



Russia–Ukraine war: Understanding and responding to wars and rumours of wars as ἀρχὴ ὠδίνων

**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

Research Project Registration:

Project Leader: Ernest van Eck 

Project Number: 2400030

Description:

The author/s are participating in the research project 'Africa Platform for NT Scholars', directed by Prof. Dr Ernest van Eck, Department of New Testament and Related Literature, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria

Corresponding author:

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

Dates:

Received: 22 Mar. 2023

Accepted: 07 Sept. 2023

Published: 21 Dec. 2023

How to cite this article:

Ukeachusim, C.P., 2023, 'Russia–Ukraine war: Understanding and responding to wars and rumours of wars as ἀρχὴ ὠδίνων', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 79(4), a8717. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i4.8717>

Read online:

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

In Matthew 24, Jesus prophesied to his disciples about 'wars and rumours of wars' and other eschatological birth-pangs to prepare them in advance on how they are to be responding to eschatological events as they would be unfolding in the interim of his ascension and his promised Parousia. What then does Jesus mean by enlisting 'wars and rumours of wars' in this eschatological era to be functioning as 'the beginning of birth-pangs' and how should Christians be responding to wars and rumours of wars as eschatological birth-pangs? Employing the redaction exegetical method, this study focuses on interpreting Matthew 24:6–8 to explain what Jesus most probably meant as he enlisted 'wars and rumours of wars' as eschatological birth-pangs; and with special reference to the Russia–Ukraine war that broke out on 24 February 2022, recommends from the Olivet prophecy how Christians are to be righteously responding to 'wars and rumours of wars' as eschatological birth-pangs.

Contribution: This study explored Matthew 24:6–8 to unveil what Jesus means by enlisting wars and rumours of wars as eschatological birth-pangs. With special reference to the Russian military invasion of Ukraine, theological highlights were recommended on how Christians are to be responding to war and war rumours as end-time birth-pains.

Keywords: Matthew 24:6–8; Jesus' eschatological prophecy; war and rumours of wars; birth-pangs; theological eschatological responses; Christians; Russia; Ukraine.

Introduction

From the Old Testament and inter-testamental periods, history reveals that wars and rumours of wars have been taking place in the world. However, in the gospels, Jesus enlisted πολέμους and ἀκοὴς πολέμων as distressful events that after his death, resurrection and ascension would take up the theological role of functioning as eschatological birth-pangs that would be heralding the nearness of the day or hour when his promised Parousia would materialise; and also signal the nearness of the world coming to an end. It is a theological concern how Christians are to understand (Verrett 2022) and respond to the Russia–Ukraine war that started on 24 February 2022; and other wars and rumours of wars as eschatological birth-pangs (Casper 2022). Unveiling the theological teaching, commands and hortations on how Christians in these last days should be responding to wars and rumours of wars as ἀρχὴ ὠδίνων are significant because Jesus had theological views (Ladd 1974:196) and reasons (Zuck 1991:12) for which he intimated his disciples on all that they should understand about eschatological birth-pangs and how they are to be responding to wars and war rumours as merely birth-pangs.

The redaction criticism method is used in analysing biblical texts in order to explain and make room for proper understanding of the theological intentions behind the selection of sources by each gospel evangelist. Redaction criticism assumes that each gospel author selected sources and intentionally used them to effect their own peculiar interpretation and theological stances on the themes in their gospels (Chinwokwu 2015:43). Therefore, this study employs the redaction exegetical method of conducting biblical research to examine Jesus' theological teaching in Matthew 24:6–8 and to unveil from the whole context of the Olivet prophecy how Christians are to be understanding and responding to 'wars and rumours of wars' as eschatological birth-pangs.

Copyright: © 2023. The Authors. Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

Note: Special Collection: Africa Platform for NT Scholars, sub-edited by Ernest van Eck (University of Toronto, Canada).

Social context and the underlying motif of wars and rumours of wars as eschatological birth-pangs in Matthew's Gospel

The histories of the Jews as the people of God from the Old Testament (Verbrugge 2000:161), and the inter-testamental periods, reveal that because of their sins of idolatry and apostasy, and Israelites not paying heed to God's warnings through his prophets, God allowed them to be taken into exile where they experienced diverse kinds of sufferings, and oppressions. Also, during the New Testament era, the Jews were subjugated and oppressed politically, economically and socially by the Roman Empire (Thompson 1986:283). The Jews then responded by engaging in varying degrees of revolts; and various sects pictured the Messiah differently, but they still held to the apocalyptic visions and prophecies that God would act by sending the political Messiah who would fight to restore their kingdom (Packer, Tenney & William 1982:101–111). Among the then Jews and the disciples of Jesus, many were obsessed with eschatological curiosities (Mt 24:3; Ac 1:6–7). They misunderstood the theological nature and function of the promised Messiah. In their eschatological thinking, they hoped that their expected political Messiah will defeat their oppressors and consolidate his kingdom like in the days of David. The Jews and the disciples of Jesus were ignorant and lacked theological understanding about the nature and function of the Messiah (Mt 24:15); theological stance about the consummation of the world and the time of the Son of Man (Mt 24:3, 36, 42, 44; 25:13) (Clapham, Heading & Horlock 1979:40). Jesus perceiving their lack of understanding, through his eschatological sermon, thereby teaches his disciples that the wars and rumours of wars and other eschatological events that will be occurring in the future will not pinpoint the time of the end of the world and the time of his return (Mt 24:6–8).

