

The Bible and Its Interpretation in Africa

Eliud Esseko*

- I. Introduction
- II. The Bible in African Perspective
- III. The Bible, interpretation and meaning in Africa
- IV. What is the meaning of Matthew 24:1-36? A case study.
 - 1. What does "this generation" Stand for?
 - 2. What does "these things" Stand for?
 - 3. Temple Destruction
 - 4. The end of the Age and the Second Coming of Jesus
 - 5. The Second Coming of Jesus
 - 6. The Meaning of Matthew 24:1-36.
 - 7. The African non hermeneutical Speculative meaning of Matthew 24:1-36.
- V. The Importance of Hermeneutics in African Christianity
- VI. Concluding Remarks

I. Introduction

It has been mentioned that, "Africans do not need to accept the interpretation of the Bible that are presented to them but are free to read the Bible for themselves from their own perspectives: the Bible

* 승실대학교 대학원 기독교학과 박사과정 수료

must be interpreted so as to speak to the hopes and fear and pressing issues of African people.”¹⁾ We cannot deny the fact that some complicated issues in the Bible requires interpretation for better understanding and application of the scripture in daily life. Nevertheless, one is inclined to ask: to what extent do the scriptures require interpretation so as to make sense? Do we have any portion in the Bible which does not require any interpretation for its meaning to reach and be understood by the readers?

The ordinary Bible reader in Africa is not concerned about hermeneutics: He or she opens the Bible in the morning or evening and read it with open heart to receive instructions. He or she fully understand the meaning of “do not murder, do not steal, etc.” for him or her, it does not need complicated interpretation for the scripture to make sense and for him/her to obey.

African people want to see the scriptures giving answers to both their spiritual and social challenges as well. The Bible which show the way out of diseases and sickness, the meaning which will make enemies to put down their guns and shake hands as brothers and sisters, teach the practice of justice and against corruption. It should go far enough to address their sufferings and define the purpose of their life. Simply put, the interpretation of the truth will make African people know the truth, live in the truth and abide by the truth and hence life abundant here on earth and life eternal in heaven.

In his book: “First Theology” Kevin J. Vanhoozer make mention

1) The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories, and Trends,
http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/4771_4928.pdf [accessed on April 13, 2009]

that: "What we see depends on where we stand."²⁾ Based on this fact, it is critical to mention that: the non African interpretation of the Bible does not see the African context and hence once accepted and imported and applied in Africa, can cause negative results. We need the general principle of hermeneutics, we need to learn from other Christians, but we refuse the imposed meanings of the Scripture as understood by Westerners to be taken as the final and authoritative message of the author as revealed and intended by God to reach us. In this article, the call for an African interpretation of the Bible for African Christianity is voiced. The biblical understanding which ignores the material need of the people is questioned and the African Traditional Religious belief synchronized to Christianity is totally rejected.

II. The Bible in African Perspective

According to John Wesley Zwomunondita Kurewa, the Bible has exercised immense influence upon the life of African people.³⁾ The Bible has been translated into hundreds of African languages and dialects: and it may well be that it is the only book that many African Christian families possess.⁴⁾ John S. Mbiti observes that: "the Bible is the basis of African preaching as many of us can testify from

2) Kevin J. Vanhoozer: First Theology: God, Scripture & Hermeneutics(Downers Grove: Intervarsity press, 2002), 210

3) John Wesley Z. kurewa: Biblical proclamation for Africa Today(Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1995) p.11

4) Ibid.

our own experiences. However, we have extremely little written information on how and to what extent the Bible is used. We know that the Bible is used for preaching, but we do not know what the content of that preaching is.”⁵⁾ The wide usage of the Bible in Africa especially amongst Christian people is acknowledged. However, the lack of formal biblical training for ministers stands out as a problem in African Christianity. Although the Bible has been translated in full or in part into 526 of Africa’s 2,100 languages, as of 1980,⁶⁾ this does not directly imply that Africans are well versed with the Bible.

The use of the Bible in African Christianity can be two fold namely: for the general use with all professing Christians and the other is the academic side of African Christianity. The former usage has been mentioned and dealt with. The later is the issue we’ll deal with in this section. According to John S. Mbiti, “while the Bible is a very popular and highly valued book, it has its profound side which requires certain amount of learning, in order to understand it more deeply. African Christianity needs this kind of learning, in order to understand and use the Bible more meaningfully.”⁷⁾ At the same time, Kurewa mentions that: “we study the scriptures not only to admire the Bible as literature or to understand it merely for the purpose of interpreting its meaning, important as those incentives may be. A believer’s main purpose in studying the Bible diligently is that, through the illumination or the teaching of the Holy Spirit, he or she will find life in Christ

5) John S. Mbiti: Bible and Theology in African Christianity(Nairobi, oxford University Press, 1986) p,52

6) Ibid.

7) Ibid.,46

Jesus, the author of life.”⁸⁾

It is expected that other Christians who are not from African origin may wonder and even wish to know when Africans read the Bible what do they find, see and hear from the scriptures. If this be the case, John S. Mbiti responds that: “Africans finds many things in the Bible. But in their own languages the Bible becomes at once a living book, very different from other books.”⁹⁾ Africans do not read the Bible as any other book, nor do they consider or treat it that way. Mbiti observes that, people hear the story of salvation, love and grace in their own language, the language they understand with their whole being, the language of their childhood and old age, the language of their dreams and expectations, their fear and their hopes.¹⁰⁾ Mbiti stress that, Africans also hear other things from the Bible, they hear and see a confirmation of their own cultural, social and religious life in the life and the history of the Jewish people as portrayed and recorded in the passages of the Bible.¹¹⁾ The Bible at once becomes also a mirror that reflects, or a photograph that records, people’s own experiences, reflections, culture and religious outlook and practice.¹²⁾

The African perspective on the Bible is again stressed in that, “Africans feels that their own lives are described in the Bible, they as human beings are affirmed in it and that they belong to the world of the Bible. They identify their own presence in this big photograph. The

8) John Wesley Z. Kurewa.,16

9) John S. Mbiti.,26

10) Ibid.

