The Case For The Preterist Reading Of Matthew 24

By Evan Minton

Abstract: The Olivet Discourse given by Jesus in Matthew 24-25 has been the source of much speculation regarding the end times and when Jesus said he would return. In this paper, I will make a case that the things Jesus prophesied in Matthew 24-25 are not prophesying of things to occur in our future, but rather these things were fulfilled from 64 A.D to 70 A.D. I will first look at what Jesus said in scripture. After that, I will argue that there are 3 clues in the Olivet Discourse which provide "interpretive keys" to understanding whether Jesus anticipated his prophecies to be fulfilled by the end of the first century or thousands of years later. After that, I will look at the specific things that Jesus prophesied in light of extra-biblical sources such as Josephus and Tacitus which will show that everything that Jesus prophesied actually came to pass.

What Matthew 24 Says

Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains. “Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. “So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand— then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the housetop go down to take anything out
of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again.

“If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened. At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or, ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you ahead of time. “So if anyone tells you, ‘There he is, out in the wilderness,’ do not go out; or, ‘Here he is, in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.

“Immediately after the distress of those days

“the sun will be darkened,
    and the moon will not give its light;
the stars will fall from the sky,
    and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’

“Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

“Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.” “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men
will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, ‘My master is staying away a long time,’ and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

NIV

Interpretive Key #1: Prediction Of The Temple's Destruction

The first key to interpreting this passage is to notice that Jesus is responding to questions posed by His disciples. In verses 1-3, Jesus and the disciples were leaving the temple and the disciples were marveling over the grandeur of the temple's size. Jesus told them that the massive temple they were marveling over would be destroyed at some point in the future to such an extent that not a single stone would be left standing upon another. It isn't hard to imagine that the disciples would be in shock upon hearing this sudden forecast that the very center of their religion and national identity would be obliterated, so they naturally asked the question “Tell us, when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”

The verses which proceed are clearly in answer to the question of when the destruction of the temple would be destroyed as well as what the sign of Jesus' coming and the end of the age would be. Now, the "sign of your coming" and "the end of age" have been widely misunderstood in eschatological circles and is probably the primary reason why dispensationalists view these prophesies as far
future. I will get to explaining what the coming of Christ and the end of the age actually means later in this paper. For now, we should note that it would be quite bizarre for Jesus to just ignore the disciple's question and go on to predict something to happen in the far future that has nothing to do with the radical prediction he just made.

**Interpretive Key #2: "You", Not "They"**

The second key to understanding this prophetic text is to understand who Jesus was directing his words. Did Jesus have a 21st, 22nd, 23rd, or 24th century audience in mind, or did He have His first-century Jewish audience in mind? Who was Jesus talking to?

"Jesus answered: 'Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains. Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.'" (verses 4-8, emphasis mine)

Notice the second person pronoun "you" is used repeatedly. "See to it that no one deceives **YOU**.", "**YOU** will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see it to it that **YOU** are not alarmed.", "Then **YOU** will be handed over to be persecuted", etc. You, you, you, you.

When Christians read the prophecy, they tend to assume that Jesus was referring to a distant generation, thousands of years later. So, therefore, they read his statements as if he is speaking to us or our near-future brethren in Christ. However, if Jesus really was foretelling things to occur in a generation thousands and thousands of years later, why didn't Jesus use the word "they" instead of "you". The fact that Jesus repeatedly says "you" instead of "they" strongly indicates that Jesus had His first-century disciples in mind rather than some future generation of Christians. Whenever someone is speaking to "you"
and uses the word "you", you naturally assume that they're speaking to and about "you", not your great-grandchildren.

