

Unveiling the Russia–Ukraine war nexuses to the birthpangs in Matthew 24:1–26



Author:

Chidinma P. Ukeachusim^{1,2}

Affiliations:

¹Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

²Department of New Testament and Related Literature, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Chidinma Ukeachusim,
chidinma.ukeachusim@unn.edu.ng

Dates:

Received: 29 Oct. 2024

Accepted: 03 Dec. 2024

Published: 05 Mar. 2025

How to cite this article:

Ukeachusim, C.P., 2025, 'Unveiling the Russia–Ukraine war nexuses to the birthpangs in Matthew 24:1–26', *In die Skriflig* 59(1), a3143. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v59i1.3143>

Copyright:

© 2025. The Author.
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

Wars and rumours of wars have occurred worldwide since time immemorial. After the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, wars [πολέμους] and rumours of wars [ἀκοὰς πολέμων] and other events enlisted in the Olivet–prophecy are now being theologically re-interpreted to be eschatological birthpangs. Many Christians around the globe do not understand the peculiar nexuses that exist between each ongoing war and news of wars as well as the apocalyptic views and teachings of Jesus in the Olivet–prophecy. Because of the lack of understanding many have about wars and rumours about wars, it is significant to study the didactic Matthean Gospel's redacted account of the Markan eschatological sermon, and thereby unveil the peculiar nexuses that the ongoing war and news between Russia and Ukraine have with Jesus' eschatological views and teachings. Therefore, the main concern of this study is whether the Russia–Ukraine war and its rumours of war have nexuses with Jesus' presaged biblical eschatological birthpangs, as redacted by Matthew the theological redactor. The study adopted the exegetical design and specifically employed the redaction method of Bible criticism to study Matthew 24:1–26, focusing on unveiling whether there are peculiar nexuses and theological implications that the ongoing Russia–Ukraine war and its news have with the eschatological views and teachings of Jesus. The results drawn from the exegetical study of Matthew 24:1–26 when applied to the war that started on 24 February 2022 and is still ongoing between Russia and Ukraine revealed that there are nexuses that relate them to the apocalyptic views and teachings of Jesus as preached and preserved by Mark and redacted by Matthew. Such nexuses have theological implications for Christians being troubled by this war and other intensifying wars and rumours of wars and how to understand these. The highlighted theological essence and engagement help to discern whether the nexuses underline the peculiar understanding Christians should have regarding their response to the ongoing Russia–Ukraine war.

Contribution: This study unveiled that the ongoing conflicts and war between Russia and Ukraine have peculiar nexuses with the theological underlined characteristics of the eschatological birthpangs Jesus enlisted in the Olivet–prophecy. With special reference to the Russia–Ukraine war, the study unveils the theological implications that manifest due to the nexuses the Russia–Ukraine conflicts and war have as merely eschatological birthpangs.

Keywords: Matthew 24:1–26; wars and rumours of wars; eschatological prophecy and birthpangs; Russia–Ukraine war; Christians; Russia; Ukraine.

Introduction

The ongoing military invasion of Ukraine by the Russian military on 24 February 2022 developed into a war with paroxysmal impacts. Many people in the world are desirous to know how to understand and explain this war (Bailey 2022; Laurie 2022; Smith 2022; The Economist 2022; Ukeachusim 2023a). The theological question is whether there are nexuses that the Russia–Ukraine war and its news have with the eschatological war and rumours which Jesus presaged to be among the eschatological birthpang events. This question is significant and should be theologically explored because many Christians in Ukraine and Russia, and Christians in war and tranquil zones elsewhere in the world, are not knowledgeable on how they should view the conflicts and war peculiarities and how to respond to the conflicts and wars that are going on in diverse places in the world (Ukeachusim 2023a; Watson & Jenkins 1983:182).

The redaction method is used in gospel criticism to describe the editorial work which each Gospel evangelist imposed on the sources they used to compose their gospels, with which each evangelist

Read online:



Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

advances or consolidates their theological stance (Smalley 1977:181). The redaction method of studying biblical texts focuses the query of the exegete on exploring and unveiling the thoughts and agendas of each gospel evangelist (Catchpole 1997:167–188; Chinwokwu 2015:43). The redaction method unveils the main situations in life and the theological motif for which each synoptic author redacted their sources (McKnight & Malbon 1994; Osborne 1977) to compose each gospel. With their gospels, they addressed the specific situations of their Christian communities (Kudasiewicz 1986:11). Therefore, this study employs the redaction method in exploring Matthew 24:1–26, to unveil the eschatological characteristic nexuses and the theological implications which the ‘wars and rumours of wars’ Jesus enlisted, among other eschatological birthpang events in the Olivet–prophecy, have with the peculiarities of the ongoing Russia–Ukraine war. The study found that although wars and rumours of war have been occurring in the world before the advent of Jesus, in these last days, however, the Russia–Ukraine war and rumours of other wars have peculiar nexuses and theological implications with the characteristics of the eschatological birthpang events Jesus presaged. The understanding of these events will persuade Christians to respond righteously to each of these eschatological birthpangs.

The Matthean accent in Matthew 24:1–26 and the need for a Matthean redaction of the Markan narrative of Jesus’ eschatological view and teaching

Inherent in the sequence in Matthew 24 are indicators of the occurrences in his day that persuaded Matthew to use the sermon he probably composed from the eschatological views and the teachings of Jesus, as firstly composed by Mark, to re-indoctrinate (Ituma 2021:78, 86–88) his original and future audiences. The *Sitz-im-Leben* that underlies and accounts for the need and relevancies of Matthew’s redaction of the Markan account of Jesus’ Olivet–prophecy with which he reindocinated disciples in his Christian community includes the following 10 aspects:

- During ‘the time of Jesus’ (Chinwokwu 2015:105; Watson & Jenkins 1983:181) in the 1st-century era, there were monuments that existed and occurrences that appeared to be contrary to the apocalyptic prophecies as contained in the Old Testament (Mt 24:1) and the eschatological prophecy (Mt 23:38), views and teachings of Jesus. Hence the revealed Matthean accent like ‘ἀμὴν’ [*amen, truly, or verily*] in Matthew 24:2, which only Jesus uses authoritatively to consolidate his view, prophecies and teachings (Mt 24:34–35; Omanson 2003:56).
- After the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the disciples were highly nursing eschatological curiosities and anxieties, and they were possibly enthusiastic (Brown 2014:198) and presuming that the end was already near (Fenton 1963:383). They were curious to be told the exact day and hour when the world would consummate and the promised *Parousia* of Jesus would materialise (Mt 24:2, 36) (Ukeachusim 2024a). There were also the need and quests for divine oracles or prophets (Mt 24:2–3a) and many were approaching to hear authoritative information and practical directions on how they were to be responding to the prophesied eschatological intensifying developments (Mt 24:16–20). Therefore, Matthew’s ecclesiastical focus (Chinwokwu 2015:84), and the ever-relevancy of his emphatic warnings about the possibility of even the elects being deceived (Mt 24:4), reveal the many empathic references to pseudo-prophets and pseudo-Christes that were then leading the people astray (Mt 24:5, 11, 23–24, 26; Brown 2014:198).
- The Jews (including the disciples) were ruled by the Roman Empire and were conscious of the presence of the Roman military (Thompson 1986:299–302). Hence, they were expecting the coming of the promised Messiah whose messiahship roles would lead up to the end of the world as it was then known (Mt 24:3b; Ituma 2021:32; Watson & Jenkins 1983:181). The disciples were expecting the promised imminent *παρουσία* [*Parousia*] of Jesus. He promised that it would occur assuredly in their generation, hence the disciples were more tended to be curious about eschatological prophecies and could easily be deceived (Mt 24:3c). Consequently, Matthew saw the need to re-indoctrinate his audiences about their wrong understanding about the imminent return of Jesus (Fenton 1963:21); therefore in his re-indoctrination, he relaxes the eschatological curiosities and tension (Ituma 2021:78–85).
- There had been war prediction fulfilments, occurrences of wars and rumours of wars (Watson & Jenkins 1983:181), and many people experiencing sorrows had reasons to be troubled as they were erroneously thinking that such occurrences would lead up to the end of the world (Mt 24:6–8; Fenton 1963:383).
- After the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, the world did not come to an end, as the Jews presumed. Therefore, there was a need for apostolic re-indoctrination since the promised *Parousia* appears to be delayed (Ituma 2021:84–86, 88); therefore, Matthew used the eschatological view and the teaching of Jesus to ground and advance those intensifying sorrowful events as being merely the beginning of birthpangs (Mt 24:8; Ukeachusim 2023a) as Jesus presaged about his promised *Parousia* (Ukeachusim 2024a).
- The disciples, like other Jews, were experiencing pangs of being hated, afflicted and killed alongside the intensification of wars, rumours of wars and other eschatological birthpangs. Therefore, they needed to know about the nexuses that will keep featuring, as the eschatological birthpangs will be intensifying (Mt 24:3–15). They should specifically know that they would be hated, afflicted and at the extreme killed for the sake of Jesus’ name (Mt 24:9).
- For diverse reasons, many professing disciples had reasons to offend and to be offended (Matcalfe 1995:38), to hate and betray one another (Mt 24:10). There was also intensifying lawlessness, and the agape-affection disciples were supposed to be manifesting vertically and horizontally were growing cold (Ituma 2021:68–69).

