

# Matthew 24:21 Commentary

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Apostle Matthew

Click chart to enlarge  
Charts from [Jensen's Survey of the NT](#) - used by permission  
[Another Chart](#) from Charles Swindoll

## THE LIFE OF JESUS AS COVERED BY MATTHEW (shaded area)

Click chart to enlarge

**Matthew 24:21 "For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. (NAS 95)**

**KJV** For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.

**NET** For then there will be great suffering unlike anything that has happened from the beginning of the world until now, or ever will happen.

**ESV** For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.

**NIV** For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now-- and never to be equaled again.

**NLT** For there will be greater anguish than at any time since the world began. And it will never be so great again.

**YLT** for there shall be then great tribulation, such as was not from the beginning of the world till now, no, nor may be.

**ASV** for then shall be great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be.

**Matthew 24:21 "For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will: estai (3SFMI) gar tote thlipsis megale oia ou gegonen (3SRAI) ap arche kosmou eos tou nun oud ou me genetai (3SAMS):**

- Ps 69:22-28 Isa 65:12-16 Isa 66:15,16 Da 9:26 Da 12:1 Joel 1:2 2:2 Zec 11:8,9 14:2,3 Mal 4:1 Mk 13:9 Luke 19:43,44 Lk 21:24 1Th 2:16 Heb 10:26-29

## THE GREAT TRIBULATION: WITHOUT PARALLEL IN HUMAN HISTORY!

See the main commentary notes on [Matthew 24:15 Commentary](#)

For (**gar**) is a **term of explanation** which begs the question, what is Jesus explaining? He has just instructed the reader who understands the sign of the **abomination of desolation standing in the holy place** to flee, and even to pray this would not have to be in winter or on a Sabbath. So now He explains why this call to flee carries such a sense of extreme urgency. The **tribulation** that is coming will be **great** and there will be loss of life (Mt 24:22).

**For then** - At that time.

**Then** ([5119](#))(**tote**) is an adverb that functions as an **expression of time**. **Tote** means at that time or a point of time subsequent to

another point of time. In prophetic passages, then often describes the sequence of events. So what occurs next? Or to ask it another way, to what time does Jesus refer? What will be the event that precedes inception of the great tribulation? Clearly in **context** the event the reader (cp "let the reader understand" - Mt 24:15) is to be alert for is the **abomination of desolation standing in the holy place** (Mt 24:15). **Then** begins the **great tribulation**, the time of the greatest suffering and affliction the world has ever experienced.

**Will be** (estai) is first in the Greek sentence for emphasis.

**Great tribulation** - This exact phrase occurs only 3x - Mt 24:21, Rev 2:22, and Rev 7:14. In Rev 7:14 the Greek literally reads **the tribulation, the great one.**" As an aside, many commentators refer to the entire 7 year period (of **Daniel's Seventieth Week**) as the "**Tribulation.**" However, strictly speaking there is no passage in the Bible that ever specifically refers to this Seven Year period as the Tribulation. However this term is so "ingrained" in the literature that we will use it to refer to the seven year period, realizing that it is more accurately designated as **Daniel's Seventieth Week**.

The last 3.5 years of this present age will be days of **great** (megas) **thlipsis** or "dire pressure and continuing distress, caused by outward circumstances." (**Hiebert**)

**Tribulation** (2347)(**thlipsis** from **thlibo** = to crush, press together, squash, hem in, compress, squeeze in turn derived from **thlĀjo** = to break) originally expressed sheer, physical pressure on someone. **Thlipsis** is a strong term which does not refer to minor inconveniences, but to real hardships. Medically thlipsis was used of the pulse (pressure). **Thlipsis** describes a pressing together as when grapes are crushed beneath a weight. According to the ancient law of England, those who willfully refused to plead guilty, had heavy weights placed on their breasts, and were pressed and crushed to death, a gruesome picture of a literal thlipsis.

**Thlipsis** thus refers to great difficulty and Jesus adds the adjective *megale* meaning **great** to emphasize the greatness of the **tribulation**.

Many commentators attempt to explain Mt 24:21 as fulfilled in 70AD by appealing to Luke 21:23-note which says **"there will be great distress upon the land."** Luke's passage (Lk 21:20-24) clearly was fulfilled in 70AD with the destruction of Jerusalem. However, not only is Jesus' word for **distress** in Luke 21:23 different (**anagke**) than the Greek word in Mt 24:21, but Jesus' description of the **distress** is different than the description in Matthew and Mark. Both Mt 24:21 and Mk 13:19 use the Greek word (**tribulation** = **thlipsis**) and both describe a time of **tribulation** which will be unique and unprecedented, explaining that there has never been anything like it before and there will never be anything like it afterward. As reasoned elsewhere, the Holocaust makes 70AD pale in comparison, which in turn makes the thought of the yet to come **great tribulation** even more horrific! It follows that Jesus' description of **tribulation** in Mt 24:21 and Mk 13:19 is clearly a major stumbling block for writers who interpret the **abomination of desolation** (Mt 24:15, Mk 13:14) as the Roman Army and the **great tribulation** as a unique and unprecedented time of distress.