As Brian Godawa put it in his book *End Times Bible Prophecy: It's Not What They Told You*, "Imagine how confused the disciples would be thinking that Jesus was talking to them when he really meant someone else. Truly, I say to you, dear reader of this book, imagine sitting in a sermon at church where a pastor keeps speaking to you but he does not mean you, but rather another future generation of Christians. You would certainly look around and think to yourself, Why is he saying 'you' as if he is speaking to us? Why isn't he saying 'they?' So the context of the entire discourse is speaking to those who were listening to him: you, not they."¹

As Godawa also said "When Jesus said, 'Woe to you scribes and Pharisees' (23:29), he meant the scribes and Pharisees who were listening to his sermon, not a future generation of scribes and Pharisees. When he said, 'You see all these' buildings and temples (24:2), he was talking to his disciples, not a distant generation of disciples. His entire discourse contains over forty references to "you"—forty! If literalists pride themselves on taking prophecies literally, they must be quite uncomfortable when they have to twist the obvious, literal referents of Jesus' words to be figuratively applied to someone else thousands of years later."²

Of course, one may point out that there were many times Jesus employed the word "you" but he obviously didn't just mean his first-century listeners. For example, The Sermon On The Mount is filled with instances of "you". "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" for example. The futurist may object that if the second person plural in The Olivet Discourse precludes a later generation, then by this same reasoning we can ignore everything Jesus said in his teachings unless he employed third-person terminology. Since Jesus said "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" then I am not obligated to obey that and it's okay to hate my enemies, right? He only meant the people sitting in His audience at the time, right?

The problem with this objection is that The Sermon On The Mount and Jesus' Olivet Discourse are two entirely different types of monologues. In the former, Jesus' sermon had to do with moral living, how the people of God are to conduct themselves. In the latter, Jesus was responding to a particular question posed by a particular group of people regarding a particular event and the specific timing
of that event. Certainly, everything in Jesus' Sermon on The Mount is applicable to the modern Christian. Nevertheless, while Jesus' teachings were for all generations, he was still speaking to his first-century audience. The New Testament epistles likewise are for all generations but are written to particular churches.

**Interpretive Key #3: "This Generation"

At the very end of Jesus' discourse, He says "Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened." (verse 34). The plain meaning of this verse is that the generation Jesus was speaking to, the people living at the time he gave The Olivet Discourse, would not pass away until everything he prophesied was fulfilled.

Those who hold to Dispensationalism try to reinterpret the meaning of the phrase "this generation," so that this prophecy doesn't have to refer to the first-century generation. Many dispensationalists will argue that "generation" means "race of the Jews."³ Jewish people would not go out of existence until all of the prophecies have been fulfilled and since the Jews are still around to this day, then Jesus' prophecies could still have a future fulfillment. Other dispensationalists (or as I like to call them, "Left Behinders") will say that by "this generation", Jesus didn't mean His contemporaries, but a future generation. He was saying that the future generation that would see these signs would not pass away.⁴ That future generation could be ours or a generation future to ours.

I don't find either of these interpretations of "this generation" tenable. Regarding the first dispensationalist interpretation, the problem I have is that the Greek word in this text translated as "generation"is genea, and according to The Louw-Nida Greek-English Lexicon, “The expression ‘the people of this generation’ may also be expressed as ‘the people living now’ or ‘the people of this time.’”⁵ It simply doesn't mean "The Jewish Race" anywhere in The New Testament.

In fact, in his book *Matthew 24 Fulfilled*, Brian Godawa lists 14 places in which "this generation" (genea in Greek) is used and not once does it refer to simply the Jewish race. Let's take a look at a few of those examples.

Matthew 11:16 (cf. Luke 7:31) "But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates."
Matthew 12:39 (cf. Mark 8:12; Luke 11:29) "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah."

Matthew 12:41 (cf. Luke 11:32) "The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here."

Matthew 12:42 (cf. Luke 11:31) "The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here."

Matthew 12:45 "Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation."

Matthew 16:4 "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. So he left them and departed."

Matthew 17:17 (Mark 9:19; Luke 9:41) "O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?" (notice the second person pronoun by the way)

Matthew 23:36 "Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation."