- With all the sufferings and tribulations (Mt 24:9) that were intensifying, the individual disciples needed to endure to the end to be graced, to access both the present and the future salvation (Mt 24:13–14; Watson & Jenkins 1983:181–182).
- The disciples were confronted with the paroxysms and twinges from the eschatological birthpangs in the form of conflicts (Ukeachusim 2023a), natural disasters and pandemics (Ukeachusim 2023b) with the nearness of Jesus' promised *Parousia* (Ukeachusim 2024a); and persecution was accruing because of their identification with Jesus (Ukeachusim 2022:1). Therefore they needed to be cognisant about the theological significance of the Church's mandate of preaching the gospel of the kingdom concerning the envisaged end of the world, which consolidates the need for the disciples to be preaching the gospel (Mt 24:14).
- Lastly, the earliest disciples were Jews (Ituma 2021:63–64) who were most probably acquainted with the history of the wars and desolations that occurred in the times of the Old Testament (Thompson 1986:299–310). They may have been reading of the desolations that were prophesied to occur before the end of the world would materialise (Fenton 1963:383); they were to be conscious of seeing the nexuses that exist between the eschatological prophecies and the occurrences of each eschatological birthpang as they read the prophetic writings with understanding (Mt 23:38, 24:15) and thereby be informed on how they are to be responding to each intensifying eschatological birthpangs (Mt 24:16–20).

Matthew was an author and a redactor with a theological focus. He redacted the apocalyptic views and teachings of Jesus as preached and preserved by the evangelist Mark (Mk 13), with which he responded to the situations in the lives of the disciples in his Christian community (Brown 2014:198).

How Matthew, the theological redactor, redacted Mark's eschatological sermon in Mark 13

The eschatological teaching of Jesus which Matthew preserved is presumably sourced from 'Mark' and 'Q' and another source peculiar to him, labelled 'M' (Chinwokwu 2015:27). Since the narrative of Matthew is longer than the Markan version, it is advanced that Matthew redacted the Markan source presumed to be the prime source, by adding more emphatic elements he got from the 'Q' source (the presumed lost authentic sayings of Jesus) and the 'M' source peculiar to him. Matthew 24 is one of the chapters that are believed to be copied from Mark (Fenton 1963:12–13). Mark narrated his version of Jesus' apocalyptic view embedded in his eschatological teaching or message in a shorter length (37 verses), while those of Matthew, the theological redactor, contains an extended version of the narrative (51 verses) as he added other eschatological elements that reveal the essence of his theological redaction of the eschatological view of Jesus, additional to what was composed by Mark. Matthew responded to the situation in the life of the disciples in his Christian community.

The narratives of Matthew 24 and Mark 13 have striking similarities (Mt 24:2, cf. Mk 13:2; Mt 24:4–5, cf. Mk 13:5–6; Mt 24:6–8, cf. Mk 13:7–8; Mt 24:8, cf. Mk 13:8; Mt 24:13, cf. Mk 13:13b); however, some differences can be accounted for by Matthean redactorial elements. For instance, while Mark said it was 'one disciple' (Mk 24:1), Matthew revises this and says that it was 'his disciples' (Mk 13:1) that showed Jesus the buildings of the temple. Also, Mark named four disciples as those who asked Jesus eschatological questions (Mk 13:3), but Matthew for theological reasons, preserved 'the disciples', implying that all the disciples had eschatological curiosities and asked Jesus to tell them 'when' the eschatological prophecies shall materialise, and 'what' shall be the sign of his *Parousia* and the end of the world (Mt 24:3). While Mark simply states Jesus' prophesy that every stone used in the building of the temple shall be destroyed, Matthew revises the Markan account by adding 'ἀμήν' [*amen* or *verily*] which only Jesus in the gospels uses authoritatively to advance that his prophecy or saying must surely be fulfilled (Mt 5:18; 34–35; Omanson 2003:56–57). Matthew alters Mark's eschatological sermon preserved in Mark 13:4 to refer to or to add the coming [*παρουσίας*] and consummation [*συντελείας*] of the age (Chinwokwu 2015:85). Matthew is especially enthused about the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies in Jesus' ontology and function; hence he interposes with 'the stories about Jesus' his accented stereotyped emphasis on the promise and fulfilment formulae (Chinwokwu 2015:82–83; Fenton 1963:17–19). Matthew is the only gospel writer who uses the technical accent, *παρουσία* [*Parousia*], to refer to the promised coming of Jesus (Mt 24:3, 27, 37, 39), while Mark focused on 'these things', which refers to 'when' and 'what' shall be the sign of the prophesied destruction of the temple (Mk 13:4). Similarly, Mark and Matthew use Jesus' authentic words to inform their audiences that many will come in Jesus' name and shall deceive many, and relate 'wars and rumours of wars' and all other eschatological events to be 'the beginning of sorrows' in Mark, but 'merely the beginning of sorrows' in Matthew (Mt 24:5–8; Mk 13:6–8).

Concerning mission, Mark continues his narration by using the imperative words of Jesus to warn the disciples to take heed, for they will be delivered to courts, synagogues, governors and kings and be persecuted as a testimony against them (Mk 13:9), while Matthew interposes what should be happening to the disciples of Jesus as wars and other eschatological events will be intensifying (Fenton 1963:384). Matthew, focusing on the church, emphasises that the disciples as the ἐκλεκτός [called-out] Israelites, as the 'new Israel' (Ituma 2021:57), will be afflicted by being hated and possibly being killed by all nations for Jesus' sake (Mt 24:9 = Mk 13:9). Mark narrates that as the disciples will be persecuted by all nations (Mk 13:10) concerning the mission-mandate of the church for Jesus' sake (Mk 13:13), they should not border on what they should say, for πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον [the Holy Spirit] will speak through them (Mk 13:11). Matthew omits to mention the role of the Holy Spirit (Chinwokwu 2015:105). Following this, Matthew interposes being offended, betraying and hating one another, lawlessness

increasing, increased emergency of pseudo-prophets and the love of many growing cold (Mt 24:10–12), as what will be happening both in the world and among the Christian community. Like Mark, Matthew pursues from referring to the Christian community and shifts the emphasis to the place of individualistic roles in being saved, hence he preserves that it is the individual that endures to the end that shall be saved (Mt 24:13; Mk 13:13).