After the earthly ministry, death, resurrection and the ascension of Jesus, most probably, many Christian communities emerged as a result of persecution and the universal focus of the gospel. The Matthean Christian community in the then larger Jewish community (Brown 2014:215) also experienced the impacts of being oppressed militarily, economically, politically, culturally and religiously by the Roman Empire. It was most probable, that many members of the resented and persecuted Matthean Christian community in a larger Jewish community responded to their experienced *Sitz im Leben* by being obsessed with eschatological curiosities; being vulnerable to be deceived by false prophets (Mt 24:3, 5, 24); by having reasons to be afraid, lawless, betrayers; offended and apostate (Mt 24:7–12). The Matthean Christian community most probably lived during the era when persecution (Mt 24:9), revolutions and wars and rumours of wars tensions were very high (Mt 24:7–12), and therefore, its members needed to be taught how they must be adhering to security measures (Mt 24:16–20). Then, many members of the Matthean Christian community must have lacked proper understanding about the theological stance they

should know about Jesus' promised return and how the world would be consummated (Mt 24:15).

Most probably, Matthew being the leader of this Christian community himself, therefore, had special interest in eschatology (Chinwokwu 2015:85). Perhaps, he sourced and redacted the individual units of Jesus' eschatological sermons and employed them in addressing the concerns of the situations-in-life confronting his Christian community. Matthew's understanding and theology drawn from Jesus' eschatological sermon with regards to wars and rumours of wars underline the fact that Jesus did not give his followers hope that the tides of history, with its wars and rumours of wars, would be turned (Thompson 1986:283). Rather, because it has been predestined that there will be increasing intensities of sins of lawlessness, offences and love of many waxing cold (Mt 24:12), Matthew underlines the fact that there would be wars and rumours of wars as the histories of the world would be unfolding, but they would not determine when the world would end and when Jesus would return as he promised. Wars and rumours of wars will be functioning as eschatological birth-pangs in the last days (Mt 24:6–8). Therefore, through Matthew's underlining eschatological motif and teaching, he preserves for Christians of every age, how they are to be responding to wars and rumours of wars and other sorrowful events as eschatological birth-pangs.

Exegetical study of Matthew 24:6–8

Jesus was approached by his disciples when he was going out from the temple at Jerusalem to show him the buildings of the temple. Jesus beheld the buildings of the temple and prophesied doom for the temple which expressed God's covenant with Israel (Wright 1992:161). Jesus prophetically said to them, that all the magnificent buildings they were then seeing shall surely be destroyed (Mt 24:2; Foster 1980:64). When Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives, his disciples being curious (Zuck 1991:227) to know more about eschatological sayings (Chinwokwu 2015:85) about which he had been intimating them, came to him privately and requested that he tells them when his eschatological sayings shall be, and what shall be the sign of his coming, and of the end of the world. Seeing their curiosities (Haynes 2022a), Jesus in answering their 'when questions' (Chinwokwu 2015:104), commands them by the implication of the imperative verb βλέπετε to 'see to it' or 'take care' that no man deceives them (Mt 24:4; Fenton 1963:383). Jesus being all knowing and proactive, knew that his disciples would be obsessively curious to keep enquiring about eschatological birth-pangs and immediate signs that would lead to the end of the world and his Parousia, when he will no longer be bodily present with them. Therefore, he used the Greek verb πλανήση (Mt 24:4) that is in its subjunctive aorist active 3rd person singular form from πλανᾶω to warn his disciples that they could be deceived. Although Jesus' disciples are not to neglect or rule out the approaching end-time, Jesus in the Olivet prophecy re-addresses concern away from fretfulness about when he will return towards an interest in the quality of Christian life in the interim

(Chinwokwu 2015:85). Jesus in his method of advance-warning informs and thereby clarifies to his disciples (Zuck 1991:230) that in the interim of the last-days, that many shall use his name, saying ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ χριστός [I am the Christ] and leverage on that to deceive many (Mt 24:5). Pretenders posing as prophets will be using the name of Jesus to be deceiving many (Mt 24:4, 11; Fenton 1963:383).