Luke 11:50-52 "so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation."

Matthew 24:34 (cf. Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32) "Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place."

In every single one of these instances of genea, Jesus meant the people living at the time. I don't know of any Bible scholar who would take any one of these instances as referring to the race of Jews for the plain fact that these just can't be applied to any generation beyond the first. For example, in Matthew 12:39 Jesus said that a wicked generation asks for a sign but that no sign would be
given to it but the sign of Jonah. As the very next verse tells us, the Sign of Jonah was Jesus' death and resurrection. "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." (Matthew 12:40). Jesus wasn't raised from the dead in the twenty-first century! He was raised in the first century! Mark 9 is the account of Jesus casting out a demon from a boy after his disciples failed to do so because they didn't fast and pray enough beforehand. This is the context in we find Jesus' words "O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?" Is Jesus lamenting the Jewish race? How does that make any sense?

As Bible scholar Gary DeMar put it; "Those who deny that 'this generation' refers to the generation to whom Jesus was speaking in the Matthew 24 context must maintain that 'this generation' means something different from the way it is used in other places in Matthew and the rest of the New Testament!"  

DeMar also wrote "There is a logical problem if genea is translated 'race.' Since 'race' is a reference to the Jewish race, Matthew 24:34 would read this way: 'This Jewish race will not pass away until all these things take place. When all these things take place, then Jewish race will pass away.' This doesn't make any sense."  

Had Jesus been referring to the Jewish race, he would have used the Greek word genos ("race") rather than genea ("generation").  

Okay, so interpreting genea to mean the Jewish race is untenable, but what about the second possible futurist interpretation? What if "this generation" is referring to the generation who would see the signs come to pass, whenever that generation might live? I think that the first two interpretive keys we looked at in this paper dismantle the plausibility of this interpretation. First, remember that the whole discourse is in response to the disciples' questions "when will these things [i.e the destruction of the temple] come to pass?" and "what will be the sign of your coming?" Jesus' response is loaded with the second person pronoun "you" rather than "they" strongly indicating he meant the people He was speaking to! Finally, just as I would have expected Jesus to use the word "they" instead of "you" if He were referring to a future generation of Christians, I likewise would have expected to use the phrase "that generation" instead of "this generation".
The whole grammatical structure of The Olivet Discourse suggests that Jesus had the first century generation in mind rather than a later generation.

These 3 interpretive keys strongly indicate that Jesus expected His prophecies to be fulfilled before the close of the first century. I concur with Thomas Newton who said "It is to me a wonder how any man can refer part of the foregoing discourse to the destruction of Jerusalem, and part to the end of the world, or any other distant event, when it is said so positively here in the conclusion, All these things shall be fulfilled in this generation."  

A Look At The Specific Prophesies

Now that we've determined the time-frame that Jesus expected His prophecies to come to pass, let's examine the specific things Jesus predicted and whether or not these things actually occurred. Now, for the sake of keeping this blog post/paper from being lengthier than it has to be, I won't provide as much commentary as I have thus far. Rather, I'll follow more of the pattern of Brian Godawa's book Matthew 24 Fulfilled. I will, for the most part, simply cite Jesus' prediction followed by a citation of a historical source which records its fulfillment.

Wars and Rumors Of Wars -

Prediction: "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come." (verse 6)

Fulfillment: The reason this prophecy is significant in signaling the sign of the destruction of Jerusalem and of Jesus' coming is that at this point in time, Rome was experiencing unprecedented peace known as "Pax Romana" which means “the peace of Rome”. The world has always had wars and rumors of wars, so this prediction of Jesus would be very generic, ambiguous and dare I say irrelevant at any other time period in history except for the first century, during this “time of peace.”

