in the future.

The “Son of Man” has sowed the “good seed” (v.37) and the enemy has sown “weeds” (v.38). Both sowings occur during the Kingdom and during “this age.” But a “tension” exists.⁵⁹ While judgment is coming,

⁵⁷ Arthur Sloman, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1889 reprint; London: Macmillan, 1912), 107.

⁵⁸ Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 382.

⁵⁹ Douglas Hare, *Matthew* (Louisville, KY: WJKP, 1993), 155.

both good seeds and weeds must be allowed to grow together, "Let both grow together until the harvest" (v.30a). By using two-age eschatology and "stark" language, Matthew is able stress patience (v.30a) and the immediateness of the future judgment.⁶⁰ This is reinforced by the language of the "harvest" at the end of the age which would have resonated with the Jewish hearers familiar with similar biblical and extra-biblical texts (Jer 51:33; Hos 6:11; 4 Ezra 4:28; 2 Bar 70:2).⁶¹

Like the two-age reference in chapter 12, the force of the references to two-age eschatology in 13:39-40 rests upon a strict dualism between the ages. There is overlap with regard to the Kingdom but there is no overlap with regard to the ages. In this pericope, patience characterizes "this age" while judgment characterizes the "age to come." Any overlap between the ages would totally negate the command to be patient and the existence of future judgment.

Hill argues that the Kingdom of the Son of Man in 13:41 that needs to be cleansed is the visible church on earth.⁶² However, as Luz points out, this is not possible from a literary standpoint, as the church is not "definitively constituted."⁶³ The "Kingdom" in this context does not equal the church but refers to the sovereign reign of Jesus.⁶⁴ The Kingdom is inaugurated and will continue into the second age or "age to come." There is both continuity and discontinuity in Matthew's eschatological structure. The period of "this age" will "close" (v.39,40) but the Kingdom will continue into its fullness when the "Son of Man will... gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers (v.41).

Matthew 24:3

The mentioning of the "end of the world" (AV) or the "close of the age" (ESV) opens what some call the "small apocalypse" of Mark 13, Matthew 24, and Luke 21.⁶⁵ Matthew focuses on Jerusalem more than Mark or Luke by omitting the story of the Widow's mite (Mk 12:41-4; Lk 21:1-4) and, with Mark, locates the discourse on the Mount of Olives,

⁶⁰ Thomas G. Long, *Matthew* (Louisville, KY: WJKP, 1997), 155.

⁶¹ David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972), 236.

⁶² Ibid., 237.

⁶³ Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 268.

⁶⁴ Craig Blomberg, *Matthew* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 222.

⁶⁵ Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992), 318.

perhaps echoing the eschatological scene of Zech 14:4.⁶⁶ In Mark 13:4, the pericope opens with “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished (συντελεῖσθαι)?” In Luke 21:7, the pericope opens with “And they asked him, “Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?” However, Matthew 24:3 introduces two-age vocabulary, “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* (συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος)?”⁶⁷

The beginning of chapter 24 indicates that when the disciples marveled at the Temple (cf. Lk 21:5), they proved they did not understand Jesus’ judgment of the Temple and Jerusalem, as described in chapter 23. Neil D. Nelson Jr.’s literary-critical analysis is helpful in pointing out that the rebuke of the disciples (in 19:13) for turning away children and the request by the mother of James and John in 20:20 prepares the implied reader to “anticipate misunderstanding on the part of the disciples and a corrective response on the part of Jesus in chapter 24.”⁶⁸

Contra Douglas Hare, who finds the destruction of the temple the “basic question,” both issues of the temple and the second coming stem from the previous discourse.⁶⁹ The questions of the disciples are inverted as they relate to the order brought up. Jesus first brings up the issue of his second coming in 23:39 and the Temple in 24:2. However, the disciples first ask about the Temple, referring to “these things” and then to the second coming. While there appears to be three items, there are only two interrogatives (πότε [when] and τί [what]). In addition, it is unlikely that the “close of the age” should be considered separately because there is no definite article in the phrase “and of [the] close of the age” (καὶ συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος). The result is a consensus that both questions (or the three items) from the disciples (the Temple and the *Parousia*) are about one thing: the end of history.⁷⁰ Yet the ability to draw a main point

⁶⁶ Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 318-9.

⁶⁷ David Sim argues that Matthew redacts the Markan version of the return of the Son of Man at the end of the age and “intensifies it” Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, 95.

⁶⁸ Neil D. Nelson, Jr. “‘This Generation’ in Matt 24:34: A Literary Critical Perspective.” *JETS* 38:3 (1995): 372.

⁶⁹ Hare, *Matthew*, 274.