Also, Matthew emphasises the universal focus of Jesus' ontology and mission with his peculiar accent and explains concerning the curiosities of the disciples in his Christian community that it is only after 'the gospel of the kingdom' would have been preached in all the world for a witness to all the nations that the end shall come (Mt 24:14, cf. Mk 13:10). Unlike Mark who mentions the abomination of desolation 'standing where it ought not', Matthew, on this, is specific. Because of Matthew's Jewish particularism or favouritism (Chinwokwu 2015:84), he specifically mentions 'the holy place' as the place where the disciples, seeing 'the abomination of desolation' occurring, and seeing the nexuses prophesied in the Scriptures, should read to have understanding. Like Mark, however, in tandem with his habit of consolidating his teachings with references from the Old Testament Scripture (Fenton 1963:17–19), Matthew grounds his emphasis by referencing Jesus' allusion to when the disciples see 'the abomination of desolation' prophesied by the prophet Daniel, occurring in 'the holy place' (Dn 11:31; 12:11). When the disciples, by the implications of the verb 'to read' [*ἀναγινώσκων*] (being in participle present active nominative, masculine, singular case) and 'to understand' (perceive, understand, gain an insight into; think over, consider [*νοεῖτω*] being a verb in its imperative present active, third person singular case), by way of hortation, Matthew persuades the disciples in his Christian community to read prophetic writings and perceive the nexuses that exist with each occurring eschatological event. They should also have an understanding (Mt 24:15), and thereby gain theological insights on how each disciple should be responding to the intensifying eschatological birthpangs. This should be done, aiming to access both immediate safety (Mt 24:16–20) and future salvation, by watching (Mt 24:42) and being ready (Mt 24:44) for the promised *Parousia* of Jesus (Mt 24:21–51; Ukeachusim 2024a). Mark grounds his emphasis on the need for the disciples to take heed, to watch and to pray, for they would not know when the master of the house will come (Mk 13:33, 35–37); he also simply describes the departure of Jesus, who has given authority to his servants to carry out their individual assigned work and the doorkeeper to watch (Mk 13:34). On the other hand, peculiar to Matthew, he consolidates his teaching about the need for the disciples to be 'watching' and being 'ready', by adding the proverb of the vultures gathering wherever the corpse is (Mt 24:28), which in his character was probably gotten from the Old Testament Scripture (Job 39:30; Hab 1:8; Ezk 39:17); the parable of the fig tree and its lessons that are in Mark (Mt 24:32–33 = Mk 13:28–29); the sayings about 'the days of Noah' being likened to the promised *Parousia* of Jesus (Mt 24:37–39; Gn 7:6–23),

and the two in the field and the two women in the grinding mill, from which one of each will be taken (Mt 24:40–41); and the saying about the need for the house-master to watch over his house, to prevent any thief from burgling his house (Mt 24:43). He adds the saying about the faithful and the unfaithful servants, concerning the delayed *Parousia* (Mt 24:45–51), which is not paralleled in Mark.

The purpose of Matthew's redaction of Mark 13

Matthew did not enlarge and revise the Markan source to effect 'corrections which an eyewitness might make in the account of one who was not an eyewitness' (Fenton 1963:12), nor did he document the historical narrative of Jesus' life, that would be more accurate than Mark's account of Jesus' ontological and functional natures in the gospel. Matthew's redaction of the Markan account was for kerygmatic and didactic intentions and not for documenting the biographies of Jesus (Chinwokwu 2015:35). After the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus and the Pentecost experience, Matthew came to have a deeper understanding of Jesus' views, teachings and commands concerning the eschatology and his other teachings (Ituma 2021:50–51). As Matthew's redactions have revealed, his enlargements, and revisions of the Markan account of the teachings of Jesus and other sources which he used in composing his gospel, were sincerely motivated (McGill n.d.). Matthew reinterpreted and reindoctrinated his audiences, to further elucidate and to rightly apply Jesus' teachings to their situation in life (Bultmann 1963:166–205; Chinwokwu 2015:35). In this case, with special reference to the pericope of this study, Matthew reinterpreted and applied Jesus' apocalyptic view contained in his messages for his original audience(s) and the future readers of his gospel to gain insights, to deeply understand, appreciate and grow in faith and obedience (Fenton 1963:26–27). He applies the words of Jesus to his Christian community who were experiencing the intensifying occurrences of wars and other eschatological events, and he consolidates that they are occurring as Jesus had presaged.

Matthew 24:1–26's exegesis demonstrates Matthew's approach to the theme of wars

In Matthew 24:1, Jesus' disciples came to him and showed him the buildings of the temple [*οικοδομὰς τοῦ ἱεροῦ*]. Jesus may have entered the *οικοδομὰς τοῦ ἱεροῦ* as far back as Matthew 21:23, and all that was recorded between that point and the end of Chapter 23 may have taken place in the 'temple' (Fenton 1963:380). Matthew did not declare why Jesus left the temple; however, the last words Jesus declared to the crowds in the temple in Matthew 23:38, which envisioned the destruction of the temple (Wright 2002), correlate with why the disciples [*μαθηταί*] had to draw Jesus' attention to look and behold the magnificence of the Temple which Herod was rebuilding. The *μαθηταί* of Jesus had curiosities that motivated them to point out to Jesus the magnificence of 'the buildings of the Jerusalem temple' (Drane 1979:14, 165).

Rhetorically, by the inference of οὐ βλέπετε ταῦτα πάντα, Jesus refers to the buildings of the temple as these things [ταῦτα πάντα] (Mt 24:2). Jesus had theological reasons for derogatorily referring to the revered Jerusalem temple, including other buildings which Herod, for his political interest, added to win the hearts of the Jews, as merely ταῦτα πάντα. However, concerning the buildings of the temple as ταῦτα πάντα, Matthew relates that Jesus, assuredly by the implication of ‘verily I say to you’ [ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν], prophesied to his disciples that no stone on stone shall not be thrown down [καταλυθήσεται] (Mt 24:2). Jesus categorically presaged to his disciples that the temple buildings that the Jews revere will be destroyed [καταλυθήσεται] in the near future and the consummation [συντελείας] or end of the world will occur when no one knows (Matcalfe 1995:43). The Roman Empire under the emperorship of Titus destroyed Jerusalem and the temple buildings in AD 70. As Jesus prophesied concerning the temple buildings, Halliday (1997:13, 163) notes that ‘stones were even pried apart to collect the gold leaf that melted from the roof when the temple was set on fire’. By the implication of πότε ταῦτα ἔσται, ‘all the disciples of Jesus’ asked to be told when the destruction of the Jerusalem temple buildings will be (Fenton 1963:382). Jesus had hinted to his disciples that he would go back to his Father and would return, and hence the disciples may have become curious to know the sign [σημεῖον] that would pinpoint when He would be coming (Mt 24:3, 27, 37, 39), and when the world would end (Mt 24:3). Hence the disciples’ curiosity to be told the sign of the promised *Parousia* of Jesus, by the implication of the aorist verb imperative, ‘εἰπέ’, they commanded that Jesus tells them what the sign [σημεῖον] of his coming [παρουσία] will be, and of the consummation [συντελείας] of the age (Mt 13:39, 49; 24:3; 28:20). Ladd (1974:181) notes that ‘the Messianic mission of Jesus had as its objective the preparation of men for the future kingdom of God’, and for the immediate survival in the face of the eschatological events. Hence in verse 4, Jesus starts answering his disciples’ questions by foretelling them, by the inference of the verb imperative present active, second person plural βλέπετε [to see, or take heed] that no man deceives or misleads them (Mt 24:4). Because the disciples were curious to get answers to the eschatological questions that were troubling them, Jesus senses that when He had departed from this world, his disciples may be obsessed with the ‘expectation of the nearness of Christ’s return and the end of the world’ (Chinwokwu 2015:85). The Jews believed that the prophesied end of the world would be conditioned by ‘wars and rumours of wars’ (Fenton 1963:383). Thus, by the implication of the active aorist subjunctive verb, [πλανήσῃ] Jesus forewarns them to see that they are not deceived. Jesus portends that many will come in his name (ὄνοματί; Mt 24:5), and categorically declares in verse 5 that He is the anointed, Christ, Messiah [ὁ χριστός]. This highlights the main concern of the Matthean gospel’s author, namely to prove to his readers that Jesus is the anointed Messiah sent by God (Drane 1979:165), and to create awareness among Jesus’ disciples that there will be many Messianic claimants who would come claiming to have Jesus’ authority, who would have the high tendencies