Tacitus, in Histories 5.9 wrote "Under Tiberius things were quiet...” (Tiberius' reign, AD 14- 37). In his Histories 1.2 (January - March, A.D. 69), Tacitus wrote "The history on which I am entering is that of a period rich in disasters, terrible with battles, torn by civil struggles, horrible even in peace. Four emperors fell by the sword; there were three civil wars, more foreign wars, and often both at the same time. There was success in the East, misfortune in the West. Illyricum was
disturbed, the Gallic provinces wavering, Britain subdued and immediately let go. The Sarmatae and Suebi rose against us; the Dacians won fame by defeats inflicted and suffered; even the Parthians were almost roused to arms through the trickery of a pretended Nero. Moreover, Italy was distressed by disasters unknown before or returning after the lapse of ages. Cities on the rich fertile shores of Campania were swallowed up or overwhelmed; Rome was devastated by conflagrations, in which her most ancient shrines were consumed and the very Capitol fired by citizens' hands. Sacred rites were defiled; there were adulteries in high places. The sea was filled with exiles, its cliffs made foul with the bodies of the dead."

(Tacitus, Annals, pg 271) -- "In this year, war broke out between the Armenians and the Iberians..."

Jospehus, in his Wars 4:9:2 2. wrote "Now as Vespasian was returned to Cesarea, and was getting ready with all his army to march directly to Jerusalem, he was informed that Nero was dead...civil war; - I have omitted to give an exact account of them, because they are well known by all, and they are described by a great number of Greek and Roman authors; yet for the sake of the connexion of matters, and that my history may not be incoherent, I have just touched upon everything briefly."

Famines and Earthquakes -

Prediction: "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places." (verse 7)

Fulfillment: A Great Famine in the days of Claudius:

Acts 11:27-29 -- "Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood up and {began} to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius. And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea."

Acts 16:25  -- "But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's chains were unfastened."
Josephus, Wars 6.299-300 (6:6:7) -- "Moreover, at that feast which we call Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner [court of the] temple, as their custom was, to perform their sacred ministrations, they said that, in the first place, they felt a quaking, and heard a great noise, and after that they heard a sound as of a great multitude, saying, "Let us remove hence".

Josephus, Wars 1.370-371
"But as he was avenging himself on his enemies, there fell upon him another providential calamity; for in the seventh year of his reign, when the war about Actium was at the height, at the beginning of the spring the earth was shaken, and destroyed an immense number of cattle, with thirty thousand men; but the army received no harm, because it lay in the open air. (371) In the meantime, the fame of this earthquake elevated the Arabians to greater courage."

Josephus, Wars 4.286-287 (4:4:5) (286) "for there broke out a prodigious storm in the night, with the utmost violence, and very strong winds, with the largest showers of rain, with continual lightnings, terrible thunderings, and amazing concussions and bellowings of the earth, that was in an earthquake. (287) These things were a manifest indication that some destruction was coming upon men, when the system of the world was put into this disorder; and anyone would guess that these wonders foreshowed some grand calamities that were coming."

Tacitus, The Annals, 12.43, "This year witnessed many prodigies [signs and omens].... repeated earthquakes... further portents were seen in a shortage of corn, resulting in famine... it was established that there was no more than fifteen days supply of food in the city [Rome]. Only Heaven’s special favour and a mild winter prevented catastrophe."

The Persecution Of Christians -

Prediction: “Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me." (verse 9)

Fulfillment:

"And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles." - Acts 8:1
"About that time King Herod laid hands on some from the church to harm them."
 - Acts 12:1

"Now while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews attacked Paul together and brought him before the judgment seat."
 - Acts 18:12

"After he stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. When he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him that they could not prove. Paul argued in his defense, 'Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense.' But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, 'Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem and there be tried on these charges before me?' But Paul said, 'I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you yourself know very well. If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death. But if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar.' Then Festus, when he had conferred with his council, answered, 'To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go.' Now when some days had passed, Agrippa the king and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and greeted Festus. And as they stayed there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, 'There is a man left prisoner by Felix, and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews laid out their case against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation against him.'"
 - Acts 25:6-15