11) Ibid.

12) Ibid.

world of the Bible did not vanish two or three thousand years ago. People discover that it is for them a world of yesterday, and today, a world of their own lives and communities. It is a living portrait of their cultures and experiences, of their history and geography, of their fears and expectations and of their spiritual longing.”¹³⁾

Before the translation and publication of the Bible in African indigenous languages, the Bible did not have enough force to speak to the African people. It was presented in different languages which were foreign to African people. However, “with the publication of African translations, it became possible for the African to differentiate missions and scriptures. In the scriptures, therefore, African Christians gradually began to detect a basic discrepancy between missions and scriptures on what were to them a major point of conflict, namely the traditional customs being attacked by missions”¹⁴⁾ Mbiti concludes that, “the scriptures have therefore provided the African Christians with indispensable guidance at crucial period at which they would otherwise have been inarticulate. So began the demand of African society for spiritual independence from the religious imperialism of Western extra biblical ideas.”¹⁵⁾

It should be clearly noted that, even without any interpretation, the Bible is sufficient to convey the message of salvation and the grace of redemption. The interpretation of the Bible which Africans desire is not limited to mind only, it includes heart and understanding of the message by the soul. The extra biblical interpretation as emphasise in

13) Ibid.,27

14) Ibid.,30

15) Ibid.

the West does not have room to deviate the basic and simple message of grace, faith, confession, baptism and redemption through and by Jesus Christ. The question remains, what percent does the Bible require interpretative meaning so as to make sense and be practiced in the lives of African people?

III. Bible Interpretation and meaning in African church.

What happens when one “understands” a literary text?¹⁶⁾ Such a question is either treated in an abstract, logical, and technological way, or pushed aside as irrelevant, since it would seem to deal not with the object of analysis but with the subjective experience of it.¹⁷⁾

The assumption is that one can speak of an object of analysis in terms of its form and “objective meaning” in such a way that the work seems to exist independently of our experience of it!¹⁸⁾ Palmer stresses that, “gradually there comes to be no correlation between the analysis of the object and our own experience of it in understanding. The abstract analysis of form and of logical contradictions comes to be the hallmark of subtle interpretation, and ultimately the dynamics of experiencing the work are unconsciously bypassed, or dropped as leading to fallacy. Yet such objectivity assumes a rational rather than experiential access to work: it takes interpretation out of its living

16) Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1969), 223

17) *Ibid.*

18) *Ibid.*

context and purges it of its historical character.”¹⁹⁾

As far as the Bible, interpretation and meaning in African is concerned, as mentioned before, African refuses the imported interpretation as well as enforced and attached culture which comes with the Bible from missionaries. Even without the knowledge of hermeneutics, the church in Africa has been able to advance and flourish. We do not refuse the use of hermeneutics, but we say no to the added attachment which makes the Word of God susceptible to error.

It stands as a common fact that the Bible shapes African Christianity. Preachers use the biblical text to expound the Christian message. “What they actually say by the way of interpreting these passages we do not know. But at least the people are exposed to the whole Bible: it is brought to them more or less in its entirety. We can also say that they come to it as they are, because they read and hear the Bible from the standing point of their concerns and understanding .”²⁰⁾ This means that, if the Bible does not address our concerns, it will be rendered irrelevant due to lack of the African context.

The interpretation of the Bible for its application in Africa should never ignore the challenges we face in the continent. “The people of African continent are still under the grip of many ancient and destructive forces, including hunger, disease, illiteracy, and superstition, to mention only a few. At the same time, the people are increasingly coming under the grip of new forces such as urbanization,

19) Ibid.

20) John S. Mbiti., 40

industrialization, a monetary economic order and many others.”²¹⁾ In this direction and context, the Bible should be interpreted and contextualized for the purpose of both alleviation from the destructive forces and edification for the life eternal promise.

The imported and imposed Bible interpretation which ignores the African context is accountable for the deterioration and in some cases the death of African medicine. It is due to the advent of Western interpretation of the Bible in African church and its forced application that African medicine became witchcraft, African culture became demonic and African lifestyle became uncivilized. Clearly, the Western imposed Bible interpretation did no justice to Africa.

According to Palmer, there is no such thing as a non positional subject, and therefore there is also no such thing as a non positional understanding.²²⁾ Understanding is always positional: it stands at given point in history.²³⁾ If the Bible is to speak to African and address our both spiritual as well as social needs, then it should be interpreted in relation to our circumstances, and hence the need for an African interpretation and application of Word of God. The balance can be drawn in that: we do not allow that which is valued in African culture to dominate the Bible. We as African Christians should be ready to relinquish or do away with the African traditions which are contrary to the biblical teachings. To this, the standard bearer should remain to be only and only the bible, not the Western culture or missionaries perspective.

21) John Wesley Z. Kurewa., 69

22) Richard E. Palmer, 224

23) Ibid.

In order to exemplify the Bible and its interpretation in Africa, Matthew 24:1-36 is chosen as a case study. At first, the hermeneutical principles are drawn into application so as to demonstrate the importance of the science of interpretation and theological studies in general. Thus far, the exegetical work is undertaken so as to thoroughly deal with the complex logic and rhetoric of Matthew 24:1-36, so as to biblically ascertain the meaning and application for the present and future time.

