

Matthew Chapter 24-25 – The Olivet Discourse – Part 5  
Matthew 24:4-14 – Various Interpretations

**Matthew 24:4-14**

In the first section, Jesus gives a very general run-through of the end times.

Verses 4-8 state that there will be many false christs, there will be wars and reports of wars, and there will be (supernatural) disasters. But this is not yet the end of the age.

Verses 9-14 provide what is going to happen nearer to the end of the age. Jesus tells them that there will be great persecution, many will “fall away” (deception, self-interest, and betrayal), the love for others will be nearly non-existent, and this gospel of the kingdom will reach all nations.

This text carries with it the most questions and, based on our conclusions, impacts the rest of the understanding of the rest of the Olivet Discourse.

Here is the main question about this passage: Did these things take place? Are they taking place? Or will they take place in the future?

**#1 These Things Have Already Taken Place – Full Preterism**

Full Preterism (hyper-Preterism; post-millennial theology) believes that all aspects of the prophecy of Matthew 24-25 (and all prophecy of the New Testament) have been fulfilled, that Jesus Christ has already returned when Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D., and the Church is now the spiritual resurrection of Jesus Christ. They treat Scripture, especially prophecy, as an allegory.

Jesus Christ came to establish the cosmic earthquake of the New Covenant which would transform not only man's role in salvation history but the entire cosmos in the eschatological event of the promised creation of the new heavens and the new earth [2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1-2]. The rebirth of the human family in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, the re-born Israel which is the New Covenant Church, is the first stage in that new creation, just as the King of King declared in victory: "Behold, I make all things new" Revelation 21:5. ~ Michael Hunt, Agape Bible Study

According to Full Preterism, we are living in the kingdom; we are living in the new heaven and new earth. Life on this planet will go on forever (as far as they know), and the spiritual reality of life after death will not result in a bodily resurrection.

**#1a Some of These Things Have Already Taken Place – Partial Preterism**

Partial Preterism does not believe that the “resurrection” or second coming happened in 70 A.D. They do believe that Christ judged Jerusalem in 70 A.D. They believe this judgment signified the end of the “Jewish Age”, and concurrently inaugurated the “age to come.” The “age to come” refers to the current age of the Church, which is the kingdom now. In their view, there is no literal Kingdom of Israel.

In both views, the events described in Matthew 24-25 have been fulfilled, and the events in Matthew 24:4-14 were completed by AD 70. Below is a line-by-line fulfillment of Matthew 24 according to Michael Hunt.

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Prophecy from Matthew 24	Fulfillment historically
Many will come claiming to be the Christ	In the revolt against Rome that began in AD 66, three different men claimed to be the Messiah
There will be wars	In AD 64 the Roman Empire became unstable. A number of Roman provinces began revolts against the Empire
There will be famines	Acts 11:27-28 refers to a worldwide famine at the time of Emperor Claudius. Aid was sent to Jerusalem by Christians in the Roman Empire
There will be earthquakes *	There was a massive earthquake when Jesus died on the cross and at His resurrection. Earthquakes are frequent in the Holy Land due to a fault line that runs through the Jordan River Valley.
Christians will be handed over and tortured and killed	Stephen was martyred c. AD 34 and St. James in c. 62. In AD 64, the Roman Empire authorized the persecution of Christians. Many Christians across the Empire were martyred including SS. Peter and Paul.
Many will fall away from the faith because of the perilous times	The Jews who refused to believe in the Messiah in effect "fell away" from the faith and so did many Christians who faced martyrdom.
False prophets will arise	Many false prophets urged the revolt against Rome in AD 66.
Lawlessness will increase	Prior to the revolt the Roman authority acted with brutal disregard for the safety of the people; Jewish gangs known as the Scaraii murdered people at will.
The Gospel will be proclaimed to the inhabited world [oikoumene]; meaning the Roman world before the "end" will come.	By the time of the revolt in AD 66, the Gospel had spread from Britain to the Black Sea, from Gaul to Galatia, and from Egypt to the banks of the Euphrates River-covering the boundaries of the Roman Empire and beyond into India where St. Thomas was martyred.
The Temple will be profaned, Abomination of Desolation	Emperor Nero planned to put his statue in the Holy of Holies of the Temple but died before the plan could be initiated. Roman General Titus set up Roman standards, which depicted Roman deities, in the Temple in AD 66. Those in Judea must recognize the signs and escape. Simon, the Christian Bishop of Jerusalem led the Christian community out of Judea, across the Jordan River into Perea c. AD 66.
The Jerusalem Temple will be destroyed (verses 1-2).	The Jerusalem Temple was utterly destroyed by the Roman army in AD 70.

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This view is not only held by Full and Partial Preterists but also by some that believe that Jesus will return and have an actual kingdom. Some state that verse 15 picks up with the Great Tribulation. Usually, those who hold this view also believe that the rapture is after the Great Tribulation, post-tribulation rapture.”

Some also have held that the answers that Jesus gives are not in chronological order. Some have presented that 4-14 is the Church age, then it moves to the Great Tribulation (15-28), then Jesus talks about the Rapture and those who are rewardable at the Bema (24:29-5:30). In this case, the view of Matthew 24:4-14 being fulfilled in AD 70 would be seen as Historicism.

