

"EXCEPT THOSE DAYS BE SHORTENED"

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INTRODUCTION:

1. [Mat_24:22](#), "And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened."
2. This passage is one which introduces several questions; to truly appreciate the questions and their answers, first, one must consider the context of the statement and the misunderstanding associated with it; second, he must consider the fulfillment of the first prophecy of the chapter; third, he may then consider the meaning of the passage.

I. THE MISUNDERSTANDING OF [Mat_24:1-3](#).

- A. The disciples heard Jesus speak of the total destruction of the temple, and thinking such could only occur at the ultimate destruction of the world (Keith A. Mosher,

Sr., MSOP Class Notes taken by DFC, ca 1992) [cf Tacitus, *Histories*, V.12, "The temple resembled a citadel, and had its own walls, which were more laboriously constructed than the others [defensive walls of Jerusalem which had towers "raised to a height of sixty feet" and "fortifications, where the ground fell, to a height of one hundred and twenty"-DFC]. Even the colonnades with which it was surrounded formed an admirable outwork."] asked two or three questions which they took to be just one.

1. Jesus demonstrated that they had asked more than one by answering in two parts.
 2. Unfortunately, some promote false doctrine on a modification of the same assumption the apostles had made: not only had they only asked one question, but Jesus had one given them an answer to the one question.
- B. The premillennialist tries to apply the whole chapter to the end times ignoring the contrasting language of [Mat 24:36](#), "But of that day and hour [Lit. "Concerning But/Now the day that and the hour ..." -DFC] knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only."
1. "Refers to the seven year period, especially the last three and a half years of the Tribulation. If the Tribulation had not been limited to seven years, all humanity would be destroyed. Note the "good news" of the kingdom in vv. [Mat_24:13-14](#) ([Zec_14:2-4](#)). Christ will intervene and stop a genocide" (*Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*).
 2. Warren W. Wiersbe wrote in his *Expository Outlines*, "The Antichrist will make a covenant with the Jewish nation (still in unbelief) for seven years ("one week," [Dan_9:27](#)), and will break it after 3 1/2 years, or at the middle of the tribulation period. He will set up his own image in the Jewish temple ([Dan_11:31](#) and [Dan_12:11](#)) and force the world to worship him (see [Rev_13:1-18](#); [2Th_2:3-4](#)). Note Matthew's little parenthesis:

'whoever reads, let him understand' ([Mat_24:15-17](#), NKJV). Jews living during this tribulation period will read [Mat_24:1-51](#), and understand what to do. In fact, many statements in Dan., Matt. 24-25, and Rev. that are perplexing to us will be understood then by believers. Christ warned the Jews to flee Jerusalem ([Mat_24:16-20](#)), for the last half of this period will be great tribulation and will end with the armies of the nations assembled against Jerusalem."

3. Cautiously, Philip Schaff wrote in *A Popular Commentary on the New Testament*, "These verses certainly refer to the destruction of Jerusalem. Another fulfillment is probable, in accordance with the parallel lines of prophecy we have traced in the preceding section ([Mat_24:5-14](#)). But precisely because the details are so minute, we must be cautious in applying it to the final catastrophe."
- C. The realized eschatologists (those who hold A.D. 70 Doctrine or Kingism) assert "that Christ actually, really came in A.D. 70" combining "the destruction of Jerusalem with the Second Coming of Christ"; King wrote that Jesus "unequivocally identified His time ["this generation" ([Mat_24:34](#))] as the setting for the complete realization of the things spoken in this discourse" (Curtis Cates, *The A.D. 70 Theology*).

II. THE FULFILLMENT OF [Mat_24:4-35](#).

- A. In A.D. 66, the Jews began a series of uprising which culminated in the physical destruction of their kingdom (basically by A.D. 68 [Tacitus, *Histories*, V.10]) and capital (A.D. 70) and last rebels (A.D. 73).
- B. As Jesus had prophesied ([Mat_24:4-8](#), [Mat_24:15](#), [Mat_24:29-31](#), [Mat_24:33](#)), there were signs warning of the certain destruction--especially note those in the complementary accounts of Tacitus [anti-Jewish (*Histories*, V.4,5), anti-Christian (*Annals*, XV.44), and pro-Rome Roman historian who wrote sometime between A.D. 96-117] and Josephus [non-Christian, Jewish historian who wrote between the A.D. mid-70s to around 100.].
 1. Eusebius wrote that "before the war began, members of the Jerusalem church were ordered by an oracle given by revelation [cf [1Co_12:10](#); [1Co_13:2](#); [1Co_14:29](#), [1Co_14:39](#); et al] to those worthy of it to leave the city ..." (III.5).
 2. "Prodigies had occurred, ... hosts joining battle in the skies, ..." (Tacitus, *Histories*, V.13); "a star stood over the city like a sword, and a comet that lasted for a year" ... "before sunset there appeared in the sky over the whole land chariots and armed forces speeding through the clouds and surrounding the cities" (Josephus, *Wars*, VI.288ff).
 3. "The doors of the inner shrine were suddenly throne open, and a voice of more than mortal tone was heard to cry that the Gods were departing" (*Histories*, V.13) [ironically, Tacitus had said that in Pompey's day, "the place stood empty with no similitude of gods within, and that the shrine

had nothing to reveal" (*Histories*, V.9)--this was certainly one of the reasons he saw Judaism as "tasteless and mean" (*Histories*, V.5)"]; Josephus had said, "at midnight the eastern gate of the inner sanctuary opened itself" ... "and at the Feast of Pentecost, when the priests entered the temple at night for their usual ceremonies, they heard a disturbance, a loud crash, and then a thunderous cry, 'Let us leave this place!'" (*Wars*, VI.288ff).