In verse 6, Jesus categorically enlists hearing of wars and rumours of wars as eschatological birth-pangs (Verrett 2022). The verb μελήσετε used in its indicative future active second person plural form -μέλλω, qualifies both the hearing of wars and rumours of wars as birth-pang events that would be occurring in the future, after the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. These events have been destined to be happening in the interim (Chinwokwu 2015:85) between the departure of Jesus and his promised Parousia. Jesus emphatically states that these wars and rumours of wars, and other birth-pangs 'must take place' (Mt 24:6). In the Old Testament, wars and its rumours have been occurring (2 Chr 15:6; Is 19:2). Then nations had political economic, cultural and religious reasons to militarily invade other nations. Israel fought both offensive holy wars to enter and possess the Promised Land, and defensive wars to defend their land, religious and political heritages (Verbrugge 2000:481). In the interim of Jesus' departure and his promised Parousia, wars and its rumours have taken up eschatological birth-pain function. Eschatological birth-pangs with special reference to wars and rumours of wars will be intensively causing offence, upheavals, violence, traumas, woes, disorders, despairs, adversities and deaths in the world; the elects like the worldly could also be victims of its distressful effects. Eschatological ὠδίνων [birth-pangs] may have occurred in the lifetime of the disciples or may occur in the future. The disciples are by the implication of the Greek imperative phrase 'ὀρᾶτεμὴθροεῖσθε', to remain calm (Zuck 1991:229) and not to be troubled (Mt 24:6), because they have been informed in advance and thereby fore-armed.

These eschatological events predestined to come to pass because of the increasing intensities of sins of lawlessness, offences and love of many waxing cold (Mt 24:12), will not be limited by persons or numbers. Jesus did not declare the number of wars that would take place before the end of the world and the materialisation of his Parousia (Verrett 2022); hence, γενέσθαι is used in its infinitive aorist middle deponent form. By the inference of the Greek phrase, ἀλλ' οὐπω ἐστὶν τὸ τέλος Jesus provides the answer to the disciples' second question, which is, that he tells them the sign of the end of the world. By the implication of ἀλλ' (Macnair 1995:225), Jesus intimates his disciples that the eschatological birth-pangs will be happening as predestined but they will not indicate or pinpoint that 'the world is ending at any particular time (*kairos*) which in this context refers to the climatic era that would lead up to Christ's second coming' (Stone 2008:14) or the day the consummation of the world would occur. As these eschatological birth-pangs will be happening, nevertheless, they would not yet exactly determine the time of the τέλος [end] (Verbrugge 2000:559) of this current state of

the world. There may have been some early disciples who were erroneously living with the consciousness that along with the destruction of their temple in AD 70 the end of the world should have materialised (Foster 1980:40). But, there will not be many endings of the world. The context of Matthew 24:6 indicates that there will be only one end of the world. The occurrences of these listed eschatological birth-pangs would not pinpoint the exact time of the τέλος [end] that Jesus talked about.

In verse 7, Jesus continues explaining and enlisting eschatological birth-sorrows that would be happening in the world in the last-days. To further explain what he means by wars and rumours of wars in the last-days, by the implication of ἐγερθήσεται γὰρ ἔθνος ἐπὶ ἔθνος, Jesus mentions that nation shall rise against nation, and 'ἐγερθήσεται βασιλεία ἐπὶ βασιλείαν' that kingdom shall rise against kingdom (Mt 24:7). The Greek noun ἔθνος means a multitude of people living together under one government and includes people of the same ethnicity or federation (Verbrugge 2000:161). As the history of the world would be unfolding, people living under one government in its variations of ethnicities or federations would be rising against each other in diverse places (τόπος). The preposition 'ἐπὶ' in this verse implies that the superior nation or kingdom would rise up against or exercise power authority or control over the other with hostile intents. The Greek noun βασιλεία used in its nominative feminine singular form, literally means territory ruled by a king. Kingdom against kingdom portends the open wars of different countries against each other. This means that as a sign of 'the last-days' and not of 'the last-day', nations and royal powers shall be rising up against each other in different times in the history of the world, 'engaging in military conflicts and discussing military conflicts' (Verrett 2022), but the occurrences of nations rising up and engaging in 'large-scale conflicts' against each other would not indicate the time of Jesus' coming and the exact time of the end of the world. All those occurrences that were enlisted in verses 5–7 are described by Jesus to be merely the beginning of sorrows-ἀρχὴ ὠδίνων (Mt 24:8; Ladd 1974:623); hence, they are not the signs that would pinpoint the hour or day when Jesus' promised return and the end of the world would materialise (Fenton 1963:383).