Eusebius, ECC. Histories 2:9
“[1] Now about that time” (it is clear that 1 he means the time of Claudius)
“Herod the King[2] stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the Church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.” And 2 concerning this James, Clement, in the seventh book of his Hypotyposes,[3] relates a story which is worthy of mention; telling it as he received it from those who had lived before him. He says that the one who led James to the judgment-seat, when he saw him bearing his testimony, was moved, and confessed that he was himself also a Christian. They were both therefore, he says, led away together; and on the way he begged James to forgive him. And he, after considering a little, said, “Peace be with thee,” and kissed him. And thus they were both beheaded at the same time. 4 And then, as the divine Scripture says,[4] Herod, upon the death of James, seeing that the deed pleased the Jews, attacked Peter also and committed him to prison,"
Tacitus, Annals 15:44
"Therefore, to scotch the rumor, Nero substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men, loathed for their vices, whom the crowd styled Christians. Christus, the founder of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilatus, and the pernicious superstition was checked for a moment, only to break out once more, not merely in Judaea, the home of the disease, but in the capital itself, where all things horrible or shameful in the world collect and find a vogue. First, then, the confessed members of the sect were arrested; next, on their disclosures, vast numbers were convicted, not so much on the count of arson as for hatred of the human race. And derision accompanied their end: they were covered with wild beasts' skins and torn to death by dogs; or they were fastened on crosses, and, when daylight failed were burned to serve as lamps by night. Nero had offered his Gardens for the spectacle, and gave an exhibition in his Circus, mixing with the crowd in the habit of a charioteer, or mounted on his car. Hence, in spite of a guilt which had earned the most exemplary punishment, there arose a sentiment of pity, due to the impression that they were being sacrificed not for the welfare of the state but to the ferocity of a single man."

Apostasy -
Prediction: "At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other," (Verse 10)


False Prophets -
Prediction: "and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people."
(verse 11)


Eusebius, History of the Church, 2:13
"Christ having now been diffused among all men,[2] the enemy of man's salvation contrived a plan for seizing the imperial city for himself. He conducted thither the above-mentioned Simon,[3] aided him in his deceitful arts, led many of the inhabitants of Rome astray, and thus brought them into his own power. This is stated by Justin,[4] one of our distinguished writers who lived not long after
the time of the apostles. Concerning him I shall speak in the proper place.[5] 
Take and read the work of this man, who in the first Apology[6] which he 
addressed to Antonine in behalf of our religion writes 3 as follows:[7] “And after 
the ascension of the Lord into heaven the demons put forward certain men who 
said they were gods, and who were not only allowed by you to go unpersecuted, 
but were even deemed worthy of honors. One of them was Simon, a Samaritan 
of the village of Gitto,[8] who in the reign of Claudius C’sar[9] performed in your 
imperial city some mighty acts of magic by the art of demons operating in him, 
and was considered a god,”

Josephus, Wars of the Jews 2:258 (2.13.4.258) 
"There was also another body of wicked men gotten together, not so impure in 
their actions, but more wicked in their intentions, who laid waste the happy state 
of the city no less than did these murderers. 259 (2.13.4.259) These were such 
men as deceived and deluded the people under pretense of divine inspiration, 
but were for procuring innovations and changes of the government, and these 
prevailed with the multitude to act like madmen, and went before them into the 
wilderness, as pretending that God would there show them the signals of liberty; 
260 (2.13.4.260) but Felix thought this procedure was to be the beginning of a 
revolt; so he sent some horsemen and footmen, both armed, who destroyed a 
great number of them."

Tacitus, Histories 5.13 
“The majority [of the Jews] were convinced that the ancient scriptures of their 
priests alluded to the present as the very time when the Orient would triumph 
and from Judaea would go forth men destined to rule the world. This mysterious 
prophecy really referred to Vespasian and Titus, but the common people, true to 
the selfish ambitions of mankind, thought that this exalted destiny was reserved 
for them, and not even their calamities opened their eyes to the truth.”

