

# Matthew 24:22 Commentary

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Apostle Matthew

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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 24:22** "Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short: kai ei me ekolobothesan (3PAPI) ai hemerai ekeinai ouk an esothe (3SAPI) pasa sarx dia de tous eklektous kolobothesontai (3PFPI) ai` hemerai ekeinai:

- **Unless:** Mk 13:20)(for the sake of: Isa 6:13 65:8,9 Zec 13:8, 14:2 Ro 9:11 11:25-31 2Ti 2:10)

### DAYS OF UNPARALLELED AND ALL CONSUMING FEROCITY

**NET** And if those days had not been cut short, no one would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

**ESV** And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

**NIV** If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.

**NLT** In fact, unless that time of calamity is shortened, not a single person will survive. But it will be shortened for the sake of God's chosen ones.

**Those days - What days?** From the immediate context (Mt 24:21, cf also same phrase "those days" in Mt 24:19) the answer clearly is the **days** of the time of the Great Tribulation, the last 3.5 years (1260 days = 42 months = time, times, half a time) preceding the end of this present age which will be brought to an end ("cut short") by the **Second Coming** ushering in the Messianic Age, the age of righteousness (aka, the **Millennium**). Those days will be days of three and one-half years of unprecedented oppression on Israel (as well as all believers alive at that time) as described in multiple passages in both testaments (see Da 7:21, 25 [saints in context = Jews]; Rev. 11:2, Rev 12:6, 14; Rev 13:5, Rev 13:15)

Greek expert **Dr Spiros Zodhiates** writes "The contextual referent of "those days" is the **Great Tribulation**." ([Exegetical Commentary on Matthew- Dr. Spiros Zodhiates - 2006](#))

**R T France** attempts to explain Jesus' statement as compatible with a 70AD fulfillment writing "The horror was in fact **but short**" by the Roman capture of the city after five months, bringing physical relief to those who had survived the famine in the city." (NICNT) As an aside it seems that most "preteristic" interpreters are forced to appeal to non-inspired, secular historical writings to buttress their interpretations rather than relying the fully inspired Scriptures to comment on Scripture. (**See related resource: Compare Scripture with Scripture**)

However even the **ESV Study Bible** observes that "It is evident that the reference is **not** to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, since the unprecedented destruction described in Mt 24:21 did not take place in 70." (Bolding mine)

### A RE "THOSE DAYS" REALLY "THOSE DAYS" OF MATTHEW 24:15-21?

As has been discussed in Mt 24:15-note, those who hold to a 70AD fulfillment of Mt 24:15-22 have a number of "problematic passages" to deal with, whereas a futuristic interpretation encounters far fewer problems. Some "preteristic" commentators (like [D A Carson](#)) recognize there are significant problems with their historical interpretation and thus try to say that "those days" in Mt 24:22 does not really refer to "those days" Jesus had just described in the immediate **context!** Beloved, if you begin to jettison the golden rule that "**Context Is King**" in **interpretation**, rest assured that your interpretation will likely be *askew* if not even *absurd!* What is fascinating is that **Carson** does recognize that **no life** in Mt 24:22 "*normally refers to all mankind and is more sweeping than "no one in Jerusalem."* I totally agree, and indeed that truth actually **supports** a "*sweeping*" end times, eschatological **tribulation** and not a fulfillment in 70AD! In addition note that the literal Greek of Mt 24:22 begins with "**kai**" (English = "**and**") which the NAS does not translate, but the ESV and NET versions do. The point is that "**and**" is a **copulative** which clearly links the narrative in Mt 24:22 with Jesus' words in Mt 24:21. These two verses are clearly related (*coupled*) despite what some "preteristic" commentators contend! Notice also that in **context** Jesus has just used the same phrase "**those days**" in Mt 24:19 which serves to link "**those days**" in Mt 24:22 with the **days** of the Great Tribulation. Finally, keep the overall **context** of this section in mind -- Jesus has just described days of unprecedented tribulation, but in Mt 24:22 comforts and encourages those who will find themselves in **those days** with the mercy filled truth that "**those days**" will be "**cut short.**" Any other interpretation clearly distorts and twists the text out of its proper context! (**See related resource: Keep Context King** if you want rightly **Interpret** the Word of Truth - 2Ti 2:15-note).