In addition, it is notable that in the **Septuagint**, the Greek word **anagke** (Lk 21:23-note) is used to describe the **Day of the LORD** (cf Zeph 1:15), but is never used to describe a unique, unprecedented time of distress in Israel. Of course one might argue that the "Day of the LORD" would include the time of the **great tribulation**, and I would agree. The point is that in the **Septuagint** the Greek word **thlipsis** is used in Da 12:1-note in a description very similar to Jesus' description in Mk 13:19 and Mt 24:21. And so the prophet Daniel describes "a time of **distress** (Lxx = **thlipsis**) **such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time.**" In sum, **thlipsis** is clearly used in both the Old and New Testaments to describe a unique, unprecedented time of tribulation in the nation of Israel.

**Henry Morris** - Although the entire seven year period will be a time of immense suffering on the earth, the **great tribulation** will be the final 3.5 years, initiated by the placing of the **"abomination of desolation"** (Matthew 24:15). This is all described in detail in the book of Revelation, especially Revelation 11:1-19:21.

## **THE WORST IS YET TO COME!**

**Such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world** - To what does **beginning of the world** refer? God's creation of the heaven and earth not a "big bang!" (cp Heb 11:3-note, Heb 1:2-note, Col 1:16-note = "by Him" = Jesus). What would **tribulation** such has never **occurred** include? It would include such cataclysmic events as the world wide flood in Noah's day and the total destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire and brimstone! Jesus says the coming tribulation is so great, that it would surpass even those dramatic divine judgments. Indeed, the great tribulation will be a manifestation of God's righteous wrath.

**John MacArthur** writes that "the massacres of Jews by the Romans in A.D. 70 and by the Nazis during the World War II will pale by comparison. Two out of every three Jews in the Holy Land will die under the fury of Satan as he enacts the judgment of God on the rebels of the Jewish nation. Many Christians will also be slaughtered, not as an act of God's judgment but in acts of ungodly

persecution." (MacArthur New Testament Commentary)

**Not** - Jesus uses the negative particle ([ou](#)) which is the strongest way of expressing negation.

**Occurred** - The verb occurred is in the **perfect tense** which speaks of the abiding nature of this time of the great tribulation. It will occur for 3.5 years, 1260 days, 42 months or time, times and half a time and no longer because of Mt 24:22.

**Zodhiates** - The contrast that follows is between this and every other **tribulation**. This will be the severest. ([Exegetical Commentary on Matthew- Dr. Spiros Zodhiates - 2006](#))

**Hiebert** adds "The **perfect tense** (of *has not occurred*) pictures its unparalleled intensity as an abiding fact. *Neither shall be* emphatically assures that there never will be another like it. Those who restrict the reference to A.D. 70 must confine this tribulation to that siege, but Taylor well observes, "This assertion is much too emphatic for a siege; it is clear that the thought of Mk 13:19 (Ed: And Mt 25:21) is eschatological." ([The Gospel of Mark- An Expositional Commentary](#))

**Weber** says "So the disciples might not underestimate the horror of this Great Tribulation, Jesus explained that it would be the worst suffering in all of history—unequaled from the beginning of the world until now (Mt 24:21). He added further emphasis, saying that this Tribulation would have the potential of destroying all life, leading some modern students to think of nuclear war. But whatever the means necessary to bring about such unparalleled destruction, it is evident that such a Great Tribulation is still future to us. So there is much more in mind here than the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. As bad as it was, that destruction has been multiplied in intensity on a number of occasions in the twentieth century alone.....The world has yet to see the great distress which will never be observed again." (Holman New Testament Commentary)

**John MacArthur** - God's message for Israel is that things are going to get immeasurably worse before they become better. That nation and its people will suffer treachery, desecration of the rebuilt Temple, indescribable persecution, and brutal slaughter that will be totally unparalleled in history. (MacArthur New Testament Commentary)

**Ray Stedman** - Many have found these words hard to believe. They clearly refer to an hour unlike anything else in history. Till recent times it had been thought incredible that humanity could ever sink to such an ebb as to bring on a judgment of this character. But we must always remember that political leaders only express ideas which have been lying half hidden in human hearts, waiting only for the precise moment to emerge. Hitler did not teach the Nazis to hate the Jews; he only dared express in voluble terms the hatred and smoldering resentment of thousands of Germans who were scarcely aware of the terrible passions hidden in their own hearts. When this man of lawlessness takes his position in the temple of God he will only be expressing what long has lain dormant in human hearts. ([When the Dam Breaks - Matthew 24:21-22](#))