of misleading many of those ‘who will prefer the assurance and ‘certainty’ that the end is near’ (Fenton 1963:383). In verse 5, Matthew’s Jesus gives the reason for which He commands and forewarns his disciples to see that they are not deceived. Hence, by the implication of many [πολλοί] coming in the name of Jesus, saying I am the Christ [Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ χριστός], Jesus forewarns that by doing so, many ‘false-Christ’s’ shall deceive many [πολλοὺς πλανήσουσιν].

In verse 6, Jesus enlists wars [πολέμους] and rumours of wars [ἀκοὰς πολέμων] among other convulsive birthing events that will be taking place during the last days. πολέμους and ἀκοὰς πολέμων ‘are a regular feature in Jewish belief about the end of the world; they are within the divinely ordained plan’ (Fenton 1963:383). Hearing of wars and rumours of wars consolidate fear in the minds of many world inhabitants. However, as wars [πολέμους] and rumours of wars [ἀκοὰς πολέμων] must be taking place, by the implication of the second person plural, present active imperative verbs see [ὁρᾶτε], and not troubled [μὴ θροεῖσθε], Jesus commands his disciples not to fear, for the end [τέλος] is not yet, implying that ‘wars and rumours of wars’ will not determine when Jesus’ promised *Parousia* and the end of the world will materialise.

Theologically, wars and rumours as eschatological birthing events will be occurring, as they have been divinely pre-ordained; for because of the increasing intensities of sins, many more birthpangs will keep happening before the end comes (Fenton 1963:383). Thompson (1986:283) notes that ‘there has never been a period in human history in which nations or tribes have not been fighting each other’. In the world’s history, there were times when food and shelter were being countered by disasters (Thompson 1986:315). However, by the implication of the Greek verb, rise [ἐγερθήσεται], Jesus enlists that in the interim, before his promised *Parousia* and the end, that nation shall rise against nation [ἔθνος ἐπὶ ἔθνος], and kingdom against kingdom [βασιλεία ἐπὶ βασιλείαν]; and in various places [τόπους] there shall be famines [λιμοί] and earthquakes [σεισμοί] (Mt 24:7).

In verse 8, Jesus in advance informs his disciples that all the eschatological convulsing events will be occurring merely as the beginning of birthpangs [ἀρχὴ ὠδίνων] (Ukeachusim 2023a). By theological implication, these things [πάντα ταῦτα] Jesus listed will be occurring and will be functioning as the beginning of the sufferings for the world inhabitants (Mt 24:8). In verse 9, Jesus includes that, for his name’s sake, his disciples will be delivered up to be afflicted [παραδώσουσιν ὑμᾶς εἰς θλίψιν], and they will be killed [ἀποκτενοῦσιν] and they will be hated [μισούμενοι] by all nations. Because of the convulsive effects of the eschatological birthing events, by the implication of the indicative future passive third person plural verb, offended many [σκανδαλισθήσονται πολλοί], many shall have reasons to be offended and shall betray [παραδώσουσιν] and hate [μισήσουσιν] one another (Mt 24:10). In the last days, many false prophets [ψευδοπροφήται] shall

arise within the Christian community, teaching a pseudo-gospel and thereby misleading [πλανήσουσιν] many (Fenton 1963:383). In the interim of the departure of Jesus and his promised *Parousia*, iniquity or lawlessness [ἀνομίαν] shall increase (in both the church community and outside it) and influence the *agape* love [ἀγάπη] to be extinguished, or to wax cold (Mt 24:12). As all these convulsive events will be happening in the world during the interim of Jesus' departure and his promised return, many will be curious to know what they can do to be saved. Because the gospel exposes the disciples to varying kinds of suffering, therefore hope, faith, and love formed the triad the disciples of Jesus must be endowed with to be saved (Fenton 1963:385). Hence, by the inference of the Greek verb endures [ὑπομένειν] (Halliday 1997:164), Jesus presages that it is the individual that endures by holding fast his or her faith in love and hope till the end that shall be saved [σωθήσεται] from the future penalties of the Messianic judgement (Mt 24:13). In verse 14, Jesus portends that the gospel of the kingdom [εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας], by the implication of the indicative future passive third person singular verb κηρυχθήσεται, shall be preached in the whole inhabited world [οἰκουμένη], for a witness [μαρτύριον] to all nations, and then the end [τέλος] shall come. The gospel of the kingdom being preached to the inhabited world [οἰκουμένη] highlights the later universal focus of the gospel (Chinwokwu 2015:84).

In verse 15, Matthew's Jesus, quoting from the Old Testament (Drane 1979:164), augured to his disciples that when they shall see the abomination of desolation [ἴδητε τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως] spoken of by Daniel the prophet standing in 'the holy place', by the implications of the participle present active nominative masculine singular verb to read [ἀναγινώσκων], and the verb imperative present active third person singular, to understand [νοεῖτω], Jesus commanded his disciples to be reading prophetic writings with understanding (Mt 24:15). During wars and other eschatological events, those with dependants and their dependants will be greatly distressed (Mt 24:19). As this prophecy, by the implication of great tribulation [θλίψις μεγάλη] is associated with immense anguish, which would come with the corollary of suffering than the world has ever known (Mt 24:21; Thompson 1986:309) and the rise of pseudo-prophets and their tendencies to mislead many (Mt 24:23–26); Jewish Christians in Judaea were to discern prophecies and read prophetic writings with understanding, so as to appreciate the nexuses that relate those events to be eschatological birthpang events and to know how they are to be responding to them as eschatological birthpang events. Hence, disciples of Jesus by the implication of the imperative verbs flee [φευγέτωσαν] to the mountains [ὄρη] (Mt 24:16) should not come down [μὴ καταβάτω] from the housetop to take anything out of the house and not return [μὴ ἐπιστρέψατω] to the field to take clothes (Mt 24:18); for security, they are commanded on some of the practical ways they are to seek safety during the occurrence of wars and other eschatological birthpang events. It is by reading and understanding the events' nexuses to the prophecies that the disciples will know the

peculiarities of each eschatological event and gain insights on how they are to respond to each eschatological birthpang-event to be saved from immediate harm and be watching and getting ready to access their future salvation at the *Parousia* of Jesus (Ukeachusim 2024a).