The Russia–Ukraine war and rumours of wars as ὠδίνων (eschatological birth-pangs)

Historically, Russia and Ukraine have been having conflicts (Smith 2022). The immediate causes of the escalation of this Russia war on Ukraine that started on 24 February 2022 include: that Russia under the administration of President Putin upholds that Ukraine as a sovereign nation does not have a genuine statehood; that Ukraine broke the agreements she had reached with Russia; that Ukraine's attempt to join NATO is a threat to the security of Russia (Yadav 2022b); that the history which the Ukrainians hold dear to themselves as their political, and religious historic origin is perceived by

Russia's current political administration as being distorted and that Russia does not approve other European countries' moves to align with United States (Aljazeera News 2022a). All these motivated the President of Russia to make proposals to have dialogue with United States and NATO on these issues for the past 8 years. While President Putin claimed that the proposals were not answered and this influenced him to threaten that he will carry out military operation in Ukraine (Aljazeera News 2022b), President Zelensky declared that they have 'held 88 rounds of talks in various formats to prevent this war' (Tawfeeq 2022). When President Putin threatened that he and his administration were being pushed to carry out military operation in Ukraine, many thought that his threats were mere rumours (Casper 2022). This war was preceded by diverse kinds of rumours, in this case 'news' about the Russia and Ukraine war, and this relates to Jesus' prophecy about rumours [ἄκοις πολέμων] about wars being one of the eschatological birth-pangs in the last-days (Mt 24:6).

President Putin's assumed 'mere threat' of carrying out military invasion of Ukraine, thought to be impossible was on 24 February 2022 executed. President Putin being supported by the Federation Council of Russia launched a 'special military operation' against Ukraine as their only option to protect Russia and to help the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic separatists that are pro-Russia to gain their independence. Russia invaded Ukraine with the aim to demilitarise and denazify Ukraine (Aljazeera News 2022a). As the Russian military started executing their military operation which is twisted with struggles for religious and political sovereignties in Ukraine (Stack 2022), they had to reveal to the world some of their dangerous nuclear weapons which they claim that, if deployed, could destroy everyone on the earth (Jonathan 2022). The Russian military unveiled their dangerous nuclear weapons for the purpose of frightening Ukrainians with their tactical nuclear weapons (News Sky 2022) and other nations of the world that might help them (Independenteagle 2022). In response, the Ukrainians being led by their President Volodymyr Zelenskyy had to mobilise their military age men to fight in defence of the sovereignty of their nation and religion (Kramer 2022). The Russian military fighting to expand and protect their sovereignty and Ukrainians fighting to defend their nation relate to Jesus' prophecy that in the last days nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom (Mt 24:7; Bricker 2022). Being a war that is tangled by religion, Putin also made moves to restore the 'Russkiy Mir' or 'Russian world' religious sovereignty in Ukraine (Kramer 2022).

Although there are many Russians who do not support this Russian military invasion of Ukraine (Demytrie 2022), there are some leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church who claim that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church should not be sovereign, and hence, perceive the raid to be a holy-war. The Russian church leaders who see the war to be a holy-war unreservedly support Putin's military invasion of Ukraine, by praying and blessing President Putin's use of military

oppression to consolidate Russia's political and religious sovereignty (The Economist 2022). The church leaders that support President Putin's military invasion state that 'Russian soldiers dying in Ukraine will be cleansed of sin that they committed' (Reuters 2022a). Viewing Russia's war against the Ukrainians as a crusade has cracked the worldwide Orthodox Church and is now causing the worldwide Orthodox Church to be experiencing an in-house rebellion. The war caused a rift between the Russian Orthodox Church and other Orthodox Churches worldwide and other Christian churches (Pullela 2022).

In Ukraine, both leaders of the Orthodox Churches sternly express disapproval of the Russian military operation in Ukraine (Smith 2022), and appealed that the fratricidal war going on between two related nations be stopped. However, because of the struggles for religious and political sovereignties, the appeals were not heeded, hence the war escalated (Hoston & Mandaville 2022). The future of the Ukraine Orthodox Church and the sovereignty of the Russian Orthodox Church largely depend on the outcome of the war (Kramer 2022). This ongoing Russia-Ukraine war has caused the massive destruction of about 59 religious sites (Hunter 2022) and other uncountable number of religious buildings. Also, uncountable numbers of individual and government owned properties and energy infrastructures have been targeted and destroyed (Reuters 2022b). Within the first 2 weeks of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Russian military deliberately shot and burned down residential houses, hospitals, schools, bakeries and ware-houses; they also shot at civilians who were not armed (McCarthy 2022) and thereby causing many to experience woes which relate to Jesus' prophecy in Matthew 24:17. The impacts of the ongoing war have caused about 3.2 million Ukrainians to be displaced (McCarthy 2022), and out of fear about 25 000 Russians have fled from their country since Russia invaded Ukraine (Demytrie 2022). Many male military-aged Russians also left Russia for the fear of being mobilised to go and fight against the Ukrainians (Soni 2022); many Ukrainians have been wounded (Kramer 2022); many Ukraine civilians (Statista Research Department 2022) and those fighting in defence of their country (Reuters 2022c), and many of the Russian soldiers and senior commanders have been killed or injured (The Sun 2022). Hence, many Ukrainians and Russians are in shock, and traumatised; and many Christians are experiencing a crisis of faith.