The popular preacher **David Platt** ([Exalting Jesus in Matthew](#)) interprets Matthew 24:15-22 as fulfilled in 70AD and sees this as the "**great tribulation**" but such teaching fails to adhere strictly to the plain reading of Jesus' words that clearly depict a unique and unprecedented time of distress for the Jews in the **great tribulation**. **Platt** does correctly state that Daniel 12:1-note refers to a time like that described by Jesus in Mt 24:21, but he fails to interpret the prophecy in Daniel in **context** (of the events in Da 11:36-45-note which describe the rise and rule of the Antichrist in the last 3.5 years, the Great Tribulation), for reading the context leaves no doubt whatsoever that Daniel 12:1 ("a time of **distress** [**Lxx** uses **thlipsis**, the same word Jesus used for "**tribulation**" in Mt 24:21!] such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time") refers to the fate of the Jews in the end times, the last 3.5 years (cf the "Woman's" [aka Israel's] fate during the very specific time of 1260 days [corresponding to the "time, times, and half a time" in which the Little Horn {aka The Antichrist} wears down the saints [the Jews] as discussed in Da 7:25-note] of the Great Tribulation in Rev 12:6-note, Rev 12:14-note). And similarly the "**great tribulation**" is a yet future time of distress. **Platt** makes the mistake that most "preteristic" interpreters make of failing to take Jesus' words at face value (i.e., literally!). If one does so, it is clear that, as horrible as the events of 70AD were, they simply cannot compare to the future time of the great tribulation which is coming on the nation of Israel when **2/3's of the worlds Jews** will be slaughtered (cp 1/3 of world's Jewish population were slaughtered by Hitler! See prophetic description of this great slaughter of Jews that will occur during the Great Tribulation = Zech 13:8-9)

**William Hendricksen** who interprets Mt 24:15 as having a double fulfillment, both historically in 70AD and in the end times, writes that the Roman destruction and desolation in 70AD "foreshadowed the great and final violation by the Antichrist of all that is sacred." That is all Hendricksen says. He makes no mention whatsoever of Daniel 9:27 but instead mentions Da 12:11. On Matthew 24:21 Hendricksen gives an honest appraisal writing that "It should hardly be necessary to add that justice is not done to the concept of this tribulation, which immediately precedes "the end" of the world's history and which surpasses any other distress in its intensity, **if it is referred solely to the sorrows experienced during the fall of Jerusalem.**" (Bolding mine) While I so not agree with his "double fulfillment" interpretation, at least he interprets Matthew 24:21 honestly and without distorting the plain meaning of Jesus' words, unlike **all five** of the top rated commentaries on Matthew (see below for [Commenting on some of the Matthew Commentaries](#))

**ESV Study Bible** on the **great tribulation** - "The time of the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was horrible, but **the vision Jesus paints will have an even more horrific fulfillment in the future.**" (Bolding added)

Notice that Jesus' description makes it crystal clear that there can be **ONLY ONE great tribulation**, because there is nothing worse before it or after it! Daniel 12:1-note gave a similar description of "a time of distress such as **never occurred** since there was a nation **until that time.**" Daniel's description could not be a description of 70AD for the Jewish Holocaust in WWII surpassed the Jewish massacre in 70AD. While in fairness one could say the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD was a foreshadowing or harbinger of a more horrible future event, it was definitely not the **great tribulation** according to Jesus' "definition."

**Beginning** (746)(**arche**) refers to the commencement of something as an action, process, or state of being. Here **arche** refers to first in relation to time (priority in time, the beginning of anything, the origin and by far the most common use in the NT)

**World** (2889)(**kosmos** related to the verb **kosmeo** = to adorn, to put in order) means something that is well-arranged, that which has order or something arranged harmoniously. **Kosmos** refers to an ordered system or a system where order prevails. In this passage Jesus is referring to planet earth.

**Nor ever will** - This is the world's worst suffering and nothing after it will be worse. This qualifying statement of the degree of tribulation is the truth that presents one of the greatest stumbling blocks for those who try to ascribe all of Mt 24:15-22 to a past, historical fulfillment in 70AD. Notice that if one reads the words of Jesus in a normal manner and does not try to "read anything into" them, it is clear that this **great tribulation** in no way can be explained by the events of 70AD in which upwards to 1.1 million Jews were killed by the Roman soldiers. That horrible event was a tragic foreshadowing of the fact that the worst is yet to come!