The Gospel Preached To The Whole World -

Prediction: "Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow 
cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the 
kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and 
them the end will come." (verses 12-14)

This is one of the arguments that dispensationalists/futurists/Left-Behinders give 
against the preterist reading of Jesus' Olivet Discourse. Jesus says that before 
the end comes, the gospel must first be preached throughout the entire world 
as a testimony to all nations. Obviously, they argue, that didn't happen in the first
century. Indeed, it still hasn't even happened today. Even today there are people groups who had never heard the gospel. So, how could I possibly say that prophecy was fulfilled in the first century.

I think the first thing I need to point out is that the Greek phrase translated as "the whole world" is Oikoumene. This phrase is used numerous times in The New Testament. Whenever it is used, it does not mean the entire planet or the entire population of humans. Instead, it means the Roman World or the nations known to them at the time. For example, Luke 2:1 says "In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world [oikoumene] should be registered" No one thinks Caesar Augustus required a census from the people of Japan, China, or the peoples of the North American continent. It was simply "The Roman World" that was required to register for the census.

Thayer's Greek Lexicon says "οικουμένη, οικουμένης, ἡ (feminine of the present passive participle from οἰκέω (namely, γῆ; cf. Winers Grammar, § 64, 5; Buttmann, § 123, 8));
1. the inhabited earth;

a. in Greek writings often the portion of the earth inhabited by the Greeks, in distinction from the lands of the barbarians, cf. Passow, ii., p. 415a; (Liddell and Scott, under the word, I.).

b. in the Greek authors who wrote about Roman affairs (like the Latinorbis terrarum) equivalent to the Roman empire: so πᾶσα ἡ οἰκουμένη contextually equivalent to all the subjects of this empire, Luke 2:1."

So, when Jesus said the gospel would be preached throughout "the whole world", he did not mean the entire planet. He meant the entire Roman empire. Had Jesus meant that the gospel would be preached throughout the entire planet, He would have used a different Greek word; Kosmos. Kosmos is the word that Greek speakers would use whenever they wanted to refer either to the entire planet Earth or the entire universe. This is where we get our English word Cosmos. This word is used in John 1:10 "He was in the world [kosmos], and the world [kosmos] was made through him, yet the world [kosmos] did not know him." Jesus didn't just create the Roman Empire. Jesus created the entire universe! This is why John uses kosmos and not oikoumene. Kosmos is also used in passages such as John 3:16, John 3:17, 1 John 2:2, and Revelation 17:8.
Now that we know that "whole world" in Matthew 24 does not mean the entire planet, let's see if this was actually fulfilled in the first century. Was the gospel preached throughout the entire Roman Empire prior to 70 AD?

Fulfillment: In Romans 1:8, The Apostle Paul wrote: "because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world." The Greek word that Paul uses in Romans 1:8 that's translated as "the whole world" is the same Greek word that Jesus employed in Matthew 24:14 (i.e oikoumene). According to Paul, the gospel had spread to the oikumene in his lifetime! This is not the only place that Paul says this. In 1 Timothy 3:16, he says "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory."

The Abomination Of Desolation -

Prediction: "So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand— then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the housetop go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers!" (verses 15-19)

In this passage, Jesus references a prophecy in The Old Testament book of Daniel. Jesus says that this thing will stand "in the holy place" and that Daniel had predicted it also. What does Daniel say? "Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator." (Daniel 9:24-27)
Brian Godawa said that "The Abomination of Desolation standing in the holy place was one of three things: 1) The pagan Roman leader, Titus and his Army surrounding Jerusalem 2) the irreligious Zealots entering the temple, 3) The pagan Edomites desecrating the temple."\(^{12}\)

Based on Luke's parallel account of The Olivet Discourse in chapter 21 of his gospel, I think it is most likely the first option. In Luke's account, Jesus said "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is at hand. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains." (Luke 21:20-21, emphasis mine).