**Unless those days had been cut short** - On one hand this description serves to emphasize the unparalleled, unprecedented "consuming ferocity" of the **Great Tribulation!** On the other hand this description emphasizes the sovereign control of Jehovah God over ALL the affairs of this world. In His great mercy, He has decreed the Great Tribulation will last only 3.5 years (1260 days) and not one day more! There is no "if" about the shortening of these days; they shall be shortened.

"**Cut short**" does not mean the **Great Tribulation** will be less than 3.5 years, but only that it will be abruptly terminated by the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Paul** describes the cutting short of those days of the horrible 42 month rule of the **Antichrist** (Rev 13:5)

And then that lawless one (Antichrist) will be revealed (apokalupto = **When?** Answer = Mt 24:15 and 2Thes 2:3, 4) whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and **bring to an end** (cp "**cut short**") by the appearance (epiphaneia) of His **Coming** (parousia) (2Thes 2:8)

**Zodhiates** on **those days...cut short** - The time would be longer if God were not merciful, but since He is, He will shorten the period in which the Antichrist expends his fury. ([Ibid](#))

**Hiebert** comments that this "strong figurative statement (**Ed**: referring to the fact that **koloboo** can mean "amputated") indicates that God has forcefully acted not to permit them to be extended to the full length that human passions would have carried them." ([The Gospel of Mark- An Expository Commentary](#))

**Cut short** ("amputated," "mutilated") ([2856](#))(**koloboo** from from **kolobōs** = maimed, cut off) means strictly speaking to cause something not to be full length and so to cut short, to curtail, to abridge, to mutilate, to amputate (Lxx - 2Sa 4:12 "cut off their hands and feet"). Figuratively as used in all 4 NT passages **koloboo** refers to a reducing in number or extent. Our English word halt, in the sense of lame, is related to it, since it refers to a person whose walking ability has been cut short or curtailed.

Notice Jesus' use of the **orist tense** which here speaks of a future event as it were a past completed action (**Proleptic**). In other words, God has decreed in the *past* that the yet *future* Great Tribulation will be cut short.

The adjective **kolobos** meaning maimed or mutilated is used in secular Greek in the description of a donkey (Moulton-Milligan).

**Moulton and Milligan** also record an unusual use of **koloboo** - "The epithet *ho kolobodaktulos; the stump-fingered*,"; (which was applied to Mark (writer of Gospel) (Hippolytus Philos. vii. 30), has been traced to a desire on the part of the philosophers to ridicule the shortness of his Gospel, but is more probably due to some natural defect of the evangelist himself."

**Marvin Vincent** on **koloboo** - A very picturesque word. The verb is, literally, to dock, to cut off, leaving a stump, as a limb. Wycliffe, abridged. As a fact, various causes did combine to shorten the siege. Herod Agrippa was stopped in his work of strengthening the walls by orders from the emperor; the Jews, absorbed in their party strifes, had totally neglected preparations to stand a siege; the magazines of corn and provisions were burnt before the arrival of Titus. Titus arrived suddenly, and the Jews voluntarily abandoned parts of the fortification. Titus himself confessed that God was against the Jews, since otherwise neither his armies nor his engines would have availed against their defences.

**TDNT** on use of **koloboo** in Mark - God has cut short the time of affliction, i.e., made it less than the oppressors purpose, so that **the elect** may be preserved from physical destruction (as indicated by the "all flesh" of Mk. 13:20, the physical nature of the sufferings, and the presence of **the elect** at the parousia, Mk. 13:27).

Other than Mt 24:22 the only use is twice in Mark 13:20 "And unless the Lord had **shortened** those days, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect whom He chose, He **shortened** the days."