At the end of the pointed case study, one will pinpoint the African non hermeneutical speculative meaning of the mentioned Scripture under discussion. As the result, we'll find that in this discussion one unified meaning of the Scripture due to the fact that there are no tools available to unveil the scriptures without advanced theological learning. At this point, we turn our focus to the selected case study i.e. the meaning of Matthew 24:1-36.

IV. What is the meaning of Matthew 24:1-36? A case study.

Referring to the Gospel according to St. Matthew in Chapter 24, we find the Bible make mention of the 'events' which will take place to signal, or mark 'the end of the age.' The careful reader of the gospels and especially the scripture in discussion will not fail to grasp the idea that at least some events do occur to signal or as an indicator to the major event. In the case of Matthew 24:3 the Disciple requested to know both the signs for Jesus' coming and the end of the age. In this

particular verse, the signs requested are by no means the events anticipated (Jesus' coming and the end of the age) but serves to point to the *events* (Jesus' coming and the end of the age)

The scripture presents us with two issues namely the coming of Jesus and the end of the age. Several questions may come to mind as one think about the issues, among others, is the coming of Jesus directly connected to the end of the age? What is the meaning of generation as it's used in Matthew 24:34? What is the meaning of "these things" as used in Matthew 24:2 and 34?

Matthew 24:33 35 and its meanings stands out as the key to understanding the whole chapter and hence the proper interpretation of that particular scripture. With environmental degradation, international and national conflicts, moral erosion and the destruction of social order, people are asking: Where is the world going? Will it get better or worse? On the other hand, for Christians questions like: does this mean we are approaching the end of the age (world)? What is the meaning of a certain event in relation to the second coming of Jesus and our future hope (heavenly dwelling)?

Therefore, it can clearly be stated that people are much concerned with the meaning of events which are happening in their individual, communal, national and international spectrum. *This meaning of the events* is so crucial that it may cause one to change his/her plan, decisions and way of life in general. The focus is not put only on today's life (this world dwelling) but the next life is highly considered give the situation and the individual understanding of the events and

its meanings and the time frame in individual life. In connection to the said factors, biblically speaking there is a need to understand the meaning of Matthew 24: 33 35.

1. What does “this generation” Stand for?

The great discourse on the end as according to Matthew 24 and 25 are told also in Mark 13 and Luke 21. It was about the destruction of Jerusalem, His coming, and the end of the world.²⁴⁾ It seems that Jesus had in mind two distinct events, separated by an interval of time, indicated by “these” in 24:34 and “that day” in 24:36.²⁵⁾ Some would explain “this generation”(24:34) to mean “this nation,” that is, the Jewish race shall not pass away until the Lord comes. The more common view is that He meant that Jerusalem would be destroyed within the life time of those then living.²⁶⁾

One of the above mentioned views as according to the Halley’s Bible Hand Book (the view that *this generation* meant *this nation*) will be rejected due to lack of substantial evidence to support its stance. A close look to the scriptures, it shows the multiple usage of the word “nation” either in its singular or plural form. With a word study being performed, there is no way we may speculate the interchangeable usage between the words generation and nation. In 24:7 the word *nation* in its singular form is used. While in 24:14 the word *nations* is

24) Halley’s Bible Had book with the New International Version(Zondervan Publishing House, 2000) p.607

25) Ibid.

26) Ibid.

mentioned in its plural form.

According to “Wikipedia” generation (from the Greek γενεά), also known as procreation, is the act of producing offspring.²⁷⁾ At the same time, according to Easton Bible Dictionary, the under listed are verses in the Bible with the word “generation” in its different usage. Genesis 2:4, “These are the generations,” means the “history.” 5:1, “The book of the generations,” means a family register, or history of Adam 37:2, “The generations of Jacob” = the history of Jacob and his descendants 7:1, “In this generation” = in this age.²⁸⁾ Psalms 49:19, “The generation of his fathers” = the dwelling of his fathers, i.e., the grave. Psalms 73:15, “The generation of thy children” = the contemporary race. Isaiah 53:8, “Who shall declare his generation?” = His manner of life who shall declare? or rather = His race, posterity, shall be so numerous that no one shall be able to declare it.²⁹⁾

In Matthew 1:17, the word means a succession or series of persons from the same stock. Matthew 3:7, “Generation of vipers” = brood of vipers 24:34, “*This generation*” = *the persons then living contemporary with Christ*. 1 Peter 2:9, “A chosen generation” = a chosen people.³⁰⁾ The Hebrews seem to have reckoned time by the generation. In the time of Abraham a generation was an hundred years, thus: Genesis 15:16, “In the fourth generation” = in four hundred years (Compare verse 13 and Exodus 12:40). In Deuteronomy 1:35 and 2:14 a

27) Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Generation> [accessed on November 12, 2008]

28) Crosswalk, <http://bible.crosswalk.com/Dictionaries/EastonsBibleDictionary/ebd.cgi> [accessed on November 21, 2008]

29) Ibid.

30) Ibid.

generation is a period of thirty eight years.³¹⁾

The above discussion has in some ways investigated the usage of the word "generation" from both old Testament and New Testament. As pointed earlier, the meaning of the word "*generation*" have significant impact in both interpretation and understanding the meaning of Matthew 24:33-35 in specific and Chapter 24 and 25 at large on the subject of "Signs of the End of the Age."

The mentioned discussion suggests that the word "generation" as applied to Matthew 24:33-35 is to be considered and used as "the persons then living contemporary with Christ. It should be noted that the word generation" is used in connection with the expression "these things" (New International Version Bible). Now here is the question, what does the expression "these things" denote?

