

The Great Tribulation of Matthew 24

Matthew 24 is a favorite text of prophetic speculators who interpret it to apply to the time in which we now live. By citing the morning news about wars, famines and earthquakes they assert that Jesus was talking about these times in which we now live. In fact, there is no reason to divorce this passage from its historical setting. Jesus was discussing the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Romans which took place in AD 70. The chart below will illustrate the historical fulfillment of these things in the first century.

This discourse is sometimes called the Olivet Discourse because it was delivered on the Mount of Olives (vs. 3). It is called the Little Apocalypse because it contains apocalyptic imagery similar to the book of Revelation. Mark 13 and Luke 21 are parallel accounts.

Wars and Rumors of Wars (vs. 6)

- An unstable time
- The Jewish Revolt – AD 66-70

Famines (vs. 7)

- Judea – Time of Emperor Claudius, c. AD 46 (Acts 11:28)
- Rome – Time of Claudius

Earthquakes (vs. 7)

- Laodicea – AD 61
- Pompeii – AD 62

Deliver You to Tribulation (vs. 9)

- Apostles and other disciples imprisoned and persecuted – Acts 4-5; 7-8
- Heb. 10:32-36

Kill You

- James, by Herod Agrippa I (AD 37-44)
- Peter & Paul by Nero

Many Will Fall Away (vs. 10)

- Love grow cold (vs. 12).
- Heb. 10:24-25

False Prophets: “I am the Christ” (vss. 11, 23-26)

- Theudas – Acts 5:36; *Ant.* XX.v.1
- The Egyptian – Acts 21:38; *Ant.* XX.viii.6
- Simon – Acts 8:9

Gospel Preached in Whole World (vs. 14)

- The great commission (Mt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15-16; Acts 1:8)
- By AD 62 – Col. 1:23; cf. 1:6

Abomination of Desolation (vs. 15)

- Prophesied by Daniel (9:27; 11:31; 12:11)
- Jerusalem surrounded by armies (Lk. 21:20)

To Those in Judea: Flee to the Mountains (vs. 16-20)

- Church fled to Pella in trans-Jordan (Eusebius *EH* iii.v)
- Many Jews “swam away from the city as from a ship when it is going to sink” (Josephus *Wars* II.20.1)
- Urgency of fleeing: housetop, field, with child, winter, sabbath

Great Tribulation (vss. 21, 29-31)

- Worst event of history
- Sun and moon darkened; stars fall; coming on the clouds
- Typical apocalyptic imagery and language. See examples: Joel 2:10; 3:15; Isa. 13:10; 34:4; Ezek. 32:7; Amos 8:9; Isa. 19:1; Ps. 104:3

Send Forth His Angels (vs. 31)

- Used often of earthly messengers (Mt. 11:10; Lk. 7:24; Jas. 2:25)
- Apostles and others who took the gospel to the world (cf. vs. 14)

The Time Text – “This Generation” (vs. 34)

- Used of an ordinary generation (Mt. 1:17; 11:16; 12:39; 17:17; et al.)
- Describes something which was to happen at that time

The Transition Text – “That Day and Hour” (vs. 36)

- Here the Lord moves from a discussion of the destruction of Jerusalem to comments about the final and universal judgment (Mt. 7:22; 11:22; Jn. 5:28-29)
- No one knows the time