**ESV Study Bible** - Some suggest this means that, if God's wrath were to continue unchecked against the wickedness of humanity, no one would survive the eventual destruction. Others see in this a reference to a cutting short of either the seventieth "seven" (week) of Da 9:27 or the 42 months of Rev. 11:2. (**Ed comment:** The 42 months of Rev 11:2 [note](#) are the last 3.5 years, the time of the **great tribulation**, corresponding to the Antichrist breaking the seven year covenant with Israel in the middle of the seven years as described in of Da 9:27-see notes) **It is evident that the reference is not to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70** since the unprecedented destruction described in Mt 24:21 did not take place in 70.

**Hendriksen** likewise recognizes the problem of interpreting 70AD as the time of fulfillment of the **great tribulation** - 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.

## **PHYSICAL PRESERVATION PREDICTED FOR THE ELECT**

**No life** - The Greek word for "**no**" means absolutely none! Life is the Greek word **sarx** which can be translated "**flesh**" here speaking not of the "fallen flesh" (sin nature inherent in every human), but of the physical flesh of our body.

**Weber** - Jesus said as much when he indicated that those days would necessarily be cut short, implying divine intervention (24:22). Christ will intervene to prevent complete genocide and the wholesale destruction of the human race. But even in judgment, the Lord will display mercy, particularly for the sake of the elect (plural of eklektos, "select, chosen ones"). These are those who have placed faith in him and followed him as his disciples. (Holman New Testament Commentary)

**Would be saved** (4982)(**sozo**) has the basic meaning of rescuing one from great peril and that is the sense in this context. Jesus is not speaking so much of spiritual salvation as He is of physical preservation of one's life. Mt 24:13-note refers to spiritual salvation.

**But** (**de**) is a **term of contrast** which always calls for the reader to ask "**What is being contrasted?**" Most of the time the answer is easy as it is in this case. This simple exercise will give force you to slow down, to examine the context and ultimately to allow the Spirit a chance to speak to your innermost being. Too often we are trying to just "get through" our morning reading to satisfy our "quota" for the day. God is not nearly as interested in us "speed reading" His Word out of a sense of obligation as He is in us being still and acknowledging that He is God and He is good. (cp Ps 46:10).

**Those days will be cut short** - This is a promise the believers in the Great Tribulation will find to be very precious and comforting. They will know that "this too will pass!"

**For the sake of** - Is this not a manifestation of the great love and mercy of God that not all might have to die! All of mankind deserves hell, but in His kindness God bestows the gift of heaven to those who believe in His Son.

**John Phillips** has an interesting note on **for the sake of the elect** - This is another of those statements in Scripture that show how much the careless and unbelieving world owes to the presence of God's people in its midst. (Exploring the Gospel of Matthew)

**The elect** speaks of believers and in context specifically speaks of Jewish believers. Of course, this passage is clearly applicable to Gentile believers who come to faith in the Great Tribulation. The fact that there will be Jewish and Gentile believers alive when Jesus this time is "cut short" provides a population on earth who will then enter into the **Millennium**. If all the elect were killed, there would be no elect to populate the Messianic Kingdom. Jesus expands on this idea in Mt 25:31-45 where the Judgment of the Sheep and Goats determines which of those who are alive after the Great Tribulation will enter into His Kingdom, which will initially be populated only of true believers.

**Zechariah** speaks of the Jewish **elect** who will **be saved** out of the Great Tribulation -

"In that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity. ....8" And it will come about in all the land," Declares the LORD, "That two parts in it will be cut off and perish; but the third will be left in it. "And I will bring the third part through the fire, Refine them as silver is refined, And test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, And I will answer them; I will say, 'They are My people,' And they will say, 'The LORD is my God.'" (This is the language of the New Covenant into which 1/3 of the Jews will enter by grace through faith = Jer 31:31-34-note) (Zechariah 13:1-note; Zechariah 13:8-9-note)

**Comment:** The Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD with killing of up to a million or more Jews was a foreshadowing