The conclusions derived from Matthew 24:1–26's exegesis show how Matthew addressed the subject of war

The exegetical study of Matthew reveals how Matthew deals with the theme of wars and rumours of wars among other events that are in the apocalyptic view of Jesus, functioning as the beginning of the birthpangs of the eschatological era. How Matthew dealt with the theme of war is implicitly highlighted from his holistic view, inherent in his eschatological teaching, by way of the redaction sourced from 'Mark', 'Q' and 'M', a peculiar source to him. Matthew envisages that the intensifying of wars and rumours of wars among other eschatological events that would be occurring in the eschatological era would have nexuses with the theological underlined characteristics of the eschatological birthpangs Jesus enlisted in the Olivet-prophecy (New Testament; Mt 24:1–26) and alluded to in the Old Testament Prophecy (Old Testament Scripture; Mt 24:15; Dn 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). According to Matthew, as consolidated from Jesus' apocalyptic view and teaching, wars will be characterised by rumours (Mt 24:6), kingdoms and nations rising up against each other (Mt 24:6–8), raising peoples' eschatological curiosities and fear that war could lead to the end of the world (Mt 24:3). Matthew sees war as being able to lead to the destruction of long-standing religious buildings and institutions (Mt 24:2), causing those with dependants and those that are vulnerable to experience varying degrees of woes (Mt 24:19) and cause the death of many, even the disciples (Mt 24:9–12). There will be confusion on how those people in the war zone are to immediately respond concerning their safety (Mt 24:16–21). For both the disciples and other inhabitants of those war zones, the wars will have the corollaries of famine, pestilence and other forms of suffering (Mt 24:7), and the rise of pseudo-prophets (Mt 24:4–5, 23–25). Wars will impact the disciples as individuals and as a community and overlap with the promised but delaying *Parousia* of Jesus (Mt 24:27–51). Hence for Matthew's ecclesiastical interest and focus, he teaches that it is significant for the disciples of Jesus to look out for these nexuses to understand their theological implications and understand how they are to respond to the peculiarities of each war for their immediate safety and eternal salvation.

The Russia–Ukraine war and its peculiar nexuses to the eschatological events in Matthew 24:1–26

Below, the military invasion of Russia in Ukraine is explored and analysed concerning the peculiar characteristics and theological implications that are typical to the wars and rumours of wars Jesus presaged in Matthew 24:1–26.

Rumours of Russia invading Ukraine (Mt 24:6)

The feud between Russia and Ukraine that culminated in the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian government under the administration of President Putin has a long history behind it. Cengel (2022) notes that the debate over how to remember Ukraine's World War II history, as well as its implications for Ukrainian nationalism and independence, is the key to understanding the current conflict (Cengel 2022). Following the history of World War II, most Ukrainians aligned with the Nazis, perceiving the Nazis to be a possible power that could help them to be liberated from Soviet oppression; since then the Russian government has designated Ukraine to be a Nazi nation. The Russian government classifies Ukraine as a republic created in 1922 by the Soviet leaders and that it should remain within the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, to the Russian government, Ukraine has never had a tradition of genuine statehood (Aljazeera News 2022a). President Putin views Ukraine as a conjuring nation that does not deserve to be a sovereign country that is alienated from the ancient history Ukraine has with Russian territory. Consequently, President Putin, on behalf of the Russian government, considers their acclaim: Ukraine's lack of genuine statehood; the agreements reached with Ukraine which were not necessary to recognise their independence; the need to consolidate the sovereignty of the pro-Russian Separatists; the security of Russia which would be threatened if Ukraine succeeds to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); the distorted disseminated history about the origins of modern Ukraine; NATO's 2008 membership promise to Ukraine and Georgia; and European countries aligning with the United States, motivated the Russian president and government to have made proposals for an equal dialogue on these issues to the United States and NATO, and which President Putin claimed remained unanswered. President Putin threatened that his administration may be forced to conduct military operations in Ukraine. As President Putin and his government perceived these issues to be threats to Russia's sovereignty, national interests and values, he declared that 'Russia has every right to take retaliatory measures to ensure its security. "That is exactly what we will do"' (Aljazeera News 2022b).

Many thought that President Putin's speech was just an anecdote. Some thought of his speech about retaliation to just mean 'a mere rumour'. Some Ukrainian officials tried to downplay the threat of an invasion (Casper 2022). Hearing of this typical rumour relates to one of the eschatological birthpang events Jesus pre-informed his disciples that must be happening in the last days, which would not pinpoint when the end would materialise (Mt 24:6). For rumours that are generated before wars start and escalate, during the wars and after the wars, by the implication of ὁρᾶτε μὴ θροεῖσθε. (Mt 24:6), Jesus (as recalled in Matthew) commands his followers 'to see that they be not troubled', for wars and its corollaries will keep coming to pass; however, they will not pinpoint the exact time or day when 'the end' [τὸ τέλος] would materialise.

The Russia-Ukraine war is a nation rising against a nation (Mt 24:6–8)

The rumours of Russia possibly invading Ukraine, which some thought to be impossible (Casper 2022), were fully executed on 24 February 2022. The nexuses which the Russian invasion of Ukraine has with the eschatological teachings of Jesus relate it to be one of the *wars* that Jesus refers to in Matthew 24:6 (Bricker 2022). Though the warring nations have reasons to fight to defend their political and religious sovereignties, theologically, one nation rising against another nation, and one kingdom rising against another kingdom, is among the convulsive events that would be happening in the last days, as Jesus presaged. To frighten Ukraine's military force, NATO, the United States of America and other Western nations that might move to assist Ukraine in winning the war (Jonathan 2022), the Russian President and the Russian military forces had reasons to unveil Russia's nuclear weapons, which they asserted to be the biggest nuclear weapons on the planet that, when deployed, could destroy everyone living in the world (USA Today 2022a). They claimed that there are more weapons ready for launch (USA Today 2022b). Russia's claim that their new nuclear weaponry dubbed Satan 2 could destroy everything breathing in the world has been rated to be false (Curet 2022). The convulsive impacts of the war currently going on spurred many to have reasons to envisage that the war between Russia and Ukraine might lead to World War III (Gabriela 2022; Hunter 2022). Jesus in his prophesies about the end of the world pre-informed his disciples that war with other eschatological birthpang events will not pinpoint when the world would end (Mt 24:6–8). No human or human's weapon creations will determine when the world ends. It is God, who created the world for his pleasure, who will determine 'how' and 'when' the world will end (Haynes 2022b).

The Russia-Ukraine war raises questions about whether it will lead to the end of the world (Mt 24:3)

There are end-time theories that propose that Russia has a special role to play in these last days. Some evangelical and Pentecostal Christians believe that there is a prophetic significance to the Russia-Ukraine war (Bailey 2022). Before this war, every convulsive event occurring in the world made many world inhabitants curious to know whether they would lead to the end of the world. Accordingly, from the days of antiquity, human beings have been curious to know about 'how' and 'when' the world would end (Haynes 2022a). The Russia-Ukraine war has reignited the beliefs among some conservative evangelicals that Russia could help to fulfil the biblical prophesies about the end of the world (Bailey 2022). Some are predicting that this ongoing military operation of Russia's military in Ukraine would escalate to a third world war and or that it could cause the end of the world (Mt 24:3; Hunter 2022). There was the threat that nuclear weapons could be deployed in this war, which could destroy the world (Jonathan 2022). Some people in the world were terrified about the threat that those nuclear

weapons could be deployed to kill everyone in the world. The question remains, how should Christians respond to this? Should they be terrified and freak out? The answer is no (Laurie 2022). However, Jesus, having foreknowledge of the eschatological birthpang events that would be occurring in the world, commands his disciples to 'see' that they are not frightened, for wars and their rumours must be taking place, but the end is not yet (Mt 24:6). Jesus' apocalyptic prophesy implies that no eschatological birthpang-event or any human creation could lead to the end of the world.