⁷⁰ Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 319; Thomas G. Long, *Matthew*. Louisville, KY: WJKP, 1997) 268; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 352.

from the discourse does not negate the fact that several issues are engaged. Darrell Bock suggests that the “third question” Matthew’s reference makes the “eschatological force explicit.”⁷¹ In this reading, the function of two-age eschatology is to direct the focus of the questioning. The interpretive challenge of this pericope is that Matthew overlays two different eschatological schemas. The first schema is an inaugurated eschatology wherein the coming of Christ has implications for the Temple (24:2) and for a second coming (24:3). In this schema, the first coming of Jesus has clearly begun a series of eschatological events. At the same time, Matthew introduces a second schema. The language of a two-age schema from the disciples identifies “the close of the age” with the second coming. In this two-age schema, there is no eschatological overlap or inauguration. The first coming of Jesus does not eliminate or destroy the two-age eschatological pattern by creating a third or fourth epoch. Thus, “this age” is a time of evil and waiting for the “age to come.”⁷² What is introduced in this pericope is not another epoch or another division of time but the identity of the event that will close this age and usher in the “age to come.” In this two-age schema, there is no inauguration of Jesus’ second coming or a present inauguration of the “age to come.”

Both eschatological schemas are referenced when Jesus answers the question regarding his second coming in 24:14, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” First, Matthew references Kingdom eschatology. This schema is characterized by an inauguration of Jesus’ first coming. Second, Jesus identifies the “end” as coming in the future (with a future tense), “then the end will come” (τότε ἔξει τὸ τέλος). The end of “this age” will come only at his second coming. It is only when this particular day arrives that the “day of the Lord” will “close” this age and begin the “age to come.”⁷³

Matthew 28:20

The last occurrence of two-age language occurs in the Great Commission passage of Mt 28:19-20, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy

⁷¹ Darrell Bock, *Luke, Vol. 2: 9:51-24:53* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 1663.

⁷² William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew, vol. 2* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2001), 353.

⁷³ Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew, vol. 2*, 353.

Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age (τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος)." ⁷⁴

In the climactic portion of Matthew's gospel (chapter 28), two-age language functions as a way to bind together themes of the authority of Jesus, discipleship failure, and his presence amongst the New Covenant community he has created. ⁷⁵ The authority of Jesus theme is present already in the direction given to the disciples in 28:16. As David Bauer notes, because Jesus does not depart in Matthew, he remains the ever-present speaker. ⁷⁶ This literary technique strengthens the last appearance of the exalted Christ to the disciples and gives a sense of enduring presence to the implied readers who come after them. The theme of discipleship failure appears in 28:17, "but some doubted." The doubt of the disciples is a problem associated with "this age" due to its evil nature. For Matthew, "this age" contains many other eschatological changes such as progression, fulfillment, and the growth of the church. However, these events do not change the basic character of the age in question. Only the radical renewal brought about by the *Parousia* and the close of the age will remove the need to address the "doubts" of the disciples.

The "reassurance" given to the disciples strengthens the idea that "this age" should be understood as an evil age that is filled with suffering and hardships that will be even harder for the disciples to endure when Jesus is no longer with them physically. ⁷⁷ Yet, in Jesus' ascension, Jesus becomes present with them through the Holy Spirit, being free from the "bonds of time and space." ⁷⁸ Davies suggests that in spite of discipleship failure, this promise provides both a "foundation for the mission of Jesus' covenant community" and a sense of imminence regarding the end of the age. ⁷⁹

Dale Allison Jr. argues for an inaugurated eschatology in 28:16-20, stating that, "The Parousia, which will coincide with 'the end of the age'

⁷⁴ Robert H. Smith notes an explicit connection with Mt 13:39. Robert H. Smith, *Matthew* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1989), 341.

⁷⁵ David R. Bauer, *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*. JSNTSS 31; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1988), 141.

⁷⁶ Bauer, *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel*, 141.

⁷⁷ Davies, *Matthew*, 208.

⁷⁸ Theodore H. Robinson, *The Gospel of Matthew* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1928), 237.

⁷⁹ Davies, *Matthew*, 209.

(28:20), will only make manifest on earth a fact already established in heaven.”⁸⁰ An inaugurated eschatology that recognizes that Jesus has already “received authority in heaven” should not be denied.⁸¹ However, this inaugurated eschatology that points to an enthronement is part of the Kingdom eschatology. There is no already/ not yet change within the two-age schema. The period of “this age” is inclusive of the church age but is not changed by it and thus is still characterized by sin. The sinfulness of this age necessitates both the promise and the presence of Jesus through the Holy Spirit before Jesus’ second coming.

This reference to two-age eschatology is also interwoven with an inaugurated eschatology. The nature of the two-age eschatology in the Great Commission is not inaugurated or overlapping. Once Jesus returns in his *Parousia* there will be no need for mission or for the Spirit to comfort the disciples. However, it is also clear that Matthew has another eschatological schema in mind. This Great Commission is a development of the mission that once was exclusive to Israel (10:5-6) but now must go to all the nations (28:19).⁸² An eschatological schema of development is used in conjunction with a two-age eschatology that has no inaugurated aspects.