2. What does "these things" stand for?

The Bible in Matthew 24:34 say, "I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened."(NIV) given the meaning of the word "generation" as mentioned in the previous paragraph, it is anticipated that "these things" stands for events that should happen within that generation namely "the persons then living contemporary with Jesus."

If we go back to the basic question given earlier, then stands a need to categorize the issues addressed by Jesus with regards to the questions raised by the Disciples. The Disciples asked two main

31) Ibid.

questions notably “when will this happen? And what will be the signs of your coming and of the end of the world? (Matthew 24:3 NIV)

The scripture in Matthew 24:1-2 gives us the first occurrence of the expression “*these things*.” In verse one: we see that the Disciples called Jesus’ attention to the *temple buildings*. With the usage of the expression of these things in verse 1&2 of Matthew 24, one will suggest that we need to trace its application in other verses used in the same chapter so as to draw a balanced conclusion of the issue under discussion. The expression “*all these things*” is mentioned in Matthew 24:2: 33&34. We need to establish whether or not does the expression share similar usage and meaning so as to draw a conclusion of the meaning intended.

According to the KJV New Testament Greek Lexicon the original word for *things* is “**tau'ta** and the transliterated word is **Tauta** and the phonetic word is **tau'tah** (nominative or accusative case neuter plural of) **pa'li** is the word use for “all” which is an Adjective which may mean each, every, all, the whole, every one, all things³²⁾ Reading from the Nestle Aland’s Greek English New Testament, the scriptures in Matthew 24:2 “Yn see all these, dovern not? Truln (I mean to ern, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.³³⁾ Jesus’ response was directed toward the disciples “point to him the buildings of the temple”.³⁴⁾ This imply that

32) Crosswalk, <http://bible1.crosswalk.com/Lexicons/Greek/grk.cgi?number=3956&version=kjv> [accessed on November 25, 2008]

33) Nestle Aland, Greek English New Testament(60 66th Thousand, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart, 8th printing, 2001), 68

34) Ibid., 68-71

when Jesus answered by saying “Yrn see all these, dovern not?”³⁵⁾ He was responding to the focus of the conversation as w, evas the context of that time which was the temple buildings. With the said explanation, the word “*all these*” (Nestle Aland) and “all these things”(NIV) as used in Matthew 24:2 implies the *temple buildings*.

The scripture in Matthew 24:33 “So also when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates.”³⁶⁾ This verse is preceded by a number of events which the Bible says will take place before the coming of Jesus. It’s therefore directly that the expression “*all these things*” is denoting the events.

Again the scripture in Matthew 24:34 “I tell you the truth: this generation will not pass away until “*all these things*” have happened.”(NIV) Even the ending of the scripture itself shows that what are due to happen are events. Therefore the expression “*all these things*” as applied in Matthew 24:34 means events.

The discussion allowed us to learn that the use of “all these” (Nestle - Aland) or “all these things” (NIV) as according to Matthew 24:2 is indicating “*the temple buildings*.” Meanwhile, the usage of “all these things” (NIV & Nestle - Aland) as according to Matthew 24:33: 34, indicate the events. However, the events themselves can be distinguished due to the use of the word “*generation*.”

With careful distinctions, one will come to recommend that one set of events has a limited time frame namely “this generation.” The other

35) Ibid.

36) Ibid.,70

set of events are to be progressive and they will come to an end marked by the arrival of Jesus himself. From the scriptures, it is indicated that the signs of Jesus' coming and of the end of the age are concomitant, Matthew 24:3 (NIV & Nestle - Aland). That being the case, then we are dealing with mainly two issues namely the "*temple destruction*" and "*Jesus' coming and the end of the age*".

3. Temple Destruction

During most of the last 2500 years, from the Babylonian exile through the New Testament era to the present, the majority of Jews have lived outside the land that God had given them.³⁷⁾ It was not until 1948 that Jews were able to return to Israel in large numbers and take political, economic, and social control of at least part of the land. It is worthy to note the historical background of the people of Israel in that: during the life of Jesus, Palestine had been uncharacteristically quiet, the Roman historian Tacitus, speaks of Palestine under Emperor Tiberius (A D 14-37), thus, almost with a sigh of relief, "peace under Tiberius!" But it was not to last.³⁸⁾ The rebuilding and beautifying of the temple in Jerusalem, begun by Herod the Great in 20 B.C., was finally completed, A D 64 sixty years after Herod's death.³⁹⁾ A mere two years later, the zealots, a fanatical Jewish sect, instigated a violent insurrection against Rome. In A.D. 70 the revolt was crushed, and

37) Halley's Bible Handbook with the New International Version (Zondervan Publishing House, 2000) p.1020

38) Ibid., 1022

39) Ibid.,

Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed.⁴⁰⁾

There have been several military engagements between the Jews and the Romans: the Roman general Pompey subdued Judaea in 63 BCE (after which it became a client kingdom) in 6 CE, the emperor Augustus deposed King Archelaus, and his governor of Syria, Quirinius, established the province of Judaea (which became a prefecture) in 66, a serious rebellion started, which led to the destruction of the Temple (September 70): this war was described by Flavius Josephus in his *Jewish War*.⁴¹⁾

The above historical records stand as a proof of the fulfillment of the prophecy given by Jesus in Matthew 24:1-2 concerning the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus' words concerning Jerusalem were fulfilled, literally, in less than 40 years.⁴²⁾ The magnificent buildings of marble and gold were so completely demolished by the Roman Army in A.D. 70 that Josephus said it looked as if its site had never been inhabited.⁴³⁾

After many days of fighting, a council of war was called by Rome to decide the fate of the Sanctuary. Six chief generals of the army advised the destruction of the temple and Titus agreed to it. His army went out of control, and penetrated all the way into the Holy of Holies.⁴⁴⁾ There were many people hiding out in the Sanctuary, and those

40) Ibid.