The Russia-Ukraine war shocked Ukraine, destroyed religious institutions and created a crisis of faith (Mt 24:10)

There are significant roles of religion in Russia's war on Ukraine (Deutsche Welle-DW 2022; Hoston & Mandaville 2022), and there is an international law that prohibits attacks on religious sites which, during wars, leverage some civilians to take up shelter in some religious places of worship (Casper 2022); however, 'Orthodox church buildings and other sites linked to religion are suffering direct damage throughout Ukraine' (Hoston & Mandaville 2022). Some religious buildings have been severely damaged, some mangled and their woodwork decorations shredded, and some are in total ruin after days of bombardment. According to Ukraine records, the Russian military has damaged or destroyed at least 59 religious sites across the country since its invasion (Hunter 2022). With the killings and massive destruction of individuals, government and religious-owned properties, those in the war zones were and are still traumatised, and some are mourning for their loved ones who have been killed, wounded, or displaced (Kramer 2022). Many Christians prayed and hoped that God would avert this war when it was just peddled as a mere rumour. However, as this war escalated and is still going on, it spurred many to become offended. Jesus presaged that eschatological birthpang events will occur with the corollary of offence (Mt 24:10). Many Ukrainians, Russians and other Christians are desperately praying that the war comes to an end, but it seems that their prayers are not to be answered. While some are still holding onto their faith in God, some are losing their faith in God (Casper 2022).

The Russian invasion of Ukraine shocked the country and caused a crisis of faith, in that the religious institutions and religious practices that have been thriving for some decades like the revered Jerusalem temples which Jesus had prophetic theological reasons to condemn (Mt 24:1–2), and which was later fulfilled during the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD. Similarly, Russian troops shot at churches and many other religious places of worship where people can find support and help, massively destroying Ukraine and causing many Ukrainians to be refugees. The war is making them vulnerable and experience a crisis of faith. Hence, 'the devastation of Ukraine's spiritual sites has left many from its religious communities deeply shaken' (Hunter 2022). Some still want to connect with God but rather go to the caves to pray (Hunter 2022). Jesus pre-

informs that it is the one who, notwithstanding the crises of faith that confront him or her, endures to the end, who would be saved (Mt 24:13).

Russia-Ukraine war grounds upheaval and rebellion in the World Orthodoxy. Millions of Ukrainians are now split between Moscow and Kyiv; millions of Orthodox Christians in the world who are in unity with Moscow have had their long-standing relation strained because of this war; it has also caused a chasm between the Russian Orthodox Church and other Christian churches (Pullela 2022). The future of the Russian Patriarchate and that of the Independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine depends on the outcome of the war, for 'if Ukraine prevails against the Russian invasion, the Moscow church will all but certainly be ejected. If Russia wins, the Ukrainian church is unlikely to survive inside Ukraine' (Kramer 2022).

Russia-Ukraine war and woe to the vulnerable (Mt 24:19)

Vulnerable people experience an indescribable level of anguish as a war ensues and escalates. As the Russia-Ukraine war ensued and escalated, some women were pregnant and needed to be guaranteed protection and medical aid for them to be able to birth their babies; some had already given birth and needed peace and tranquillity to heal from the pains associated with the birth to breastfeed and to raise their babies in their nation (Mt 24:19; Kramer 2022). However, arising from the invasion, hospitals were bombed thereby killing and wounding many vulnerable hospitalised patients and their caregivers; some pregnant women were induced to give birth prematurely and in a pressurised situation, some women and children have been and are being sexually abused, and many war crimes are recorded (McCarthy 2022). As Jesus presaged and described, the devastating nature of the eschatological birthpang events envisaged woes or grief that many vulnerable people, including able-bodied people, would be experiencing as the eschatological birthpang events would be unfolding, as they have been divinely allowed (Mt 24:19).

Russia-Ukraine war, deaths and massive destruction of government and individual-owned properties (Mt 24:9–12)

Being that Ukraine is the war location of the invasion by the Russian troops, many Ukrainian towns have been deserted. The land of Ukraine has suffered massive devastation, and destruction of property, and many of its civilians and soldiers have been killed. The war going on in Ukraine is resulting in thousands of people being displaced and killed and an uncountable number of structures being destroyed. The paroxysmal impacts of the Russia-Ukraine war are negatively functioning as a 'major driver of climate change' (McCarthy 2022). Though efforts are being put in place by countries to work alongside the United Nations to stop the war in Ukraine and to consolidate lasting peace between Russia and Ukraine (McCarthy 2022) and elsewhere, it should be noted from a

theological stance that wholesome peace cannot be consolidated in the world because of the increase in the intensities of hate, betrayals, and lawlessness (Mt 24:9–12) (Ukeachusim 2024b). This is because the world is in its end-times when eschatological birthpang events are divinely orchestrated to be unfolding and heralding the nearness of the end of this age and the promised coming of Jesus (Mt 24:6), which functions as a source of consolation to Jesus' disciples amidst the intensifying conflicts, news and the tumults of wars in the world.

Russia-Ukraine war consolidates famine and negatively impacts the economies of the warring nations (Mt 24:7)

This war is currently directly causing famine in the countries of the warring nations; and indirectly causing famine in some other nations. The Russia-Ukraine war is not the first war to yield the corollary of famine in the history of the world (Waxman 2022). Jesus had prophesied that alongside war, famine would keep occurring as eschatological events (Mt 24:6). Russia and Ukraine are major agricultural cultivators and exporters, particularly of wheat and soybeans amongst other agricultural commodities. Hence, they are both known as 'the breadbasket of the globe' (Stankiewicz 2022). Both big and small agrarian farms and other financial institutions in Russia and Ukraine have been massively negatively affected by this war. However, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has the most devastating impact on Ukraine's economy because Ukraine is the war location (McCarthy 2022). The war is causing a food crisis for the Ukrainians and in the long run, it will continue to exacerbate the food crisis in many countries in Africa and the Middle East (Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation 2022) and many other parts of the world (Stankiewicz 2022).

Russia's economy is also being directly and indirectly massively affected, for many nations around the globe imposed diverse kinds of heavy sanctions on Russia (McCarthy 2022). Many Russians are traumatised by the war and economic sanctions. An estimated 25000 Russians have left the country since the invasion of Ukraine and moved to Georgia and elsewhere (Demytrie 2022). The massive impact of the war in Ukraine 'has brought the country's economy to a standstill' (McCarthy 2022). The issues of climate change and more frequent extreme weather such as droughts, locust swarms and the destruction of pastureland, economic slumps because of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic (Ukeachusim 2023b, 2024a) consolidate hardship and hunger in the world. Many countries and organisations are working hard to restore the world economy and maintain the food chain. However, the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war is fuelling and worsening poverty in Ukraine, Russia and other nations that depend on Ukraine and Russia for their export food and other by-products (Stankiewicz 2022). Historically, one of the corollaries of war in any part of the world is famine, for 'as always, conflict and hunger go hand in hand' (Cordaid 2022; Fox Business News 2022). Jesus enlisted famine on its own as one of the eschatological birthpang

events (Mt 24:7). Consequently, ultimate food security cannot be guaranteed, and the prices of food items may not be stopped from inflating. With the impacts of the Russia-Ukraine war, instead of moving to zero hunger to achieve the United Nations' second goal (United Nations, n.d.), there is and likely would be, only more hunger (Cordaid 2022).