Wars normally come with the corollary of famine and Jesus had presaged that wars occurring in the world would have the corollary of famine (Mt 24:6). Accordingly, the Russia-Ukraine war has consolidated famine (Waxman 2022) and it has negatively impacted the economies of Ukraine and Russia and in extension other nations of the world that depend on the two nations as they are recognised as the 'bread baskets' of the globe (Stankiewicz 2022).

Because of the escalation and brutality of Russia's war on Ukraine and its direct and indirect impacts on Russia, many

people are curious to know whether this Russia–Ukraine conflict will culminate to the 3rd world war and to the end of the world (Haynes 2022b); their eschatological curiosities and attempts to predict when Jesus will return relate to the eschatological curiosities of the disciples of Jesus (Mt 24:3). The Russia–Ukraine war has also leveraged self-professing prophets (Mt 24:5, 11) who are seeking credibility to be releasing prophecies and predicting the exact time or day when Jesus would return and when the world would end, to validate themselves as the anointed prophets of God (Bailey 2022).

The peace consolidation attempts and warnings of the world leaders (Baynes 2022), concerned individuals (Yadav 2022a) and countries, Church leaders, the United Nations (Guterres 2022), NATO, European Union, and African Union (Okafor 2022) to stop the war have not helped; hence the war has escalated (McCarthy 2022). Political and religious ambitions, provocations generating suspicions (RT.com 2022), offences, counter offences and attacks are encouraging the war to be escalating (Thengbong 2022). The efforts of the world leaders and the goals of the United Nations and other peace-making agencies to consolidate wholesome peace and security in the world have not succeeded because of the increasing intensities of iniquities inherent in offensive provocations, lawlessness and love of many waxing cold as Jesus prophesied concerning the eschatological era (Mt 24:10, 12). The increasing intensities of news about sorrowful events prevalent in violent conflicts and the effects of climate changes occurring in diverse places in the globe (Relief Web International Report 2018) are shaking the world in accordance with the Bible prophecies (Mt 24:5–8). With the brutality of this Russian war on Ukraine and other past and ongoing wars in these last days, like many Christians in war zones, many Ukrainians and Russians are to choose between praying and pacifism on the one hand, and praying and resistance on the other (Casper 2022). How then should Christians in this interim of Jesus' ascension and his promised Parousia be responding to wars and rumours of wars and their accompanying corollaries as eschatological birth-pangs?

Jesus' Olivet Prophecy's insights to righteous Christians' responses to wars and rumours of wars as eschatological birth-pangs

Response of not being obsessed with eschatological curiosities (Mt 24:3):

Due to the Russia-Ukraine war and other wars and rumours of wars that are daily being reported by the world news, many professing Christians are curious to know the exact time and day of Jesus' second coming and of the end of the world. Christians who are obsessed about knowing the exact time and day of Jesus' second coming and of the end of the world are exposing themselves to be vulnerable to deceit as Jesus prophesied (Mt 24:3–4). Christians in war zones and elsewhere in the world should not be obsessed with eschatological curiosities. Instead,

Christians are commanded to be ever ready for the Parousia of Jesus which will happen suddenly (Mt 24:37–44), when no one knows (Mt 24:36,44).

The response of not believing false prophets (Mt 24:4–5, 23–24, 26):

Many acclaimed plenipotentiaries of God are making diverse declarations, prophecies and conspiracy theories concerning Russia-Ukraine war and other rumours of wars thereby connecting them to be immediate eschatological events that are to precede the Parousia (Mt 24:29–31), instead of birth-pangs (Mt 24:6–8) that Jesus has designated them to be. Christians are to be discerning and taking heed that none of the self-acclaimed prophets deceives them with their prophesying, teachings, preaching, conspiracy theories, end time calculations; and making attempts to predict the exact time and/or day when Jesus' promised Parousia and the end of the world would occur. For Jesus declared that, no man and no angel know when the end of the world and his Parousia will materialise (Mt 24:36).

