

PERILOUS TIMES
Signs of Christ's Coming
Matthew 24:15-28

No subject in Scripture is more intriguing than the *second coming of Jesus Christ*. His *first coming* was to *pay the penalty for man's sin*, to *defeat death*, and to *offer man His free gift of eternal life*. He came as *Savior*. In His *second coming*, He will come as *King of kings* and *Lord of lords*. He will come to *judge the world*. Realizing that Christ will one day come in *judgment*...the unbeliever should be motivated to *repent* and *receive* Him as *Savior* and *Lord*. The obedient Christian should be motivated to *faithfully present the gospel* to unbelievers giving them an opportunity to be saved. The faithful Christian should also be motivated by the *rewards* he will receive when the Lord returns. Regardless...the believer should remain *faithful*...and desire to be *pleasing* to God.

But don't be deceived...Scripture is clear...despite *temporary times* of improvement in our culture and in the world...things are destined to *get much worse* before they *permanently become better*. The world faces a time that is going to be more *catastrophic* than any ever experienced before (**vs. 21**).

The *Tribulation* will affect the entire world...but will primarily focus on the *nation* and *people* of Israel. In **Matthew 24-25**, Jesus was speaking of that coming time of indescribable horror in the world that will focus on the nation of Israel...a time of which **Isaiah**, **Jeremiah**, **Daniel**, and **Zechariah** had already spoken of in considerable detail.

Even though Israel as a nation and the Jewish people in general have endured many periods of great suffering throughout history...including *the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Romans in A.D. 70* and *the extermination of millions of them by Nazi Germany and communist Russia* in modern times...the *holocaust* of the *end time* will *vastly exceed* all of those.

I. THE DESECRATION: (vs. 15)

Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand) (**vs. 15**)...

The event that activates the *birth pains* (**vs. 8**) will be the **abomination of desolation** and it will be like the abomination spoken of through Daniel the prophet.

Luke added that Jesus said...

“When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near.”

~Luke 21:20

Abomination...Gk. *bdelugma*, denotes an *object of disgust, repulsion*, and *abhorrence*. In Scripture it's used primarily to denote things associated with *idolatry* and *gross ungodliness*. In **Revelation** it's used to represent the *immoralities* and *spiritual uncleanness* of the *false religious system* known as *“Babylon the great, the mother of harlots”* (**Revelation 17:45**).

During the end times, the Antichrist will head a confederacy of *ten European nations* that will generally correspond to the territory of the *ancient Roman Empire* (**Daniel 7:24**). He will at first pretend to be Israel's *deliverer* from her enemies, and as a result, Israel will make an alliance with him (**Daniel 9:27a**). But after he's victorious over the nations from the *south, north*, and *east* who have come together to go up against Israel, he will reveal his true character and his hatred for Israel and for God (**Daniel 11:40-45**). It is while occupying Israel under the guise of being her protector that the Antichrist will commit the **abomination of desolation**.

The abomination of desolation...Refers to the *disruption of the Jewish worship* which will have been reinstated in the Tribulation temple (**Daniel 12:11**) and the *establishment of the worship* of the world dictator...the *Antichrist*...in the temple. **The abomination of desolation** can actually be translated as...*“the abomination which desecrates and lays waste...and then makes it desolate.”*

“And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.”

~Daniel 9:27

“From the time that the regular sacrifice is abolished and the abomination of desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days.”

~Daniel 12:11

Halfway through the *seven year Tribulation*, at the end of the first *three and a half years*, the deceptive leader (Antichrist) will

violently turn against Israel, set himself up as God by setting up within the temple an image of himself to be worshiped, and commit the **abomination of desolation** that activates *the Great Tribulation*. Such an event will be clearly recognizable by everyone.

“Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.”

~II Thessalonians 2:3-4

During his reign, **Antiochus Epiphanes**...who ruled over **Palestine** from **175-165 B.C.**...slaughtered countless thousands of Jewish men, sold many of their wives and children into slavery, and tried to completely *eradicate the Jewish religion*. He also *desecrated the Temple* by *sacrificing a pig* (the most ceremonially unclean of all animals) on the altar and forcing the priests to eat its flesh. He then set up in the Temple an *idol of Zeus*, the pagan deity he fancied himself as manifesting. All of those horrible defilements by **Antiochus** were only a preview of the even greater **abomination of desolation** to be committed by the Antichrist in the end times.

II. **THE DANGERS:** (vs. 16-20)

As mentioned previously...the **abomination of desolation** will *precipitate* the *first series of catastrophic events* that Jesus compared to *birth pains* (vs. 4-14). When the Antichrist desecrates the restored Jerusalem Temple and demands that all the world worship him as God, the *second three and a half years* of the *Tribulation*, called the *Great Tribulation* (vs. 21), will begin.

Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains (vs. 16)...This statement is a warning of the severity of the *holocaust* that is about to come...and an exhortation to **flee** from it. Those who are in **Judea** will be in the greatest and most immediate danger *due to their proximity* to the Temple. Although everyone on earth will be subject to Antichrist's tyranny, his fury will be vented against the Jews.

Flee...Gk. *phuego*, is related to the term *fugitive*...*a person who takes flight in order to escape danger*. The only hope will be to run for safety.