Recall that Jesus had commanded the reader to consult the prophecy of Daniel to help understand His prophecy in Mt 24:15. In the obedience to His command, let's take a look at Daniel 12, where we find a statement that clearly parallels Jesus' warning in Mt 24:21 about the unprecedented nature of the coming **great tribulation**. Daniel records

Now at that time (**What time?** time in Da 11:36-45-note) Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of **distress** (Hebrew = **tsarah**; Lxx = **thlipsis** same noun as Mt 24:21!) **such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time**; and at that time your people (the Jews), everyone (the believing Jewish remnant) who is found written in the book (probably the [Book of Life](#)), **will be rescued** (Lxx = **sozo** the same verb Paul uses in Ro 11:26-note to describe the end times salvation of believing Jews at **Messiah's Second Coming**)." (Da 12:1-note)

**Comment:** The parallel between Daniel 12:1-note and Matthew 24:21 is clear. Daniel and Jesus are describing the same horrible end time event of unprecedented distress and tribulation which will befall the nation of Israel! This time will make the holocaust seem "small" by comparison! Notice also that in the following passage Mt 24:22 Jesus says that this horrible time will be cut short "**for the sake of the elect**" **Who are the elect?** In the context of Matthew 24 which was addressed to His Jewish disciples, Jesus probably has the Jewish **elect** in mind. However, there is no question that He also includes Gentile **elect** for we know from Revelation that there will be too many to count "from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues" (Rev 7:9-note), who are those that "come out of the **great tribulation**, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Rev 7:14-note).

**Not occurred...nor ever** (Literal = "**not** from the beginning of the world till now, **no, nor** may be) is a very unusual phrase with **three negatives** (oude ou me)! Jesus is making it very clear that the **great tribulation** He is predicting will never, absolutely ever occur again in the history of the world! This fact alone would be strong support against the commonly held view that the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD was the "great tribulation." The Jews have experienced far worse tribulation under Adolph Hitler than they did under the Roman general Titus! **This fact alone should make anyone who adheres to Mt 24:15-21 as a historically fulfilled event pause and take an honest, non-biased reappraisal of their interpretation!**

**John Phillips** on **great tribulation** - God's people have always been persecuted in this sin-cursed world, but we must not confuse ordinary persecutions with the great tribulation. It will be a special period of three and a half years (1,260 days) during which Satan will be allowed to do his worst against God's people in particular and mankind in general. It will be a time when God will pour out His wrath on this planet, and the Jewish people will finally be brought to the end of their Christ-rejecting self-reliance and pride.

**Walvoord** - The great tribulation, accordingly, is a specific period of time beginning with the abomination of desolation and closing with the second coming of Christ, in the light of Daniel's prophecies and confirmed by reference to forty-two months. In Revelation 11:2 and Rev 13:5, the great tribulation is a specific three-and-a-half-year period leading up to the second coming and should not be confused with a general time of trouble, such as was predicted earlier in Matthew 24:4-14. ([Matthew 24 The Signs of the End of the Age](#))

**Spiros Zodhiates** writes - Though dreadful and unique, the Tribulation will be under God's full control. Satan and his demons are sometimes called world rulers (from **kosmokrator**; see Eph 6:12), but God is the ruler of all, the **pantokrator** (the almighty, the ruler

of all heaven and earth, the universe (2Cor. 6:18; Rev. 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22). Because Satan's time will be short (Rev 12:7-14), he will no doubt command his malevolent ranks to carry out their evil plans efficiently. But Revelation 17:14 assures us who will be victorious: "These [the forces of evil including the Antichrist] shall make war with the Lamb [**arnion** a living lamb], and the Lamb shall overcome (**nikao**) them" (see also Rev. 5:6, 8, 12, 13; 6:1, 16; 7:9, 10, 14, 17; 12:11; 13:8; 14:1, 4, 10; 15:3; 17:14; 19:7, 9; 21:9, 14, 22, 23, 27; 22:1, 3). ([Ibid](#))

**ESV Study Bible** correctly states "that the reference is not to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, since the unprecedented destruction described in Matt. 24:21 did not take place in 70."

#### **Tony Garland on the Great Tribulation -**

- Unique time in history
- This time is said by Jesus to involve greater tribulation and danger than any other period in history past -- or yet to come!
- He states that if the time had not had a determined end -- if it were to be allowed to run its natural course, then perhaps there would be nobody left alive.
- Although this could be speaking in terms of a Jewish perspective (which is a theme in the OT), it seems to broaden here to include all living persons.
- Includes A Time of Jewish Tribulation

Numerous passages in the OT indicate there is coming a time of intense tribulation for the Jewish nation.....this is the means by which God will chastise Israel for the rejection of her Messiah and her continued unwillingness to recognize Jesus in His rightful role. (The following passages describe this same time period of Great Tribulation - Jeremiah 30:6-9, Daniel 12:1, Ezekiel 20:33-38, Zechariah 13:7-9) A theme of great judgment resulting in eventual delivery. (This is not what happened in 70 A.D.!) This is the means by which God will bring unbelieving Israel to faith in Messiah Jesus. Romans 11:25-27 ([Matthew 24 Commentary Notes](#))