41) Wars between the Jews and Romans: the destruction of Jerusalem (70 CE)

http://www.livius.org/ja_jn/jewish_wars/jwar04.html (Accessed on 2008 12 10)

42) Halley's Bible Handbook with the New International Version (Zondervan Publishing House, 2000) p.608

43) Ibid.

44) Abomination of Desolation <http://www.geocities.com/Nashville/Opry/2092/Destruct.html#>

who could not stand the thought of living without their beloved temple threw themselves into the burning mass. Many others hid in the inner court. They had been promised by the smooth words of the false prophets, the priests (Matthew 24:11), that God would save them by a miracle at the very moment of destruction. Of course, that did not happen.⁴⁵⁾

The Romans slew about six thousand on the spot. The temple was totally burned, and only smoldering rubble remained along with the western wall. Those priests who did escape to the wall went without food for days, and finally had to surrender, and Titus ordered them killed. He said, "Priests must fall with their Temple."⁴⁶⁾

The Roman standard was raised in the ruins, and they sacrificed to their pagan gods in the Holy Place. Speaking of A.D. 70, Eusebius said: "at last the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophets was implanted in the very temple of God."⁴⁷⁾

4. The End of the Age and the Coming of Jesus

The scriptures in Matthew 24:27-28 indicates that the coming of Jesus will be like surprise without prior notice. Likewise, Matthew 24:36-44 gives an account of the event of the second coming of Jesus. The most striking verse is 44 which says "Therefore you also must be ready; for the son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect"

Abomination [accessed on December 10, 2008]

45) Ibid.

46) Ibid.

47) Ibid.

(RSV)

Jesus promised His disciples He would come again. It's in the Bible, John 14:1-3, TLB. "Let not your heart be troubled. You are trusting God, now trust in Me. There are many homes up there where my Father lives and I am going to prepare them for your coming. When everything is ready, then I will come and get you, so that you can always be with Me where I am. If this weren't so, I would tell you plainly. And you know where I am going and how to get there."⁴⁸⁾

The angels promised Jesus would come again. *It's in the Bible*, Acts 1:10-11, TLB. "It was not long afterwards that He rose into the sky and disappeared into a cloud, leaving them staring after Him. As they were straining their eyes for another glimpse, suddenly two white robed men were standing there among them, and said, Men of Galilee, why are you standing here staring at the sky? Jesus has gone away to heaven, and some day, just as He went, He will return!"⁴⁹⁾

How will Jesus come again? *It's in the Bible*, Luke 21:27, NIV. "At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." How many will see Him when He comes? Revelation 1:7, NIV. "Look, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of Him."

What will we see and hear when He comes? I Thessalonians 4:16-17, NIV. "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet

48) Bibleinfo: Second Cong of Jesus, <http://en.bibleinfo.com/topics/topic.html?id=263>
[accessed on December 16, 2008]

49) Ibid.

call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”⁵⁰⁾ The Gospel according to Saint Matthew 24:27, explains how visible will the Lord be at His second coming “For as the lightening comes from the east and flashes to the west, so will be the coming of the Son of man.”(NIV)

The Lord Jesus Christ gave warnings against the coming of false Prophets and False *Christs*. Matthew 24:23-26 reads, “At that time if anyone says to you, Look, here is the Christ! Or There He is! Do not believe it. False Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect if that were possible. See, I have told you ahead of time. So if anyone tells you, ‘There He is, out in the desert,’ do not go out; or, ‘Here He is, in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it.”(NIV)

Does anyone know the exact time of Christ’s coming? *It’s in the Bible*, Matthew 24:36, NIV. “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” Knowing how human it is to procrastinate, what does Christ tell us to do? *It’s in the Bible*, Matthew 24:42, NIV. “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.”

What warning has Christ given that we might not be taken by surprise by this great event? *The scripture*, Luke 21:34-36, TLB. “Watch out! Don’t let My sudden coming catch you unawares: don’t let Me find you living in careless ease, carousing and drinkingwares: occupieMy sudden cproblems of this life, like all the rest of the world.

50) Ibid.

Keep a constant watch.”

5. The Second coming of Jesus

Mark 13:10 “And the gospel must first be preached unto all the nations. *And the gospel must first be preached unto all the nations.* Paul says that this was done (Colossians 1:23). Of course the language of both Jesus and Paul must be understood with reference to the geography of the earth as then known. Paul’s declaration was written about the year A.D. 63, or seven years before the destruction of Jerusalem. His meaning is not that every creature had actually heard the gospel, but that each had been given an opportunity to hear because the gospel had been so universally preached.”⁵¹⁾

It is empirical that first Jesus must come and then the end of the world will be affected by the same. In this juncture, it will be to our interest to briefly pinpoint on the issue of the second coming of Jesus. According to commentaries listed under crosswalk, the under listed information may help explain the second coming of Jesus:

“*The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light.* The language is that of the ancient prophets. See Amos 8:9; Joel 2:30, 31 Ezekiel 32:7, 8. Compare also Revelation 6:12 14. Some regard the language as metaphorical, indicating the eclipse of nations and the downfall of rulers, but there are many similar passages of Scripture which constrain us to regard the language here as literal rather than

51) Crosswalk, <http://bible1.crosswalk.com/Commentaries/TheFourfoldGospel/tfg.cgi?book=mr&chapter=13#10> [accessed on December 16, 2008]

figurative. See Hebrews 1:12; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 20:11.”⁵²⁾