Russia-Ukraine war, acclaimed prophets, and their prophesies (Mt 24:4–5)

With the recent occurrence of climate change, COVID-19 (Ukeachusim 2023b, 2024a), rising oil prices (Mix 2022) and the Russia-Ukraine war (Ukeachusim 2023a), prophecy is being invoked to explain and make sense of the current events (Sutton 2015). Some Christians are employing the literal method of biblical interpretations and applications to relate Russia to biblical prophesies about the end of the world, while some other Christians are employing allegorical methods in interpreting biblical descriptions of eschatological birthpang events (Bailey 2022). Many end-time theories are being advanced by many acclaimed plenipotentiaries of God who may or may not be seeking credibility; and some conservative and charismatic Christians who make uptight efforts to tie Russia to the biblical narratives (Bailey 2022). Modern-day Russia has been identified as 'the kingdom of the North', described in the book of Daniel (Dn 11). Also, some Christians are relating Russia to the Magog, which in the end-time would attack and invade Israel as prophesied in the book of Ezekiel (Ezk 38–39; Laurie 2022). In this eschatological era, many self-professing prophets aver that their prophesies do come to pass to validate that it was God who called them and that they are the anointed of God (Mt 24:4–5, 11). Those who engage in prophecy, read and interpret biblical prophesies about end-time events, highlighting the biblical nexuses to the Russia-Ukraine war. They uphold and advance that it could have been God who compelled President Putin to conduct military operations in Ukraine and that this war could trigger the end of the world. Some of these prophets claim that they had prophesied about the Russia-Ukraine war before it came to pass. The Russia-Ukraine war has therefore currently reignited beliefs among some evangelicals that Russia could help to fulfil the biblical prophesies about the end of the world (Bailey 2022). Many Christians believe that Russia has a special role to play in the end-time, and they are therefore advancing the end-time theory that the Russia-Ukraine war might be part of the divine plan for Russia to invade Ukraine this time. Some are currently describing the Russian President Vladimir Putin as 'an Antichrist of our current time' (Bailey 2022).

A Rapture Index that tracks events occurring in the world as they relate to the biblical prophesies about end-time activities has estimated that 187 out of 200 end-time events around the globe have occurred (Mix 2022). Theologically, the exact time or day when the *Parousia* of Jesus and the end of the world will materialise is divinely orchestrated and not to be known (Ukeachusim 2023a); however, many professing Christians, like the disciples of Jesus (Mt 24:3),

are curious to use the eschatological birthpang events happening in the world to pinpoint the exact time or day when the Lord would come and the world would end; this tendency could expose many Christians to be deceived (Haynes 2022b). Hence, being that many could thereby be deceived by the implication of βλέπετε μή τις ὑμᾶς πλανήσῃ (Mt 24:4), Jesus commands his disciples to 'see' or to 'take heed' that no one deceives or misleads them. Jesus warns his disciples because He knew that in the last days, many shall be claiming to be God's anointed, who prophesy as the oracles of God, and shall thereby deceive many (Mt 24:5). Jesus commands his disciples to respond to false predictive prophecies about the rapture and other eschatological birthpang events, by not believing them and seeing that they are not deceived (Mt 24:4).

How Christians should respond to war: Praying and pacifism, or praying and resistance? What should Christians' ethical attitude to war be? (Mt 24:16–21)

As the Russia–Ukraine war is going on, many Christians are curious to know how they are to respond to the war. Should Christians align themselves to pacifism without any form of resistance or defence in the face of war (Silk 2022; Watson & Jenkins 1983:178)? Should Christians flee in the face of war? Should Christians just be praying, or stand and fight in defence of their land (Casper 2022)? Religion is a weapon of control (Elliott 2022), and Christian teaching and preaching have also become part of the Russia–Ukraine battlefield (Kramer 2022). Pacifist gospels are preached during sermons by priests to those in the war zones, to persuade able-bodied citizens to embrace pacifism at a time when the self-protective strategy of those in war zones rested on mobilising able-bodied civilians to fight and resist the invaders (Casper 2022). Many viewed this standpoint as dissident or treasonous. From the theological insights from Matthew 24:15–26, Christians in war zones are to see wars and the rumours of wars as merely eschatological events (Ukeachusim 2023a) and respond to them by being discerning to know when to flee, when not to return to the war zones, when to pray and when to stand to fight in defence of their land and for their faith.

Conclusion

In the Olivet-prophecy Jesus enlists wars and rumours of wars as paroxysmal occurrences that must occur as eschatological birthpang events. Wars and rumours of wars as eschatological birthpangs are not saddled with the responsibility of pinpointing the exact time or day when Jesus' *Parousia* and the end of this world would materialise. The Russia–Ukraine war has nexuses with the eschatological war and other last days birthpang events Jesus described in the Olivet-prophecy. Though the Ukraine–Russia war has nexuses with the prophesied characteristics of eschatological birthpang events, Christians are not to be obsessed with employing either or both literal or allegorical

means of Bible texts to interpret events that relate to eschatology, to consciously or unconsciously try to determine or predict the exact time or day when Jesus' coming and the end of the world would materialise. Christians in Ukraine, Russia and elsewhere around the globe are not to respond to wars and rumours of wars with trepidation, be anxious to relate wars and rumours to the end of the world, and be vulnerable to deceptions by pseudo-prophets; they rather should understand the theological significance for which Jesus portended to his curious disciples what He wants them to comprehend about the eschatological birthpang events (Mt 24:25). Christians are to read eschatological writings in the Bible with understanding, and view eschatological birthpang events with discernment so that they will not be deceived. Christians are to view wars and their rumours as eschatological birthpang events as Jesus defined them and adhere to his teachings, commands, warnings and exhortations on how Christians are to militantly prepare for Jesus' promised second *Parousia*, and respond to eschatological birthpang events.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that she has no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced her in writing this article.

Author's contribution

C.P.U. is the sole author of this research article.

Ethical considerations

This article does not contain any studies involving human participants performed by the author. This research has been approved on 21 October 2024 by Research Ethics Committee, Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

All data supporting this study and its findings are available in this research article.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and are the product of professional research. It does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency, or that of the publisher. The author is responsible for the results, findings and content of this article.