**J C Ryle** (1816-1900) holds that the primary fulfillment of Mt 24:15 was in 70AD, but sees a yet future fulfillment - "But we must not suppose that this part of our Lord's prophecy is exhausted by the first taking of Jerusalem. It is more than probable that our Lord's words have a further and deeper application still. It is more than probable that they apply to a second siege of Jerusalem, which is yet to take place, when Israel has returned to their own land (**Ed**: Note that Ryle died 48 years before this prediction became reality in May, 1948)--and to a second tribulation on the inhabitants thereof, which shall only be stopped by the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. Such a view of this passage may sound startling to some. But those who doubt its correctness would do well to study the last chapter of the prophet Zechariah (Zech 14:1-21), and the last chapter of Daniel (Da 12:1-13). These two chapters contain solemn things. They throw great light on the verses we are now reading, and their connection with the verses which immediately follow." ([Ref](#)) **Comment**: While I appreciate Ryle's vision to see a future regathering of the nation of Israel to their land and also his interpretation of a yet to come great tribulation, Ryle is technically incorrect in saying 70AD constituted a first great tribulation. By Jesus' definition there can be only one, unique, unprecedented great tribulation.)

**Adam Clarke** (who is typical of most pre-1900 commentaries) interpreted the fall of Jerusalem in 70AD as the greatest of the tribulation Israel would ever experience writing "*These were the days in which all the calamities predicted by Moses, Joel, Daniel, and other prophets, as well as those predicted by our Savior, met in one common center, and were fulfilled in the most terrible manner on that generation.*" **Clarke** alludes to **Daniel** who described the coming great tribulation this way "Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a **time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time**; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued." (Da 12:1) As alluded to above, those writers who interpret the great tribulation of Mt 24:21 as fulfilled in 70AD did not live to witness the horrible Holocaust of World War II in which more than 6 million Jews were brutally tortured and kill by the Nazi war criminals!

**R C H Lenski** (1943) wrote of the **great tribulation** - "No judgment had ever and can ever be so severe. In the history of the world no judgment can be compared with this that wiped out the Jews as a nation." One wonders if he would have written this sentence had he known of the horrors of the holocaust that had not yet come to light when he published his commentary?

[Crucial Questions On Christ's Return Part 3- Tribulation - Now Or Never - David Legge](#)

**COMMENTING ON SOME  
OF THE MATTHEW COMMENTARIES  
AND THE UNIQUE GREAT TRIBULATION**



Clearly the fact that the unique, unprecedented time of the Great Tribulation begins the appearance of the sign of the abomination of desolation creates a major problem for anyone who says Mt 24:15 was fulfilled in 70AD. They will be forced to somehow explain or rationalize Jesus' words regarding the unique "one time" nature of this period of tribulation. That said, below are some excerpts of the "highest rated" commentaries on Matthew reviewing how they handle this problem.

(1) **D A Carson** - Author of the Matthew section in [Expositor's Bible Commentary](#) is Tim Challies' first choice of [Commentaries on Matthew](#), the second choice of [Ligonier \[R C Sproul's\] Ministry](#) and the only Matthew commentary recommended by [Desiring God](#), John Piper's website.

Let's look at how Dr Carson explains Mt 24:21 as a description of the Roman slaughter of Jews in 70AD. Dr Carson writes that

"The savagery, slaughter, disease, and famine (mothers eating their own children) were monstrous (cf. Jos. War V, 424-38), *"unequaled from the beginning of the world until now,"* and, according to Jesus, *"never to be equaled again."*

**Comment:** The italics are Dr. Carson's quotes from Josephus #443, but Josephus was not an eyewitness to the savagery, slaughter, disease and famine of Auschwitz and other Jewish concentration camps during World War II! Would Josephus really say the atrocities of 70 AD were "never to be equaled again" if he had seen the piles of naked dead Jewish bodies in the Nazi death camps? This question of course is conjectural on my part, but let the reader at least consider Josephus' reaction had he been able to see the horrors of the Holocaust!

Dr Carson goes on to acknowledge that

"There have been greater numbers of deaths—six million in the Nazi death camps, mostly Jews, and an estimated twenty million under Stalin—but never so high a percentage of a great city's population so thoroughly and painfully exterminated and enslaved as during the Fall of Jerusalem."