At the same time, the scripture gives other signal which will serve as an indicator for the second coming of Jesus. According to the crosswalk, the fig tree becoming tender in its leaves signify the change of season or conditions:

Mark 13:28 Now from the fig tree learn her parable: when her branch is now become tender, and putteth forth its leaves, ye know that the summer is nigh *Ye know that the summer is nigh*. As the change of the season in the natural world has its preliminary signs, so the change of conditions in the spiritual realm has its premonitory symptoms. When men see the symptoms which Jesus had described, they will recognize that changes are coming as to the nature of which they can only guess.⁵³⁾

Nevertheless, it should be clearly known that the signs gives only indications but does not contain exactness or accuracy on the timing. The under listed/quoted information demonstrates the fact that the timing of the coming Jesus remains unknown:

“*But of that day or that hour knoweth no one, not even the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father*. These words indicate the profound secrecy in which God has concealed the hour of judgment. It is concealed from all people, that each generation may live in expectation of its fulfillment, and we are to watch for the signs,

52) Ibid.

53) Ibid.

though we may not fully know the times. They also indicate that either by reason of his assumption of our human nature, or by a voluntary act on his part, the knowledge of Jesus became in some respects circumscribed. They also suggest that it is not only idle, but also presumptuous, for men to strive to find out by mathematical calculation and expositions of prophecy that which the Son of God did not know.”⁵⁴⁾

The issue which deserve to be mentioned as far as the second coming of Jesus is concerned is that of rapture. Addressing the question “what is the rapture of the Church? The organization named got questions” respond as follows:

“The concept of the Rapture, though, is clearly taught in Scripture. The Rapture of the church is the event in which God removes all believers from the earth in order to make way for His righteous judgment to be poured out on the earth during the Tribulation period. The Rapture is described primarily in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:50-54. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 describes the Rapture as God resurrecting all believers who have died, giving them glorified bodies, and then departing the earth with those believers who were still alive, who have also been given glorified bodies. “For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in

54) Ibid.

the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever” (1 Thessalonians 4:16 17).”⁵⁵⁾ Explaining the difference between rapture and the second coming of Jesus: the followings are the given details:

The Rapture is when Jesus Christ returns to remove the church (all believers in Christ) from the earth. The Rapture is described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 18 and 1 Corinthians 15:50 54. Believers who have died will have their bodies resurrected, and along with believers who are still living will meet the Lord in the air. This will all occur in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye. The Second Coming is when Jesus returns to defeat the antichrist, destroy evil, and establish His Millennial Kingdom. The Second Coming is described in Revelation 19:11 16.⁵⁶⁾

The followings are important difference between the Rapture and the Second coming of Jesus:⁵⁷⁾ At the Rapture, believers meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17). At the Second Coming, believers return with the Lord to the earth (Revelation 19:14). The Second Coming occurs after the great and terrible Tribulation (Revelation ripters 6 19). The Rapture occurs before the Tribulation (1 Thessalonians 5:9; Revelation 3:10).The Rapture is the removariptebelievers from the earth as an actiptedeliverance (1 Thessalonians 4:13 17; 5:9). The Second Coming inheudes the removaripteunbelievers as an actiptejudgment (Matthew 24:40 41).The Rapture ians 4:1 “he ret” and instant (1 Corinthians 15:50 54). The Second Coming ians 4:1visible to ans (Revelation 1:7; Matthew 24:29 30). The Second Coming ofe occurs

55) What is Rapture of the Church, <http://www.gotquestions.org/rapture.html> [accessed on December 17, 2008]

56) Ibid.

57) Ibid.

before not occur until after certain appointed times which take place (2 Thessalonians 2:4; Matthew 24:15-30; Revelation chapters 6-18). The Rapture is imminent: it could take place at any moment (Titus 2:13; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:50-54).

"The Rapture and Second Coming are similar but separate events. Both involve Jesus returning. Both are end-time events. However, it is especially important to recognize the differences. In summary, the Rapture is the return of the church to the earth after the Rapture of the church from the earth before the time of God's wrath. The Second Coming is the return of Christ to the earth to bring the Tribulation to an end and to defeat the antichrist and his evil world empire."⁵⁸⁾

The Halley's Bible Handbook suggests that "it is best not to be too dogmatic about the second coming of Jesus and the events surrounding His coming. But if language is the vehicle of thoughts at all, it certainly takes a good deal of explaining and interpreting to make anything else of Jesus' words than that He Himself looked forward to His coming again as a definite historical event in which he will personally and literally appear together to Himself and to eternal glory those who have been redeemed by His blood."⁵⁹⁾

5. The meaning of Matthew 24:1-36

The accounts of the Bible either narratives, parables and teachings consists of the past, present and future time frame. The past presents

58) Ibid.

59) Halley's Bible Handbook with the New International Version (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 609

us with history, the present confronts us with events which in one way or the other may project or facilitate in the shaping of the future. In consideration of human history, one may ask: where are we from? Where are we now? And where are we heading to?

The objective of this study was mentioned as a search on how to understand Matthew 24:1-36. The main words or clue words were selected as "this generation" and "these things." The understanding of the mentioned words will facilitate the clear and the most probable interpretation of the scripture in discussion.

In the course of the discussion, it was established that: the great discourse is about the destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus' coming, and the end of the world.⁶⁰⁾ It seems that Jesus had in mind two distinct events, separated by an interval of time, indicated by "these" in 24:34 and "that day" in 24:36.⁶¹⁾ Some would explain "this generation" (24:34) to mean "this nation," that is, the Jewish race shall not pass away until the Lord comes. The more common view is that He meant that Jerusalem would be destroyed within the life time of those then living.⁶²⁾

One of the above mentioned views as according to the Halley's Bible Hand Book (the view that *this generation* meant *this nation*) will be rejected due to lack of substantial evidence to support its stance. A close look to the scriptures, it shows the multiple usage of the word "nation" either in its singular or plural form. With a word study being performed, there is no way we may speculate the interchangeable

60) Ibid., 607

61) Ibid.