Response of understanding (Mt 24:15, 32 – 33):

Christians in war zones and elsewhere in the globe should always be cognizant of the theological affirmation that eschatological birth-pangs are occurring in accordance of the divine plan for this generation (Mt 24:6,34–35). As prophesies concerning the last-days are unfolding, Christians are persuaded to be reading the scripture with understanding (Mt 24:15). Christians having advance information and theological understanding, by seeing eschatological birth-pangs, the way God wants them to be seen, are thereby equipped to know how they are to be righteously responding to them as they would be militantly waiting for the promised Parousia.

Fear not response (Mt 24:6–8):

Wars and other eschatological birth-pangs cause diverse degrees of sufferings, destructions of properties and deaths; hence, they consolidate phobias in the minds of many world inhabitants. However, Jesus himself commands his disciples not to be troubled or terrified as eschatological birth-pangs will be unfolding (Mt 24:6), for he has pre-informed (Mt 24:25) and prepared them on how they are to be responding to them.

Response of not being offended (Mt 24:10):

It was self-calculated acclaimed offences and suspicions that motivated Russia to invade Ukraine. Many Ukrainians are hurt that God allowed the Russian government to invade their country, hence they are offended with God; with Russians who invaded their country; and with their fellow Ukrainians who are pro-Russia, they felt betrayed them. Though, there may be traumatizing occurrences that expose Christians to become vulnerable to experience a crisis of faith and hence, become offended and susceptible to be betraying and hating one another, yet they are to learn not to be offended with God or their fellow Christians and the rest of the people of the world (Mt 24:10).

Agape love response (Mt 24:12):

Christians are to identify with and keep relating with God and their neighbours with agape kind of affection. Those fleeing from Ukraine, Russia and other war zones should be shown

love by Christians in the nations they may have fled to. Christians are not to be weary in manifesting agape love as they would be militantly waiting and getting prepared for the second coming of Jesus by compassionately helping those God would bring their way.

Preaching the gospel response (Mt 24:14):

The Ukraine-Russia war, and other wars and rumours of wars increasingly occurring are employed by the divine to be preaching and be heralding that the world is living in the eschatological era. As fleeing Christians and non-Christians from war zones will be scattered all over the world seeking for refuge, fleeing Christians and Christians in the tranquil countries are to respond by also carrying on the mission-mandate of preaching the gospel to those God will bring their ways.

Prayer response (Mt 24:20):

As Russia-Ukraine war and other eschatological birth-pangs are negatively impacting the world, Christians are to be responding by praying. Ukraine, Russian Christians, and other Christians in the world are not to be weary in praying whether they are immediately receiving answers to their prayers or not. As this generation will be witnessing the increasing occurrences of eschatological birth-pangs, consequently, Christians are called to a life of prayerfulness till the return of Jesus.

Response of adhering to security measures (Mt 24:16–18):

Many Christians do not know how they are to be responding to eschatological birth-pangs. Theologically, by the implications of 'then let those who are in Judea flee into the mountains' (Mt 24:16); 'let him who is on the housetop not go down to get the things out that are in his house' (Mt 24:17); and 'let him who is in the field not turn back to get his cloak' (Mt 24:18); describe divine's approval to protect life as eschatological birth-pangs will be devastatingly unfolding with their corollaries of causing sorrows in the world. Christians confronting war and every other eschatological birth-pang are to run for their lives when fleeing is required to preserve lives and should stay to fight to defend their lives when situation calls for resistance.

Conclusion

Akin to the disciples of Jesus in the Olivet prophecy who had eschatological curiosities, many Christians and non-believers in the world are curious to know whether the Russian military invasion of Ukraine could culminate in the end of the world. Several Christians also do not understand what Jesus meant when he enlisted wars and rumours of wars as eschatological birth-pangs and how Christians are to be responding to wars and rumours of wars as eschatological birth-pangs. Hence, this study explored Matthew 24:6–8 that identifies wars and rumours of wars, among others, as eschatological birth-pangs that would not determine when the world would end and when Jesus' promised Parousia would materialise. This study concludes that Jesus' teachings to his disciples in the Olivet prophecy underline how Christians then and now are to be responding to war and other eschatological birth-pangs as they are because of sin, divinely premeditated to be occurring in these last-days.

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 contributions

The author declares that she is the sole author of this original research article.

Ethical considerations

This research manuscript submitted on the above topic has been duly reviewed and approved by Research Ethics Committee, Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

The Research Ethics Committee waived ethical considerations because this study is determined to be a non-human subject research, hence does not pose any risk to human beings. Because this study's manuscript involves theoretical or conceptual studies, use of secondary non-human data, use of historical archives which has no risk and because it adhered to the rules of conducting biblical hermeneutical exegetical research, it has been granted an ethics waiver from the Committee of Research Ethics and Integrity of the Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, University of Nigeria.