**Comment:** I beg to differ with Dr Carson's last statement, having read books on the horrors of WWII and watched many documentaries on the Jewish Holocaust at the hands of the demonically inspired Nazis. **First**, Jesus made an absolute and absolutely dogmatic statement in Matthew 24:21 (e.g., refer to His unusual use of **three negatives** discussed above). If one simply reads what Jesus said, not adding to or taking away from the text (cf warning in Pr 30:6), it is clear that He definitely did not specify a **percentage** of Jews exterminated. **Second**, I would propose that the percentage of Jewish deaths not to mention the horrible torture and starvation in "death camps" like [Auschwitz](#) far surpassed that of the Jewish deaths in Jerusalem (remember many writers feel that Josephus' 1.1 million is an over exaggeration)! How can anyone say that Jerusalem in 70AD was more "thoroughly and painfully exterminated" than the Jews at [Auschwitz \(if you believe this statement, you might click to refresh your memory concerning the horrors of the death camps!\)](#) And while Josephus was a witness to the events in 70AD, you might want to hear the testimony of a U S Infantryman who witnessed two Nazi death camps and tells his gripping story - [Auschwitz - World War II](#). Consider also the Wikipedia note that in 1945 when "the Red Army arrived at the camp on January 27 they found around 7,500 prisoners and about 600 corpses had been left behind. Among the items found by the Soviet soldiers were 370,000 men's suits, 837,000 women's garments {**Ed: That percentage, which of course is an approximation, calculates to about 99.4% exterminated! I think you can see the point!**}, and 7.7 tonnes (8.5 short tons) of human hair!" (Wikipedia) Beloved, as horrible as were the horrors in World War II, Jesus says in so many words that the worst is yet to come!

(2) **Leon Morris** ([Pillar New Testament Commentary](#)- also a top rated commentary by [Challies](#) and [Ligonier](#)) also interprets Mt 24:15-21 as fulfilled in 70 AD. However, at least Dr Morris agrees that Mt 24:21

"**is underlined with the information that it will be of a magnitude unparalleled in the entire history of the world; such trouble has never been, nor will it be equaled thereafter.** (There is an unusual piling up of negatives—*oud ou me*—that makes for a very emphatic negation.)" (Bolding added for emphasis)

**Ed Comment:** Notice that while Dr Morris acknowledges the problem Jesus' description presents in Matthew 24:21, at least he makes no attempt to explain it away.

(3) **Craig Keener** ([The Gospel of Matthew- A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary](#) - fifth in [Challies'](#) top 5, and third in [Ligonier's list](#)) who interprets Mt 24:15-22 as fulfilled in 70AD explains Mt 24:21-22 this way -

"Daniel spoke of the end-time tribulation greater than any that had preceded it (Da 12:1note); other Jewish writers also spoke of eschatological tribulations (1QM 15.1; 2 Bar 25:3-4). By indicating that **no tribulation**

**before or after this one would rival it**, Mark may allow and Matthew may suggest (**Ed comment**: Notice that Keener is clearly speculating) that the tribulation on which they focus is a tribulation within history, not necessarily the final one (cf. Jos. War 1.12, making the same claim for A.D. 66-73), although the language may simply follow an emphatic formula (**Ed comment**: Notice Keener's verbal gymnastics in an attempt to get around Jesus' plain statement of a unique time of unprecedented tribulation). The memory of Jerusalem's destruction in A.D. 70 seared itself indelibly in early Judaism's memory as the most horrible of times (cf., e.g., Sib. Or. 5.397-413; Pesiq. R. 1:5; 28:1), although the revolt in Egypt of 115-17 (cf. CPJ 2:225-60, 435-50)—followed by the virtual obliteration of Egyptian Jewry—and the revolt under Hadrian in 132-35 ultimately proved no less devastating (see above). (**Ed comment**: So what is Keener's point? It is interesting he makes no mention of the Holocaust!) Archaeology has provided some samples of the final moments of horror endured by those within Jerusalem during its fall (especially the burnt house; see Avigad 1980: 120-39; idem 1983a) (**Ed comment**: The horrid photographs of naked Jewish bodies piled up by the Nazis like garbage far surpasses any archaeological artifact!)

**Ed Comment**: Keener has a lengthy discussion, but does not really explain how 70AD could be considered the greatest tribulation of all time.

(4) **R T France** ([The Gospel of Matthew-NICNT](#) - third in [Challies'](#) top 5, and third in [Ligonier's list](#)) who interprets Mt 24:15-22 as fulfilled in 70AD weakly tries to skirt the plain meaning of Jesus' words in Mt 24:21 with this comment -

"Josephus' lurid description of the horrors of the siege (War 5.424-438, 512-518, 567-572; 6.193-213) shows that, while v. 21 uses the **hyperbolic language** of apocalyptic (cf. Dan 12:1; Joel 2:2; 1QM 1:11-12; Test. Mos. 8:1; Rev 16:18), it is an assessment which would have been agreed by those involved in the events."