References

- Aljazeera News, 2022a, *Highlights of Russian President Putin's speech*, viewed 10 November 2023, from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/21/highlights-of-russian-president-putins-speech>.
- Aljazeera News, 2022b, *No other option: Excerpts of Putin's speech declaring war*, viewed 10 May 2024, from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/24/putins-speech-declaring-war-on-ukraine-translated-excerpts>.
- Bailey, S.L., 2022, *Russia's war on Ukraine has some Christians wondering: Is this the end of the world?*, viewed 10 December 2023, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2022/03/10/russia-putin-end-of-the-world>.
- Bricker, V., 2022, *Wars and rumours of wars: A present-day look*, viewed 25 February 2022, from https://www.ibelieve.com/faith/wars-and-rumors-of-wars-a-present-day-look.html?utm_source=Pushnami.
- Brown, R.E., 2014, *An introduction to the New Testament*, Theological Publications, Bangalore.
- Bultmann, R., 1963, *The history of the synoptic tradition*, J. Marsh (ed.), Harper & Row, New York, NY.
- Casper, J., 2022, *Amid war and rumours of war, Ukraine pastors preach and prepare*, viewed 10 November 2023, from <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2022/february/ukraine-russia-churches-donetsk-luhansk-putin-independence.html>.
- Catchpole, D.R., 1997, 'Source, form, and redaction criticism of the New Testament', in S.E. Porter (ed.), *A handbook to the Exegesis of the New Testament*, New Testament tools and studies, p. 25, Brill, Leiden.
- Cengel, K., 2022, *The 20th-Century history behind Russia's invasion of Ukraine*, viewed 10 December 2023, from <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-20th-century-history-behind-russias-invasion-of-ukraine-180979672/>.
- Chinwoku, E.N., 2015, *Traditions of Jesus*, University of Nigeria Press, Nsukka.
- Cordaid, 2022, *How can we stop crises like the Russian war in Ukraine from spurring food insecurity in Africa?*, viewed 01 October 2023, from <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/how-can-we-stop-crises-russian-war-ukraine-spurring-food-insecurity-africa>.
- Curet, M., 2022, *New Russian Nuke weapon dubbed Satan 2 cannot destroy everything breathing in the world*, viewed 18 June 2022, from <https://www.politifact.com/factchecks/2022/mar/02/facebook-posts>.
- Demytrie, R., 2022, *Ukraine: Not all Russians support this war—Yevgeny*, viewed 13 March 2022, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-60710975/>.
- Deutsche Welle-DW, 2022, *Ukraine War: The role of the Orthodox churches*, viewed 10 November 2023, from <https://www.dw.com/en/ukraine-war-the-role-of-the-orthodox-churches/a-61063614>.
- Drane, J., 1979, *Jesus and the four Gospels*, Lion Publishing, Herts.
- Elliott, M.R., 2022, *Journal issue explores religion as a weapon in Russia's war against Ukraine*, viewed 10 November 2023, from <http://religionunplugged.com/news/2022/4/5/journal-issue-explores-religion-as-a-weapon-in-russias-war-against-ukraine>.
- Fenton, J.C., 1963, *Saint Matthew*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth.
- Fox Business News, 2022, *Sen. Joni Ernst warns Russia-Ukraine war will lead to famine*, viewed 20 October 2023, from <https://www.foxbusiness.com/politics/sen-joni-ernst-warns-of-impending-famine-as-a-result-of-russia-ukraine-war>.
- Gabriela, M., 2022, *Why is Russia invading Ukraine? Could it be the start of WWIII?*, viewed 20 August 2023, from <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2022/02/24/russian-invasion-ukraine-questions-explained/6921368001/>.
- Halliday, S., 1997, *A life-changing encounter with God's word from the book of Matthew*, NavPress, Springs.
- Haynes, C.L., 2022a, *What does the end of the world mean?*, viewed 12 May 2023, from https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/what-does-the-end-of-the-world-mean.html?utm_source=Pushnami.
- Haynes, C.L., 2022b, *Why it's dangerous to guess rapture predictions*, viewed 19 July 2023, from <https://www.crosswalk.com/special-coverage/end-times/why-its-dangerous-to-guess-rapture-predictions.html>.
- Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation, 2022, *Ukraine war Exacerbates famine in the Global South*, viewed 12 May 2023, from <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/ukraine-war-exacerbates-famine-global-south>.
- Hoston, A. & Mandaville, P., 2022, *The role of religion in Russia's war on Ukraine*, viewed 28 May 2023, from <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/03/religion-russias-war-ukraine>.
- Hunter, J., 2022, *The Ukrainian religious sites ruined by fighting*, viewed 15 April 2023, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60933862>.
- Ituma, E.A., 2021, *Introduction to early Christianity*, Society for Research & Academic Excellence, Enugu.
- Jonathan, P., 2022, *Russia unveiled nuclear weapon capable of destroying every living in the world to scare NATO and USA*, 2022, viewed 28 April 2023, from <https://www.inforclusive.com.ng/2022/03/02/russia-unveiled-nuclear-weapon-capable-of-destroying-every-living-in-the-world-to-scare-nato-and-usa-photos/>.
- Kramer, E.A., 2022, *Also at stake in Ukraine: The future of two orthodox churches*, viewed 04 April 2022, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/02/world/europe/russia-ukraine-orthodox-church.html>.
- Kudasiewicz, J., 1986, *The synoptic Gospels today*, Alba-House, New-York, NY.
- Ladd, G.E., 1974, *A theology of the New Testament*, Lutterworth, London.
- Laurie, G., 2022, *Are Russia and Ukraine in Bible prophecy?*, viewed 20 July 2023, from <https://harvest.org/resources/greggs-blog/post/are-russia-and-ukraine-in-bible-prophecy/8March2022>.
- Matcalfe, J., 1995, *Matthew*, Publishing Trust, Buckinghamshire.
- McCarthy, J., 2022, *How Russia's invasion of Ukraine could force 500M people into acute hunger*, viewed 20 August 2023, from <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/ukraine-russia-conflict-hunger-food-insecurity/>.
- McGill, K., n.d., *The motives of the New Testament authors*, viewed 28 May 2024, from <https://godisforus.com/information/bible/ntdocs/motives.htm>.
- McKnight, E.V. & Malbon, E.S., 1994, *The new literary criticism and the New Testament*, Trinity Press, Valley Forge, PA.
- Mix, D.M., 2022, *Is this the end of the world? Russia's war against Ukraine questions some Christians*, viewed 20 August 2023, from <http://jgrchj.com/is-this-the-end-of-the-world-russias-war-against-ukraine-questions-some-christians/>.
- Omanson, R.L., 2003, 'Amen', in T.C. Butler (Gen. ed.), *Holman illustrated Bible dictionary* (pp. 56–57), Holman-Reference, Nashville, TN.
- Osborne, G.R., 1977, *Redaction criticism*, TSF Research, Middleton, MA.
- Pullela, P., 2022, *Analysis: Ukraine invasion splits Orthodox Church*, viewed 2 April 2024, from <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-invasion-splits-orthodox-church-isolates-russian-patriarch-2022-03-14/>.
- Silk, M., 2022, *Ukraine offers a middle path between just war and pacifism*, viewed 12 November 2023, from <https://religionnews.com/2022/03/14/ukraine-offers-a-middle-path-between-just-war-and-pacifism/>.
- Smalley, S.S., 1977, 'Redaction criticism', in M.I. Howard (ed.), *New Testament interpretation: Essays on principles and methods* (pp. 181–195), Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Smith, P., 2022, *How the Russia-Ukraine war is tangled with religion*, viewed 20 August 2023, from <https://www.timesofisrael.com/how-the-russia-ukraine-war-is-tangled-with-religion/>.
- Stankiewicz, K., 2022, *White house is worried about famine overseas due to Russia-Ukraine war, economic advisor says*, viewed 20 August 2023, from <https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/01/russia-ukraine-war-white-house-is-worried-about-famine-overseas.html>.
- Sutton, M.A., 2015, *Could Vladimir Putin battle the antichrist? How some evangelicals debate the end times*, viewed 20 August 2023, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/04/22/could-vladimir-putin-battle-the-antichrist-how-some-evangelicals-debate-the-end-times>.
- The Economist, 2022, *Russia's orthodox church paints the conflict in Ukraine as a holy war*, viewed 20 August 2023, from <https://www.economist.com/europe/2022/03/21/russias-orthodox-church-paints-the-conflict-in-ukraine-as-a-holy-war>.
- Thompson, J.A., 1986, *Life in Bible times*, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester.
- Ukeachusim, C.P., 2022, 'Exegetical study of John 16:25–33 and the church in persecution in Nigeria', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 78(4), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i4.7366>
- Ukeachusim, C.P., 2023a, 'Russia-Ukraine war: Understanding and responding to wars and rumours of wars as ἀρχὴ ὀδίνων', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 79(4), 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i4.8717>
- Ukeachusim, C.P., 2023b, 'Eschatological events in Matthew 24:1–15 and COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 44(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v44i1.2755>
- Ukeachusim, C.P., 2024a, 'Understanding COVID-19 birth-pangs: Theological responses and the promised Parousia of Jesus', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 45(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v45i1.2834>
- Ukeachusim, C.P., 2024b, 'Assessing the sociological and Pauline insights to the quests for peace and security in Nigeria', *In die Skriflig* 58(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v58i1.3081>
- United Nations, n.d., *Sustainable development goal 2: Zero Hunger*, viewed 20 August 2023, from <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/hunger/>.
- USA Today, 2022a, *Factcheck Russians Satan 2 nuclear missile unveiled*, viewed 20 August 2023, from <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/factcheck/2022/03/08/fact-check-russians-satan-2-nuclear-missile-unveiled-2016/6983354001/>.
- USA Today, 2022b, *Ukraine-Russia invasion live updates*, viewed 13 November 2023, from <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2022/02/27/ukraine-russia-invasion-live-updates/6960680001/>.
- Watson, D. & Jenkins, S., 1983, *Jesus then and now*, Lion Publishing, Herts.
- Waxman, O.B., 2022, *How a post-war famine in Russia and Ukraine shaped the 20th century*, viewed 20 August 2023, from <https://time.com/6164661/ukraine-war-hunger-wwi-lessons/>.
- Wright, N.T., 2002, *Matthew for everyone*, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London.