From **Zechariah** we learn that not every Jew will be successful in their attempt to escape. Only *a third* will escape.

“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.’”

~Zechariah 13:8-9

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 Jewish nation.

The call for urgency, stressing the need to *immediately flee*, is stressed in the next few verses.

Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house (vs. 17)...Don't waste time trying to retrieve a few things to take with you. No material possession will be worth the risk of the slightest delay.

Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak (vs. 18)...If he's working in the field and he's left his cloak laying somewhere...he should just leave it and run.

But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! (vs. 19)...Women in such condition will not be able to move fast and will therefore be at greater risk.

But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath (vs. 20)...The slightest delay will compromise their escape...whether it's due to *wintry conditions*, or *legalistic religious expectations* placed on them on the **Sabbath**.

Jesus' point was that *no possession* would be worth the risk of retrieving and *no hindrance* could be considered small. Because of the imminent terror, *fleeing* will be the only order of the day.

III. **THE DISASTER:** (vs. 21-22)

The *first three and a half years* are referred to as the **Tribulation**. Because of the *intensity of the judgment* to follow, the *last three and a half years* are called the **Great Tribulation**.

For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will (vs. 21)...No *time* or *event* in history fits the description of the *holocaust* Jesus is speaking of here. The distressing time is further described in some detail in **Revelation 6-16**, where the *seal*, *trumpet*, and *bowl judgments* exhibit the escalating intensity of God's wrath upon sinful and rebellious mankind.

Both the books of **Revelation** and of **Daniel** make clear that the Antichrist will terrorize the world during this time. Clearly the events described by *Jesus*, by *Daniel*, and by *John* refer to the same great holocaust during the end time...just before the *millennial kingdom* is established.

God's message is that things are going to get *immeasurably worse* before they will *become permanently better*.

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 (vs. 22)...

Cut short...Gk. *koloboo*, probably refers to the normal **24 hour** day being *cut down* to a **16 hour** day. God will supernaturally shorten the hours in a day (**Revelation 8:12...4th Trumpet Judgment**).

At least *three times* during the **Great Tribulation** the *heavenly bodies* that *give light to the earth* will be *radically altered* in ways that will progressively *reduce daylight* forcing Antichrist's forces to operate more in *darkness*. God will use that *darkness for the sake of the elect*...using it to hide them from their killers.

The elect...God's *chosen people*...His *redeemed*. (This is the *first time* the term *elect* is used in the New Testament...and it's used by Jesus Himself. It refers to those who *belong to Him*. They have been *divinely chosen* and *called out* as His own people).

IV. **THE DECEPTION:** (vs. 23-27)

Then if anyone says to you, "Behold, here is the Christ," or "There He is," do not believe him. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. (vs. 23-24)...

It seems evident from Jesus' warning that *false teachers* will infiltrate the company of those who heeded Jesus' advice to **flee** to

the mountains...and that those **false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect**. Some of the *false teachers* will claim Christ *is in their own midst*...others will claim He's back in **Jerusalem** or elsewhere in **Judea**.

Satan is the *father of lies* (**John 8:44**), and since he first tempted **Eve**, one of his primary weapons has been *deceit*.

If possible...it is obvious from what Jesus is saying, that the **false Christs and false prophets will not be able to deceive the elect**. Once a person comes to know the true Christ through saving faith in Him...he can *never be deceived* by anyone, including Satan himself, *into acknowledging* a counterfeit Christ.

Behold, I have told you in advance (vs. 25)...God *speaks* to His children...*personally*. We must *know Him* and *know His voice*.

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand."

~John 10:27-28

So if they say to you, "Behold, He is in the wilderness," do not go out, or, "Behold, He is in the inner rooms," do not believe them (vs. 26)...In essence Jesus is saying, *"Pay attention only to what I am teaching you now...not to anything else you will hear or see in the day that is to come...no matter how compelling the message...or supernatural the accompanying signs may seem to be."*

For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be (vs. 27)...

Keep in mind that the Lord *will not be on the earth bodily* at that time...but He *will return* to earth. And His **coming** will be like the **lightening** that flashing **from the east...to the west**. It will be *quick*...and it will be a *splendid* and *visible event*.

V. **THE DOMINION:** (vs. 28)

Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather (vs. 28)...

This statement was a *common proverb* in **Palestine** during that day.

Wherever there is a *carcass* (physical corruption), **vultures** will go there to eat it. Similarly, where there is *spiritual corruption... judgment* will follow. The world will have become the domain of Satan's man...the Antichrist...the lawless one (**II Thessalonians 2:8**), and many people will have been *corrupted* by *false prophets* (**vs. 24**). But the **Son of Man will come quickly**...and when He comes...He *will come in judgment* (**vs. 27**).

LESSONS WE CAN LEARN:

- **God is a loving God.** He loves us so much that He's given us the truth about His second coming and about the warning signs preceding it. He has also told us about the judgment that will take place when He comes.
- **This is the one prophecy given in Scripture that has yet to take place.** With every other prophecy given in the Bible having been fulfilled...what makes you think that this one will not be fulfilled?
- **Are you ready for His second coming and the judgment to follow?**