**Ed comment**: Jesus' declaration was plain and not hyperbole. He literally meant what he said! Furthermore, France alludes to Daniel 12:1-note which is not "hyperbolic language" but a clear prophecy of a horrible time of testing coming to the nation of Israel! To deny or ignore that is twisting what the text clearly states! And recall that to accurately interpret Daniel 12:1, the reader needs to go back to Daniel 10 where this particular vision began, for this same vision is continued in Daniel 11 and finally comes to its consummation in Daniel 12.

(5) **Craig Blomberg** ([Matthew- An Exegetical and Theological Exposition](#) - Ranked number four in [Tim Challies'](#) top 5, and in the "Runners Up" after the top five in the [Ligonier's list](#)) favors a 70AD fulfillment, but thankfully he does seem to at least entertain the possibility that Jesus' warning in Mt 24:15-20 refers to a yet future event:

"Undoubtedly, much that surrounded the destruction of the Temple and the Jewish war in A.D. 70 **will be repeated, probably on a larger scale, just prior to Christ's return** (**Ed comment**: This begs the question what does Blomberg think "*will be repeated*?" Does he think an **abomination of desolation standing in the holy place** will be repeated? He does not elaborate). But given the thoroughly Jewish nature of all of the details of Mt 24:15-20, their close correspondence to the actual events of the mid-first century, and the more explicit wording of Luke 21:20-24 (**Ed comment**: As noted in the [Luke 21:20-24 Commentary](#) all commentaries that interpret Mt 24:15ff as fulfilled in 70AD reference Luke's passage, but I would submit Luke describes a different sign and has multiple other differences compared to Matthew 24!), there is *no reason* to take any of Matthew's text here as looking beyond the events that culminated in the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. (**Ed comment**: I strongly disagree. There is one *reason* and that is that the **abomination of desolation** that Daniel described in Daniel 9:27 has not taken place!)

**Blomberg** also encounters difficulty when he tries to explain the Great Tribulation of Mt 24:21 - He writes -

"Another **"then"** (tote) appears. It does not seem to mean *later* but *at that time or beginning immediately* (**Ed comment**: Which begs the question "**At what time?**" If we examine the context Jesus clearly tells us the "*time*" - "**When** [a time word] **you see the abomination of desolation...**" = that's the beginning of the end!) —the NIV does not even break for a paragraph. But the concept of a period of unparalleled distress (based on Da 12:1) **causes problems** (**Ed comment**: **Why does it cause problems?** It causes problems because a 70AD fulfillment simply cannot explain Mt 24:21, nor does it explain Daniel 12:1!). **If these two verses simply depict the horrors surrounding the war of A.D. 70, it is hard to see how Mt 24:21 could be true** (**Ed comment**: I am thankful for this honest comment. Indeed it is "*hard to see*" because the events of 70AD simply do not fulfill the description of Jesus in Mt 24:21!) If they point to some end-time sacrilege, just before the Parousia, then it is hard to see how Matthew allows for a gap of at least two thousand years between Mt 24:20-21 (**Ed comment**: To reiterate, it is NOT "**hard**" at all to see, if one simply takes at face value the flow of Jesus' visible starting signal in Mt 24:15 to His words of warning in Mt 24:16-20 and His clear explanation of



why it so imperative that the Jews flee in Mt 24:21.) It is probably best, therefore, to understand this period of great distress, or "**the great tribulation**," as it is more commonly known, as the entire period beginning with the devastation of A.D. 70 and continuing on until Christ's return (cf. "*immediately*" in Mt 24:29)

**Ed comment:** Blomberg is saying the last 2000 years have been a **great tribulation** and nothing was like it before and nothing will ever again be like it. This simply makes no sense but it does demonstrate the lengths to which non-literal interpreters must go to try to make the "pieces fit!" It is also interesting that Blomberg calls attention to the time phrase "**immediately**" because if one reads Mt 24:15-21 literally the **Great Tribulation** is in fact followed "**immediately**" by Jesus' return and that in fact is how "those days shall be cut short!" Mt 24:22).

(6) **Philip Schaff** (1819-1893) ([Matthew 24 Commentary - Schaff's Popular Commentary on the New Testament](#)) - **Schaff** interprets Mt 24:15 as fulfilled in 70AD but recognizes the problem with this genre of interpretation in Mt 24:21-22 writing

"This seems to indicate that nothing analogous will occur again. But Matthew 24:22 is so closely connected with this verse, that a **double reference is probable even in Matthew 24:15-21**, which were most strikingly fulfilled in the first century. The final application would be to a sudden catastrophe **before the coming of our Lord**, which His people will be enabled to avoid, by recognizing the appearance of the signs He has given. Still these verses, of themselves, shed little light as yet on the subject of the last days."