At first glance, the historical fulfillment of Matthew 24:4-14 sounds feasible. In fact, I have held this view in the past. But after studying the phrase *the end of the age*, we determined that it refers to the conclusion of Israel's 70 weeks. The conclusion of this pericope (4-14), then *the end will come* must refer to the 70<sup>th</sup> Week. Therefore, this is rejected.

## #2 These Things Are Taking Place – Historicism

This view presents Matthew 24:4-14, in whole or in part, as information describing the general events of the Church Age from Jesus' ascension leading up to the 70<sup>th</sup> Week of Israel. There are various views on this held by very good expositors and theologians.

1. Matthew 24:4-14 as a general progression of history in the church age leading up to the Tribulation.

John Walvoord – Taken as a whole, the opening section, ending with Matthew 24:14, itemizes general signs, events, and situations which mark the progress of the age, and, with growing intensity, indicate that the end of the age is approaching. These signs, however, by their very characteristics and because they have occurred throughout the present age, do not constitute a direct answer to the question of “the sign” of the coming of the Lord.

Stuart Weber (Holeman Commentary) – Jesus first warned, in general terms (24:4–14), of several characteristics of the period of time before he would return. There would be counterfeit messiahs, wars and rumors of wars, famines, pestilence, earthquakes martyrs, false prophets, increasing evil, and the preaching of the gospel worldwide.

2. Matthew 24:4-8 as a general description of the church age.

H. A. Ironside – “In Mt 24:4-8, Matthew deals particularly with the characteristics of the entire present age until Christ returns. Then in Mt 24:9-14, he emphasizes the signs of the last days. Mt 24:15 brings in the beginning of the great tribulation, as predicted also in Daniel 12:11.” This view is also held by Lewis S. Chafer and Kay Arthur.

J. Vernon McGee – I believe that our Lord, up there on the Mount of Olives, looked down to the end of the age and to the Great Tribulation Period, but that at the beginning of His discourse, He bridged the gap by giving us a picture of the present age of the church. I recognize that there are many good Bible teachers, much better than I am, who take the position that in Mt 24:5–8, He is speaking of the Tribulation Period, also; so if you want to

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disagree with me, you will be in very good company. However, it is my view that our Lord is not referring to the Great Tribulation until we reach Mt 24:9.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum– Matthew 24:4-6 is the general characteristics of the Church Age. And Matthew 24:7-8 is the sign of the end of the age. Matthew 24:9-28 is the Great Tribulation, with the first half being 9-14 and the second half in 15-28. Concerning the sign of the end of the age (Matthew 24:7-8), Dr. Fruchtenbaum states “World War I, 1914-1918, was the fulfillment of this particular prophecy, for that was the First World War. As virtually all historians agree, World War II was merely a continuation of World War I. Furthermore, both world wars had a decisive impact on Jewish history. World War I gave impetus to the growth of the Zionist movement, and World War II led to the re-establishment of the Jewish State. Since World War I, history has entered the last days of the Church Age. However, the last days are an extended period of time. The sign that the end of the age has begun is the worldwide conflict fulfilled by World War I and II.”

### #3 These Things Have Not Yet Taken Place - Futurism

This view interprets all of verses 4-14 are about the Great Tribulation, Israel’s final 70<sup>th</sup> week.

Dwight Pentecost - "There seems to be evidence to support the view that the first half of the week ("Daniel's 70th Week") is described in Mt 24:4-8. The parallelism between Mt 24:4-8 and Revelation 6:1-17 seems to indicate that the first half of the tribulation is here described.... The word “then” in Mt 24:9 seems to introduce the great persecutions against Israel that were promised them." This is also held by Warren Wiersbe, Thomas Constable, Stanley Toussaint, and David Jeremiah.

Charles Ryrie and Tommy Ice hold that verses 4-14 are the first half of the Tribulation, and verses 15-28 refer to the second half of the Tribulation.

Tommy Ice - I believe that Matthew 24:4-41 refers to the seven-year period (Dan. 9:24-27) that many commonly call the tribulation. The tribulation is divided in half by the abomination of desolation, mentioned by Jesus in verse 15. Thus, verses 4-14 refer to the first half of the tribulation and are parallel to the first five seal judgments found in Revelation 6.

### Conclusion – How do we know?

Three criteria must be enforced.

1. Consistent use of the Literal (Normative) Grammatical Historical (Cultural) Method. Specifically, this is a book to Israel, and this must be read and understood from the mindset of the Hebrew believer without the revelation of Paul in mind.
2. Consistent with the revelation of Matthew and the main point of Matthew remaining intact.
3. Consistent harmony with Old Testament prophecy, Matthew 24-25, and Revelation 6-19.

If we find that Matthew 24:4-14 does not represent Old Testament Eschatology or Revelation 6-19, then one can theorize that this is newly revealed information and therefore about a hidden age. I believe that 4-14 fits the general timeline of the full seven years; we will begin with that next lesson.