(BUT NOT A FULFILLMENT) of the refining fires of Zechariah 13:8-9 (cf Da 12:10 "Many [JEWS = the 1/3] will be purged, purified and refined, but the wicked [JEWS - the 2/3's] will act wickedly; and none of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand [DO YOU HAVE INSIGHT TO UNDERSTAND OR HAVE YOU BOUGHT INTO THE LIE OF [replacement theology aka supersessionism?](#)]."), but there is absolutely no record that 1/3 of the Jews were born again at that time! In the holocaust of WWII there was a foreshadowing (BUT NOT A FULFILLMENT) of this final, ultimate "holocaust" (Great Tribulation) for at that time one-third of the Jews in the world were killed (6 million). In the final time of testing on the Jews **two-thirds** of the world's population of Jews will be killed. At that time one-third will be saved, the **remnant** that Paul referred to when he said "All Israel will be saved." (Ro 11:26-27-note). Clearly, Paul is referring to "**all**" of the one-third described by Zechariah 13:8-9.

**Elect (chosen)** (1588)(**eklektos** from verb **eklego** which in middle voice [eklegomai] means select or pick out for one's self which is derived from **ek** =out + **lego** =call) means literally the "called out ones" or "chosen out ones". The idea of **eklektos** is the ones who have been chosen for one's self, selected out of a larger number. In regard to election as related to salvation, Wuest comments that "This election does not imply the rejection of the rest (those not chosen out), but is the outcome of the love of God lavished upon those chosen-out." (Wuest)

If you wrestle with election and free will notice the juxtaposition of these two doctrines in Paul's last letter...

**Remember** Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel (NOTICE NOW HOW PAUL DESCRIBES THE "WORKING OUT" OF HIS GOSPEL), 9 for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God (~"THE GOSPEL") is not imprisoned. 10 For this reason (SINCE THE GOSPEL IS THE POWER OF SALVATION Ro 1:16) I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen (PAUL'S ENDURANCE FOR THE ELECT SHOWS , so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory. (2 Timothy 2:8-10)

**Henry Morris** writes that "The Scriptures, in a very natural way, combine the **doctrines of divine election and human responsibility**, apparently not concerned with the problem this would later seem to pose to generations of theologians. Paul was willing to suffer countless difficulties and persecutions so that the elect might hear, believe and receive the salvation for which they already had been chosen by God before the world began. The apparent paradox is only resolved in terms of the infinite mind and ability of the Creator. We may not be able to understand how both can be true, just as we cannot see both sides of a coin at the same time. However, both sides are real and both doctrines are true. We can believe and rejoice in both truths, even though we don't yet comprehend how each supports the other."

The **doctrine of election** is mysterious and we will never fully comprehend it on this side of glory (cp 1Cor 13:11-12). However, Paul shows us how we are to live in the face of this doctrine (and not let it be divisive!) - "For this reason (referring to the "Gospel unchained" in 2Ti 2:9) I endure all things for the sake of those who are **chosen** (the **elect**), that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory." (2Ti 2:10-note) Paul did not know who the **elect** were, but he nevertheless endured for their sake and so too must we. We see a similar pattern in First Thessalonians where Paul reminds the believers at Thessalonica of God's "**choice** (ekloge) of you." (1Thes 1:4-note) Then he explains how their election was effected, explaining "our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction." (1Thes 1:5-note)

As **W A Criswell** says "The word "**for**" introduces a clause that explains the way in which election works. However one understands this mysterious doctrine, the text makes clear its intimate relationship to the Gospel of Christ, the preached word, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit." (Believer's Study Bible Notes)

#### Related Resources:

- [Daniel Wallace - My Understanding of the Doctrine of Election](#)
- [List of Multiple Topics on Election, Including Quesitons](#)
- [What is conditional election?](#)
- [Unconditional election - is it biblical?](#)
- [What does Peter mean when he tells us to make our calling and election sure in 2 Peter 1:10?](#)
- [How are predestination and election connected with foreknowledge?](#)
- [Who are the elect of God?](#)
- [How can I know if I am one of the elect?](#)