Funding information

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

Data availability

Data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, .P.U., on request.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

References

- Aljazeera News, 2022a, *Highlights of Russian President Putin's speech*, viewed 31 March 2022, 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 24 February, 2022 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 12 April 2022, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2022/03/10/russia-putin-end-of-the-world/>.
- Baynes, M., 2022, *Estonia warns Russian residents they could be banned from EU if they answer draft to fight in Ukraine*, viewed 4 November 2022, from <https://news.sky.com/story/estonia-warns-russian-residents-they-could-be-banned-from-EU-if-they-answer-draft-12704905>.
- Bricker, V., 2022, *Wars and Rumours of Wars: A Present-Day look*, viewed 26 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.
- Casper, J., 2022, *Amid war and rumors of war, Ukraine pastors preach and prepare*, viewed 21 February 2022, from <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2022/february/ukraine-russia-churches-donetsk-luhansk-putin-independence.html>.
- Chinwoku, N.E., 2015, *Introduction to the Tradition of Jesus*, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Clapham, D., Heading, J. & Horlock, M., 1979, *Day-by-day through the New Testament*, Precious-Seed, United Kingdom.
- Demytrie, R., 2022, *Ukraine: Not all Russians support this war'-Yevgeny*, viewed 14 March 2022, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-60710975> posted 13 March 2022.
- Fenton, J.C., 1963, *The Gospel of Saint Matthew*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth.
- Foster, D., 1980, *Jerusalem*, Christian Herald Books, New York.
- Guterres, A., 2022, *UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres Says 'there's no way I can end war in Ukraine, we have no power'*, viewed 19 October 2022, from <https://www.latestly.com/socially/world/un-secretary-general-antonio-guterres-says-theres-no-way-i-can-end-war-in-ukraine-we-have-no-power-watch-video-4351041.html>.
- Haynes, C.L., 2022a, *What does the End of the world mean?*, viewed 1 April 2022, 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 4 May 2022, from <https://www.crosswalk.com/special-coverage/end-times/why-its-dangerous-to-guess-rapture-predictions.html>.
- Hoston, A. & Mandaville, P., 2022, *The role of religion in Russia's war on Ukraine*, viewed 4 April 2022, from <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/03/role-religion-russias-war-ukraine>.
- Hunter, J., 2022, *The Ukrainian religious sites ruined by fighting*, viewed 7 March 2022, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60933862>
- Independenteagle 2022, *US and NATO to not intervene if Russia launches nuclear strike due to 'apocalypse' fear*, viewed 28 October 2022, from <https://www.independenteagle.com/us-and-nato-to-not-intervene-if-russia-launches-nuclear-strike-due-to-apocalypse-fear/>.
- Jonathan, P., 2022, *Russia Unveiled Nuclear weapon capable of destroying every living in the world to scare NATO and USA*, viewed 28 April 2022, from <https://www.infoxclusive.com.ng/2022/03/02/russia-unveiled-nuclear-weapon-capable-of-destroying-every-living-in-the-world-to-scare-nato-usa-photos/>.
- Kramer, E.A., 2022, *Also at stake in Ukraine: The future of two orthodox churches'* viewed 4 April 2022, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/02/world/europe/russia-ukraine-orthodox-church.html>.
- Ladd, G.E., 1975, *A theology of the New Testament*, Lutterworth Press, London.
- Macnair, I., 1995, *Teach yourself New Testament Greek*, Thomas-Nelson, London.
- McCarthy, J., 2022, *How Russia's Invasion of Ukraine could force 500M people into acute hunger*, viewed 10 March 2022, from <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/ukraine-russia-conflict-hunger-food-insecurity/>.
- News Sky 2022, *Ukraine invasion: What nuclear weapons does Russia have and what damage could they cause?*, viewed 1 November 2022, from <https://news.sky.com/story/ukraine-invasion-what-nuclear-weapons-does-russia-have-and-what-damage-could-they-cause-12554087>.
- Okafor, C., 2022, *African Union expresses "extreme concern" over situation in Ukraine*, viewed 1 July 2022, from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/513657-african-union-expresses-extreme-concern-over-situation-in-ukraine.html>.
- Packer, J.I., Tenney, M.C. & William, W., 1982, *The world of the New Testament*, Thomas-Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN.
- Pullela, P., 2022, *Analysis: Ukraine invasion splits Orthodox Church*, viewed 2 April 2022, from <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-invasion-splits-orthodox-church-isolates-russian-patriarch-2022-03-14/>.
- ReliefWeb International Report, 2018, *World building peace together practical resource*, viewed 3 July 2022, from <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/building-peace-together-practical-resource>.