4. The veracity of the accounts of Tacitus and Josephus might justly be questioned; however, this was still a miraculous age, Jesus had promised signs, and one would think Tacitus unlikely to copy from Josephus--or vice versa.
- C. As Jesus had warned his disciples to "flee into the mountains" ([Mat 24:16](#)), so there were multiple opportunities for those who appreciated the warning to escape.
1. The one who had first led the fight against the rebels, Vespasian, was made emperor by his troops (Eusebius, III.5) causing a natural break as total command was passed to his son, Titus [around July, 69] (cf Tacitus, *Histories*, V.10).
 2. At one point, "Titus stopped the assault when a false offer of surrender allowed Jerusalem's defenders to withdraw into the Upper City and the temple areas" (Kohn, *Dictionary of Wars*, 275).
 3. Tacitus wrote that "there was a cessation from fighting, till all the inventions [siege machines-DFC], used in ancient warfare, or devised by modern ingenuity for the reduction of cities, were constructed" (*Histories*, V.13).
 4. Tacitus conceded, "Some few put a fearful meaning on these events [the aforementioned signs]"--undoubtedly, these were the Christians who fled to Pella in Perea (Eusebius, III.5).

III. THE MEANING OF [Mat 24:22](#).

A. What does "except those days should be shortened" mean?

1. There are different ideas; some hinging upon the identification of the elect.
 - a. Usually, the elect are Christians ([Col 3:12](#); [Rom 8:33](#); [Mat 24:24](#), [Mat 24:31](#); [1Pe 1:2](#); [1Th 1:4](#)).
 - (1). "The *elect* are the believers in Christ" (Johnson).
 - (2). "Doubtless means 'Christians' ... It is probable that in Jerusalem and the adjacent parts of Judea there were many who were true followers of Christ. On their account - to preserve them alive, and to make them the instruments of spreading the gospel" (Barnes).
 - (3). "Those who were chosen in Christ, before the foundation of the world, to believe in him, and to be saved by him with an everlasting salvation; both those that were in the city, or, at least, who were to spring from some that were there, as their immediate offspring, or in future ages, and therefore

they, and their posterity, must not be cut off; and also those chosen ones, and real believers, who were at Pella, and in the mountains, and other places, for the sake of these, and that they might be delivered from these pressing calamities," (Gill).

b. The term arguably could apply to the Jews ([Rom_11:28-29](#)); although this appears to be a potential election.

(1). Perhaps some spared in A.D. 70 were ultimately converted.

c. H. Leo Boles suggested these were Christians who were among the Jews at that time--although the Christians are all said to have fled.

B. Were the days truly shortened?

1. James Burton Coffman wrote, "This was fulfilled in the relatively short duration of the siege which lasted only five months."

2. Josephus (*Wars*, V.566, as quoted in Eusebius) spoke in terms of "if the Romans had delayed their attack ...," indicating that they had not taken the time they could have.

3. Not to be confused, but rather contrasted, with Eusebius speaking of the Lord's "gracious providence in delaying the destruction of the Jews for forty years" (*Ecclesiastical History*, III.7), is his speaking of the Destruction of Jerusalem itself thus: "How quickly God's punishment followed" (III.5).

4. H.Leo Boles wrote, "History records that Titus determined to reduce Jerusalem by famine, a long and destructive mode of conquest, ... he received news from Rome which urged him to hasten to Rome. He changed his plan and pressed the city by assault."

C. How were the days shortened?

1. Vincent wrote, "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."

D. From a human perspective, why would the days be shortened?

1. Tacitus indicated that the Romans wanted to shorten the days since "it seemed beneath [the Romans-DFC] to await the result of famine" and because "the army demanded the more perilous alternative [a fight-DFC], some prompted by courage, many by sheer ferocity and greed of gain. Titus himself had Rome with all its wealth and pleasures before his eyes. Jerusalem must fall at once if it would delay his enjoyment of them" (*Histories*, V.11).

E. From the Divine perspective, why were the days shortened?

1. To preserve the Jewish race?

a. "If God had not shortened the siege and restrained the Romans, they would have exterminated the Jewish race" (J.W. McGarvey).

- b. This is unlikely given that God had turned to the Gentiles ([Mat_21:43](#); [Act_13:46](#); cf [Rom_11:11-13](#))-- at the Jews' request no less ([Mat_27:25](#)).
2. Out of deference to David and other faithful Jews under the old covenant?
 - a. Such motivated God to preserve part of the divided kingdom for Solomon ([1Ki_11:11-13](#)).
3. To have opportunity to save more souls?
 - a. "On their account, because there is salt to save the earth, and end shall be put to the awful work of death" (Johnson).
4. Perhaps in order to draw the threat of Rome to perceived Jewish people to a resolution--if Jerusalem continued holding out, Christians elsewhere might have suffered due to "guilt by association."

CONCLUSION:

1. [Mat_24:22](#) appears to be showing that due to Christians and their evangelistic opportunities and perhaps their future safety elsewhere, the days of the Destruction of Jerusalem would be shorter than they could have been.
2. What is important to the Bible student is not as much who might be saved and in what way, but the fact that Jesus accurately prophesied every aspect of the destruction including the unquestionable shortening of the days!