62) Ibid.

usage between the words generation and nation. In 24:7 the word *nation* in its singular form is used. While in 24:14 the word *nations* is mentioned in its plural form. Therefore, the word “generation” will be used to mean “the people then living at the time of Jesus.”

Likewise, the usage of the phrase “these things” was mentioned to be of vital importance in drawing a correct meaning of on the subject matter. Basically, the whole narrative is due to the questions raised by the Disciples. If we go back to the basic questions, then stands a need to categorize the issues addressed by Jesus with regards to the questions raised by the Disciples. The Disciples asked two main questions notably “when will this happen? And what will be the signs of your coming and of the end of the world?” (Matthew 24:3 NIV)

The expression “*all these things*” is mentioned in Matthew 24:2; 33&34. With the discussion undertaken, one can draw a conclusion that the phrase “all these things” does not indicate the same usage. The Nestle Aland’s Greek English New Testament: quote the scriptures in Matthew 24:2 as “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.”⁶³⁾ Jesus’ response was directed toward the disciples “point to him the buildings of the temple.”⁶⁴⁾ This implies that when Jesus answered by saying “You see all these, do you not?”⁶⁵⁾ he was responding to the focus of the conversation as well as the context of that time which was the temple buildings. With the said explanation,

63) Nestle Aland, Greek English New Testament (60 66th Thousand, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart, 8th printing, 2001), 68 71

64) Ibid.

65) Ibid.

the word “*all these*” (Nestle Aland) and “all these things”(NIV) as used in Matthew 24:2 implies the *temple buildings*.

Furthermore, the scripture in Matthew 24:33 “So also when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates.”⁶⁶⁾ This verse is preceded by a number of events which the Bible says will take place before the coming of Jesus. It’s therefore directly that the expression “*all these things*” is denoting “*the events*.”

Again the scripture in Matthew 24:34 “I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass away until “*all these things*” have happened.” (NIV) Even the ending of the scripture itself shows that what are due to happen are events. Therefore the expression “*all these things*” as applied in Matthew 24:34 means events.

The discussion allowed us to learn that the use of “all these (Nestle - Aland) or “all these things” (NIV) as according to Matthew 24:2 is indicating “*the temple buildings*.” Meanwhile, the use of the phrase “all these things” (NIV & Nestle - Aland) as according to (Matthew 24:33: 34), shows to indicate the events. However, the events themselves can be distinguished due to the use of the word “*generation*.”

With the objectives of this study, one will not fall short of recommending that: the events presented can be put into two segments. One set of events has a limited time frame namely “this generation.” The other set of events are to be progressive and they will come to an end marked by the arrival of Jesus himself as the

66) Ibid.

scriptures, indicates that the signs of Jesus' coming and of the end of the age are concomitant, Matthew 24:3 (NIV & Nestle - Aland) That being the case, then, Matthew 24:1-36 deals with mainly two issues namely the "*temple destruction*" and "*Jesus' coming and the end of the age*".

6. The African non hermeneutical speculative meaning of Matthew 24:1-34

The first and most important issue in African non hermeneutical speculative interpretation of Matthew 24:1-34 is the notion that, this portion of scriptures is dealing with one issue namely the end of the world. However, as demonstrated above, above, above, portion deals with temple destruction and "Jesus' coming and the end of the age."

Second, due to lack of training, the African non hermeneutical speculative interpretation overlook the word "these things" as used in verse 1-2 (temple buildings) in comparison with its application and meaning in verse 33-34 (events) and hence the source of misguided meaning.

Finally, with other limitations in the African non hermeneutical speculative interpretation is the issue of giving the meaning to the scripture as according to one's thinking. What the Pastor or teacher will think or imagine to be the most probable meaning after dedicated prayer, he/she will teach that to the congregation with confidence and firmness. This stands as an overdue need to be addressed in African Christianity. Theological training is a necessity for progress and health

of the church in Africa.

V. The Importance of Hermeneutics in African Christianity

Africans need the interpretation of the Bible which speak to the hopes and fear and pressing issues of the people.⁶⁷⁾ The world of the Bible did not vanish two or three thousand years ago. People discover that it is for them a world of yesterday, and today, a world of their own lives and communities. It is a living portrait of their cultures and experiences, of their history and geography, of their fears and expectations and of their spiritual longing.⁶⁸⁾

The publication of African translations of the Bible, made it possible for the African to differentiate missions and scriptures. In the scriptures, therefore, African Christians gradually began to detect a basic discrepancy between missions and scriptures on what were to them a major point of conflict, namely the traditional customs being attacked by missions⁶⁹⁾ It is important to note that the translation of the Bible into African languages gave access to majority to be able to read and understand the Scriptures. Nevertheless, there were no much efforts to educate Africans to make them experts in Bible related disciplines so as to equip African scholars who will better serve their people. In the late 1950s, a missionary and teacher at *Hartzell*

67) The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories, and Trends http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/4771_4928.pdf [accessed on April 13, 2009]

68) John S. Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity* (Nairobi, oxford University Press, 1986), 27

69) *Ibid.*, 30

Theological Seminary told his class that systematic theology as a formal discipline had not been taught or taken seriously at that Seminary until 1948, because the Methodist missionaries were not sure that Africans would grasp theological concepts.⁷⁰⁾

The training program of early African evangelists, or pastors teachers had special emphasis on the Bible: by 1919 the emphasis in training of the pastor teachers was on Bible study, memorizing scriptures was hymn singing.⁷¹⁾ As mentioned, there was no systematic theology, no hermeneutics and other theological discipline. This explains why Africa follows from a distance in terms of advanced knowledge in theology and other related disciplines. Although the Bible remains as a compass for theology and other related, there is an urgent need for theological training especially hermeneutics for healthy church theology. We avoid that syncretism was heresy in the church if we know our own doctrine for healthy church as hermeneutics stands out as heavenly and only tool to use in this regard. Therefore, hermeneutics stands as a determinant factor for life, sustenance and positive progress of the church in Africa.