- RT International, 2022, *Russia issues emergency call to UN Security Council*, viewed 28 October 2022, from <https://www.rt.com/russia/563668-uncsc-nord-stream-provocations/>.
- Reuters, 2022a, *Orthodox Church leader says Russian soldiers dying in Ukraine will be cleansed of sin*, viewed 4 November 2022, from <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/orthodox-church-leader-says-russian-soldiers-dying-ukraine-will-be-cleansed-sin-2022-09-26/>.
- Reuters, 2022b, *Russia says it launched major attack on Ukraine infrastructure*, viewed 4 November 2022, from <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-says-it-launched-massive-missile-attack-ukrainian-infrastructure-2022-10-17/>.
- Reuters, 2022c, *Almost 9000 Ukrainian military killed in war with Russia armed forces*, viewed 4 November 2022, from <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/almost-9000-ukrainian-military-killed-in-war-with-russia-armed-forces-chief-2022-08-22/>.
- Silk, M., 2022, *Ukraine offers a middle path between just war and pacifism*, viewed 10 April 2022, from <https://religionnews.com/2022/03/14/ukraine-offers-a-middle-path-between-just-war-and-pacifism/>.
- Smith, P., 2022, *How the Russia-Ukraine war is tangled with religion*, viewed 1 April 2022, from <https://www.timesofisrael.com/how-the-russia-ukraine-war-is-tangled-with-religion/>.
- Soni, M., 2022, *Many Russians flee to avoid Putin's military call-up for Ukraine war*, viewed 4 November 2022, from <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/many-russians-flee-to-avoid-putin-s-military-call-up-for-ukraine-war-5-points-101663908927669-amp.html>.
- Stack, L., 2022, *Eastern orthodox leaders are outspoken on Ukraine War. Except One*, viewed 6 April 2022, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/13/nyregion/russian-ukrainian-orthodox-churches.html>.
- Stankiewicz, K., 2022, *White house is worried about famine overseas due to Russia-Ukraine war, economic advisor says*, viewed 8 April 2022, from <https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/01/russia-ukraine-war-white-house-is-worried-about-famine-overseas.html>.
- Statista Research Department, 2022, *Number of civilian casualties during the war in Ukraine 2022*, viewed 5 November 2022, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1293492/ukraine-war-casualties-during-the-war-in-Ukraine-2022/>.
- Stone, P., 2008, *Living in the final chapter*, Voice of Evangelism, Cleveland, TN
- Tawfeeq, M. 2022, *'Zelensky says he held 88 rounds of talks with Russia to prevent the war'*, viewed 21 September 2022, from https://edition.cnn.com/europe/live-news/russia-ukraine-war-news-09-21-22/h_0825104fe02ab6ff4a0c30fb574fb704
- The Economist, 2022, *Russia's Orthodox Church paints the conflict in Ukraine as a holy war*, viewed 2 April 2022, from <https://www.economist.com/europe/2022/03/21/russias-orthodox-church-paints-the-conflict-in-ukraine-as-a-holy-war>.
- Thengblog, 2022, *I remind you that the Russian Army isn't fighting in its entirety, our offensive is not stopping-Putin vows to Continue Ukraine war*, viewed 2 November 2022, from <https://www.thengblog.com.ng/2022/09/i-remind-you-that-russian-army-isnt.html>.
- The Sun News, *Putin's 56th colonel and '40 soldiers' killed in first strikes on Russian targets using US-supplied HIMARS missiles*, viewed 30 October 2022, from <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/19013321/putins-56th-colonel-and-40-soldiers-killed-strikes>.
- Thompson, J.A., 1986, *Life in Bible Times*, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester.
- Verbrugge, V.D., 2000, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Zondervan, Grand-Rapids, MI.
- Verrett, B., 2022, *How are wars and rumours of wars Tied to the end times?*, viewed 1 November 2022, from <https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/how-are-wars-and-rumors-of-war-tied-to-the-end-times.html>.
- Waxman, O.B., 2022, *How a post-war famine in Russia and Ukraine shaped the 20th century*, viewed 9 April 2022, from <https://time.com/6164661/ukraine-war-hunger-wwi-lessons/>.
- Wright, N.T., 1992, *The New Testament and the People of God*, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, Marylebone.
- Yadav, N., 2022a, *Bill Clinton says NATO Delayed Vladimir Putin's Invasion of Ukraine...*, viewed 1 November 2022, from <https://www.benzinga.com/news/22/09/28909874/bill-clinton-says-nato-delay-putins-invasion-of-ukraine-this-crisis-might-have-occured-even-sooner>.
- Yadav, N., 2022b, *Trump offers to lead delegation to broker peace with Putin: 'The entire world is at Stake'*, viewed 28 October 2022, from <https://www.benzinga.com/news/22/09/29068369/trump-offers-to-lead-delegation-to-broker-peace-with-putin-the-entire-world-is-at-stake-i>.
- Zuck, R.B., 1991, *Basic Bible interpretation*, Cook-Communications Paris, Ontario.