**Comment: Do you see Schaff's dilemma?** While he believes in the historical fulfillment of Mt 24:15-22, he is forced by a plain reading of the text to invoke the possibility of a future fulfillment! While I certainly have questions about the interpretation of some of the passages in Matthew 24:4-14, there is very little doubt regarding the **sign** Jesus gives in Matthew 24:15-22! (**See comments on Mt 24:15**) In fact **Schaff** admits that "*The final application would be to a sudden catastrophe before the coming of our Lord, which His people will be enabled to avoid, by recognizing the appearance of the signs He has given.*" This is an amazing statement! **Schaff's** comments on one hand see only a past historical fulfillment and yet here he implies that Jesus has indeed given signs that will be useful to His people in the future! However, the only way they will be useful is if one interprets them literally and accurately!

(7) **Grant Osborne** on "**the great tribulation**" -

As Hagner (Word Biblical Commentary) notes, this must be either (1) hyperbolic language for the fall of Jerusalem (see Josephus, J.W. 5.10.1; 5.11.3-4; 5.12.3 for the terrible suffering in that siege); (2) prediction of the events at the end of the age; or (3) the destruction of Jerusalem as a foreshadowing of the final events of history. As we have argued throughout this section, the third is the most likely. Nolland also admits that the language here, while befitting the horrible nature of the Roman slaughter of the Jewish people, has a "heightening" that portrays an "eschatological horizon" that goes beyond the Jewish War. (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament).

**Comment:** Osborne recognizes the problem in attempting to explain the "**great tribulation**" as having been fulfilled at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD and so he says it is a foreshadowing and a fulfillment. While there is some truth in that interpretation, let's be perfectly clear -- The events of 70AD were **NOT** the **fulfillment** of Jesus' prophecy. There is a difference between **fulfillment** and **foreshadowing**. **Fulfillment** means the completion of something, whereas **foreshadowing** is a warning of what is to come in the future. So yes, in that sense the loss of the lives of 1 million Jews in 70AD might be considered a foreshadowing of the **great tribulation** that will occur at the end of this age, but the same could be said of the World War II holocaust in which 6 million Jews lost their lives. And just as the Nazi holocaust in the 1940's was not a fulfillment of Mt 24:15-21, neither was the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD. In sum, the **great tribulation** predicts a future time of distress that will far surpass both of these horrible historical events. Zechariah 13:8-9 prophesies that in this future time of tribulation 2/3's of Jews will die and 1/3 will survive. As of 2016 the Jewish population of the world is 16 million. Therefore, if the "great tribulation" were to occur in our day over 10 million Jews would lose their lives! Jesus' words warn of the worst time to come!

**SYNONYMS FOR  
GREAT TRIBULATION**

There are several terms that describe a time that is very compatible with that seen in the Great Tribulation. Based on a literal reading of Daniel 9:27-note, the **abomination of desolation** will appear in the **midpoint** of a seven year covenant. The **"he"** of Da 9:27 is the **Antichrist** who will take his place in the Temple, declaring himself as being God (2Th 2:3-note, 2Th 2:4-note). In addition the **False Prophet** of Revelation 13:14-15-note will make an **Image of the Beast** (The **Beast** = the Antichrist) and while it is never clearly stated, it is highly likely that this image will be standing the holy place, **the Temple** (Mt 24:15-note). These dramatic events will be visible to the entire world and for those who have spiritual eyes to see (cf Jn 12:40, Lk 8:10, read especially 2Th 2:8, 9-10, 11-12) and spiritual ears to hear (Rev 2:7, 11, 3:6, 13, 22), they will recognize that this is Jesus' sign inaugurating the **Great Tribulation**, the unspeakably horrible last half of **Daniel's Seventieth Week**. The **Great Tribulation** will last 3.5 years (see Parallel time phrases - 3.5 years, "Time, times, half a time", 42 mo, 1260 days). Although the time is not that long, the divine judgment is that great and so the time of the Great Tribulation is so important in God's prophetic timetable that it is described in multiple passages under several synonyms.

<b>SYNONYMS FOR GREAT TRIBULATION</b>	
<b>SCRIPTURE</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
<b>Matthew 24:21</b>	<b>Great Tribulation</b>
<b>Deuteronomy 4:29, 30</b>	<b>When you are in distress</b> (ESV = tribulation)
<b>Daniel 11:36-note</b>	<b>Indignation</b>
<b>Daniel 12:1-note</b>	<b>Time of great distress</b> (ESV = time of trouble)
<b>Isaiah 26:20</b>	<b>Indignation</b> (ESV = fury)
<b>Jeremiah 30:7-note</b>	<b>The Time of Jacob's distress</b>
<b>Revelation 7:14-note</b>	<b>The Great Tribulation</b>