Two-Age Eschatology and Kingdom Eschatology

Central to this study of Matthew’s eschatology is the thesis that his gospel contains more than one eschatological framework. To use the term “eschatology” is not to focus exclusively on the future. Indeed, there is little distinction to be made between Matthew as a historian and Matthew as a theologian. This closely follows Georg Strecker’s suggestion that Matthew is a historian in the same sense that Luke is.⁸³ A multi-perspectival eschatology posits that Matthew’s gospel, as a corpus, approaches time in more than one way. Two of the dominant leitmotifs that provide both a narrative-literary function and an eschatological function are Kingdom eschatology and two-age eschatology. Most significantly, Kingdom eschatology in Matthew is an inaugurated eschatology, the arrival of Jesus has altered history and his presence and ascension have ushered in the “end of times.” In

⁸⁰ Dale Allison Jr., 1985, 49.

⁸¹ Allison, *The End of the Ages Has Come*, 49.

⁸² Davies, *Matthew*, 167.

⁸³ Georg Strecker, “The Concept of History in Matthew,” in *The Interpretation of Matthew*. Ed. Graham Stanton. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 71.

contradistinction from this, two-age eschatology is characterized by unrealized dualism.

The result of the two intertwining eschatologies is that the implied reader – the disciple – is both comforted and discomfited by Matthew’s gospel.⁸⁴ The familiar language of two-age eschatology in Second Temple Judaism would have allowed the reader to feel at ease. The redundancy of the two-age eschatological language helps to facilitate this comfort. It reinforces the reader’s assumptions and allows him or her to feel at home in a world dominated by apocalyptic dualism.⁸⁵ The fact that Matthew does not change the two-age schema vis-à-vis an inaugurated eschatology indicates an attempt to draw in the reader into an eschatology that awaits the arrival of “end of the age” which will dramatically change Israel’s (and the world’s) condition.⁸⁶ This eschatological schema finds no realization in the presence of Jesus – only in his *Parousia*.

At the same time a Kingdom eschatology is operating. This eschatology confronts the implied reader with the presence of Jesus. For example, chapter 28 does not record Jesus ascending, thus leaving the reader in his presence. Two-age eschatology retains continuity with the world of the reader while inaugurated eschatology introduces “massive reorientations in history.”⁸⁷ As two-age eschatology creates a sense of anticipation, the disciple must now choose a stance in light of the presence and inauguration of Jesus as king of an enduring kingdom. These two eschatologies operate simultaneously and both employ semantic redundancies that cannot be pulled apart.

Conclusion

We may now offer a brief summary of the conclusions regarding two-age eschatology in Matthew.

⁸⁴ “The implied reader of the New Testament has a personal stake in the truthful reference of what it asserts.” Markus Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word: Refocusing New Testament Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 69.

⁸⁵ Howard C. Kee *Christian Origins in Sociological Perspective: Methods and Resources* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980), 47.

⁸⁶ Fred W. Burnett, “Prolegomenon to Reading Matthew’s Eschatological Discourse: Redundancy and the Education of the Reader in Matthew,” *Semeia* 31 (1985): 94.

⁸⁷ Scot McKnight, “Matthew, Gospel of,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Eds. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1992), 535.

1. The polemic goal of systematicians, particularly amillennialists, has flattened out the unique eschatological textures in Matthew's gospel. Likewise, many exegetes have focused on an inaugurated eschatology and have ignored the possibility of multiple layers or perspectives. However, it is not appropriate to follow Moltmann who "regards chiliasm (oriented toward a messianic age) and apocalypticism (oriented to eternity) as the two antithetical poles that must be dialectically related in order to avoid either utopian extremism."⁸⁸ Following Michael Horton's critique, such a move as Moltmann's would assume a Matthean eschatological schema devoid of the synthesis it actually has.⁸⁹ But acknowledging Matthew's synthesis does not mean absolutizing a single part of his variegated eschatology. A student of two-age eschatology in Matthew must be willing to hear everything he has to say about time and epochs without an *a priori* assumption or absolutizing of a theological notion without textual warrant.
2. The already/ not yet aspect of the Kingdom (inaugurated eschatology) works together with an unrealized dualistic eschatology at once to settle and to challenge the implied reader. Two-age eschatology is a schema devoid of change because of Jesus' presence. The second coming is the only event that will bring about a change that will usher in the "age to come." This allows Matthew to maintain an unrealized eschatology and a strict dualism between "this age" and the "age to come."
3. In agreement with Georg Strecker, who suggests that Matthew is a "historian" in the sense that Luke was, we agree that Matthew uses "periodicizing" to present history.⁹⁰ However, Matthew *also* uses two-age eschatology to present a schema wherein the nature of "this age" remains sinful and unchanged until the *Parousia*. In sum, it is better to see two-age eschatology in Matthew as part of complex tapestry of salvation history that he is weaving with his gospel.

⁸⁸ Moltmann as quoted by Horton. Michael Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville, KY: WJKP, 2002), 38.

⁸⁹ Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 38.

⁹⁰ Strecker, "The Concept of History in Matthew," 71, 74.