One only needs to read Josephus' *War Of The Jews* to see this fulfillment.

**Tribulation Never To Be Equaled Again**

Prediction: "For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again." (verse 21)

Futurists argue that the great tribulation had not occurred yet, since we have not seen a time period of persecution that "has not been from the beginning of the world, until now, no and never will be." As Hal Lindsey, author of the Left Behind series argues, that would have to be so unbelievably horrible that nothing could possibly be worse. However, if we take Jesus' words to literally mean that nothing could literally be worse than the great tribulation, we would have to conclude that The Bible contradicts itself. Why? In 587-586 B.C., Babylon invaded Israel, besieged Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, and sent most of the Jews into exile. In Ezekiel 5:9, God said: "And because of all your abominations I will do with you what I have never yet done, and the like of which I will never do again." Daniel echoed these same words of the Babylonian exile. Daniel 9:12 "He has confirmed his words, which he spoke against us and against our rulers who ruled us, by bringing upon us a great calamity. For under the whole heaven there has not been done anything like what has been done against Jerusalem." So both Daniel and Ezekiel used the same exact language that Jesus used: "There has not been done anything like it" and "never again" will it be done. And they were both talking about a foreign enemy destroying Jerusalem.

**Astronomical Upheaval?**

There are plenty of predictions in Matthew 24 we could look at with respect to what Jesus said and how they were fulfilled, but for the sake of length, I'd like to
skip from verse 21 to verse 29, where Jesus says “Immediately after the distress of those days

“the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”

Futurists or Left-Be hinders argue that this can't possibly be a reference to something that occurred in the past. After all, the sun wasn't darkened in the first century, the moon didn't stop giving its light, and the stars didn't fall from the sky. If even one star had fallen to Earth in the first century, the whole planet would have been incinerated and life of this planet would be annihilated!

The theologian John Owen points out that this language is obviously metaphorical. He wrote "Not to hold you too long upon what is so plain and evident, you may take it for a rule, that, in the denunciations of the judgments of God, through all the prophets, heaven, sun, moon, stars, and the like appearing beauties and glories of the aspectable heavens, are taken for governments, governors, dominions in political states, as Isa. 14:12-15; Jer 15:9, 51:25. Isaiah 13:13; Ps. 68:6; Joel 2:10; Rev. 8:12; Matt. 24:29; Luke 21:25; Isa 60:20; Obad. 4; Rev 8:13; 11:12; 20:11.”

Notice the verses that Owen refers to. Some of these are Old Testament prophesies of judgment given by Yahweh upon wicked people. Let's look at Isaiah 13 for example. "I myself have commanded my consecrated ones, and have summoned my mighty men to execute my anger, my proudly exulting ones. The sound of a tumult is on the mountains as of a great multitude! The sound of an uproar of kingdoms, of nations gathering together! The Lord of hosts is mustering a host for battle. They come from a distant land, from the end of the heavens, the Lord and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole land. Wail, for the day of the Lord is near; as destruction from the Almighty[c] it will come! Therefore all hands will be feeble, and every human heart will melt. They will be dismayed: pangs and agony will seize them; they will be in anguish like a woman in labor. They will look aghast at one another; their faces will be aflame. Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it."
For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light." (verses 3-10, emphasis mine)

The Coming Of The Son Of Man?

We now come to the most controversial prophecy of all. "Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory."

Jesus certainly did not come back in the first century, right? After all, if Jesus really did come on the clouds of Heaven with all the people of the Earth mourning as a result, that certainly would have gotten the attention of first century historians, right? Well, what do you think "The Son Of Man coming on the clouds of heaven" means? Most people (formerly including myself) thought that Jesus meant He would literally appear in the sky on top of clouds, as many artistic depictions of the second coming show (usually riding a white horse).