VI. Concluding Remarks

The church in Africa has the Bible as its compass for the life here on earth and the journey to heaven. We acknowledge both the importance

70) John Wesley Z. Kurewa.,14

71) Ibid.,13

and the need of Bible interpretation in the church and Christian life. However, we refuse the imported interpretation which is imposed to us mechanically. If God revealed Himself to the westerners, He cannot fail to do the same to us. We need hermeneutics as a tool to unveil the scriptures but the task of interpretation which as to consider our context, culture etc. is to be left to us. Therefore, if the revival we have in Africa has to bear long lasting fruits in advancing Christianity, theological training should be given to ministers and hermeneutics is not an option but a necessity.

<국문 초록>

아프리카에서의 성경과 해석

하나님의 말씀은 살았고 운동력이 있어 좌우에 날선 어떤 검보다도 예리하여 혼과 영과 및 관절과 골수를 찔러 쪼개기까지 하며 또 마음의 생각과 뜻을 감찰하나니. (히브리서 4:12) 이 말씀은 아프리카 기독교가 성경을 받아들이고 이해하는 근간이자 핵심이다. 하나님의 말씀은 별도의 해석이나 미사여구 없이도 이해할 수 있으며 기능할 수 있지만, 성경의 일부분은 온전한 해석과 일상생활에서의 실천을 위해서 심도 있는 해석을 필요로 하는 것이 사실이다. 이에 대해 아프리카인들은 필연적으로 “성경 말씀을 바로 이해하는 데에는 과연 어느 정도의 해석이 필요인가?”라는 질문을 던지게 된다.

아프리카의 기독교 성도들은 일반적으로 교리적인 해석과는 관계없이 성경을 접한다. 그들은 일상생활에서의 가르침을 얻기 위해 아침이나 혹은 저녁에 성경을 읽는다. 성도들은 “살인하지 말지니라”, 혹은 “남의 물건을 탐하지 말지니라”와 같은 말씀과 계율을 이해하고 따르는 데에는 아무런 제약이 없지만, 그 말씀 안에 담겨 있는 표면적인 의미를 초월한 교의(敎義)를 이해하는 데에는 추가적인 학습과 해석학에 기반한 학습법을 필요로 하는 것이 사실이다.

성경은 아프리카 기독교의 핵심이자 나침반적 역할을 하고 있지만, 영적으로 건강한 아프리카의 교회의 양육을 위해서는 성경의 올바른 교리적 해석을 위한 신학적 교육이 절실히 필요하다. 교회 내의 혼합주의와 이단적 해석의 척결은 성경에 대한 명료한 해석과 그에서 비롯되는 교리만을 통해 가능할 것이다. 이처럼 해석 이론은 아프리카 교회의 생명과

지속성에 필수불가결한 요소이며, 이를 도구화하여 아프리카의 사회문화적 맥락을 고려한 성경의 올바른 접근을 이끌어내는 것이 아프리카 기독교인들의 과제인 것이다. 따라서 현재 아프리카 교회의 부흥이 기독교의 장기적이고 지속적인 결실로 맺어지기 위해서는, 목회자들을 대상으로 한 신학적, 해석적 훈련은 선택이 아닌 필수사항이라 하겠다.

Key words : 해석학

<Reference>

- Abomination of Desolation, <http://www.geocities.com/Nashville/Opry/2092/Destruct.html#Abomination> [accessed on December 10, 2008]
- Aland, Nestle. Greek- English New Testament (60-66th Thousand, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart, 8th printing, 2001.
- Bibleinfo: Second Cong of Jesus, <http://en.bibleinfo.com/topics/topic.html?id=263> [accessed on December 16, 2008.
- Crosswalk, <http://bible1.crosswalk.com/Commentaries/TheFourfoldGospel/tfg.cgi?book=mr&chapter=13#10> [accessed on December 16, 2008]
- Crosswalk, <http://bible.crosswalk.com/Dictionaries/EastonsBibleDictionary/ebd.cgi> [accessed on November 21, 2008]
- Crosswalk, <http://bible1.crosswalk.com/Lexicons/Greek/grk.cgi?number=3956&version=kjv> [accessed on November 25,2008]
- Halley's Bible Handbook with the New International Version (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000.
- Kurewa, John Wesley Z. Biblical Proclamation for Africa Today(Nashville: Abingdon Press,1995.
- Mbiti, John S. Bible and Theology in African Christianity (Nairobi: oxford University Press, 1986.
- Palmer, Richard E. Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer. Evanston: Northwestern University Press,1969.
- The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories, and Trends, http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/4771_4928.pdf [accessed on April 13, 2009]
- Vanhooser, Kevin J. First Theology: God, Scripture & Hermeneutics. Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity press, 2002.
- Wars between the Jews and Romans: the destruction of Jerusalem (70 CE), http://www.livius.org/ja-jn/jewish_wars/jwar04.html (Accessed on 2008-12-10)

What is Rapture of the Church, <http://www.gotquestions.org/rapture.html>
[accessed on December 17, 2008]

Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Generation> [accessed on November 12,
2008]