Now, as I'll explain near the end of this paper, I think Jesus is coming again in a fashion like that, but I don't think that's what Jesus was saying in Matthew 24. I think the second coming and the coming of Matthew 24 are two entirely separate events, the latter having been fulfilled in 70 AD. Let me explain why.

Christ's "coming on the clouds" draws heavily from Old Testament portrayals of God descending from heaven to execute judgment. These judgments were acts of God described in the figurative language since no one actually saw Yahweh as a humanoid figure "cloud surfing" in the sky when these judgments happened.

Numbers 11:25 "And the LORD came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the spirit that was upon him, and gave it unto the seventy elders: and it came to pass, that, when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease. " (KJV)

Psalm 18:9-12 "He bowed the heavens also, and came down: and darkness was under his feet. And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind. He made darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies. At the brightness that was before him his thick clouds passed, hail stones and coals of fire." (KJV)
Psalm 97:2-5 "Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne. A fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about. His lightnings enlightened the world: the earth saw, and trembled. The hills melted like wax at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth." (KJV)

Psalm 104:3 "Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters: who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind;" (KJV)

Isaiah 19:1 "The burden of Egypt. Behold, the LORD rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt: and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it." (KJV)

Daniel 7:13 "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him." (KJV)

Nahum 1:3 "The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet." (KJV)

I submit to you that Jesus' "coming on the clouds" in the Olivet Discourse is the same kind of "coming" that Yahweh did in these various Old Testament passages. Jesus is God (John 1:1-3, John 10:30, Isaiah 9:6, Hebrews 1), so Jesus could "come" in judgment upon Jerusalem without actually having to be literally in the sky on top of clouds where everyone could see him with their eyes.

Why would Jesus come to Jerusalem in judgment? Because "He came to His own and His own received Him not" (John 1:11, KJV). This is why Jesus wept in Luke 19; because the Jewish people rejected Jesus as their Messiah and now He would have to judge them through the Roman army.

Does This Mean That There Is No Future Coming Of Christ?

Not at all! While full preterists would say this, I would not. I am a partial preterist. While I think the entirety of Matthew 24 (as well as the majority of the book of Revelation) was fulfilled in the first century, I do think there are still a few prophecies in scripture yet to be fulfilled. I think there will indeed be a physical,
visible second coming of Christ that will coincide with the rapture and the bodily resurrection of Christians. I just don't think Matthew 24 is about that.

I'm an Arminian and as such I hold to the doctrine of prevenient grace (as opposed to the Calvinist's view of Irresistible Grace). However, I don't think Revelation 3:20 is talking about a resistible grace. I think the biblical support for Prevenient Grace is to be found elsewhere. Likewise, biblical teachings about the still yet-to-come Perusia are to be found in passages like 1 Thessalonians 4. To see why I'm a partial preterist rather than a full preterist, see my blog post "Why I'm A Partial Preterist".

**Conclusion**

Jesus is a true prophet. That generation did not pass away before everything He predicted came to pass.

----------------------------------------

**NOTES**


3: *The Scofield Reference Bible* takes this position, for example, as does Norman Geisler (see "A Review Of Hank Hanegraaf's 'The Apocalypse Code'" -- https://normangeisler.com/a-review-of-hanegraaff-apocalypse-code/ )

4: GotQuestions.Org takes this view. See -- https://www.gotquestions.org/this-generation-not-pass.html


6: Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, Wolgemuth & Hyatt Pub; page 33

7: Gary DeMar, from the online article *Norman Geisler and 'This Generation'*, 2007
8: See "Norman Geisler and 'This Generation'" By Gary DeMar, 2007

9: Thomas Newton, "Dissertations on the Prophecies Which Have Remarkably Been Fulfilled" (1754).

10: See https://biblehub.com/greek/3625.htm


13: John Owen, (vol. 8, p. 255, in a sermon entitled Shaking and Translating of Heaven and Earth, preached on April 19, 1649)