

## The End Times According to Jesus ... Part 2



- Jack Kelley -

"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 he 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. (Matt 24:9-14)

The words here are very similar to those in Luke 21:20-24 covered in Part 1, but in Matthew, the focus is clearly the End Times. It helps to remember that verses 4-14 are an overview of the End Times that cover the period from the beginning of the birth pangs to the 2nd Coming.

Believers will be severely persecuted at the End of the Age (Matthew's version) just like they were at the beginning (Luke's version) and because Tribulation believers are not promised Eternal Security like the Church was, many will turn away from the faith due to the intense persecution. Just before the Lord's return, the Good News will be preached in every nation to prepare the people of Earth for His coming and to deny them a plausible excuse for rejecting Him, or pleading ignorance.

"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 roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get his 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, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now-and never to be equaled again. (Matt 24:15-21)

In this portion, the Lord backed up to pinpoint the beginning of the Great Tribulation, a time of judgment whose very name comes from here (translated in the NIV as great distress), one that will surpass anything the world has ever seen. The Prophet Daniel had written of a time in the future when the Temple would be desecrated by an event he called "the Abomination that causes Desolation" (Daniel 9:24-27) and the Lord was now informing them that this event would trigger the Great Tribulation.

Since Daniel's time, something like it had only happened once. In 168 BC the Syrian Ruler Antiochus Epiphanes (the name means God made manifest), after muscling his way into Israel, seized the Temple and converted it to pagan worship. He erected a statue of Zeus in the Holy Place in his own likeness, requiring everyone to bow

down before it on pain of death. The Jews called this desecration the Abomination that causes Desolation, borrowing language from Daniel 9:27. It so angered them that they rose up in arms against the Syrian invaders. The 3 1/2 year long Maccabean Revolt, as it was called, resulted in the Syrians' expulsion from Israel and a Temple cleansing and re-dedication ceremony that's still memorialized annually in the Feast of Chanukkah.

Today, students of the End Times see a frighteningly clear model of the Great Tribulation in the Maccabean Revolt, with a foreign invader calling himself God and demanding worship, a Temple desecration, and unbelievable persecution ending in a 3 1/2-year war of liberation. As we'll see, that's just what the Lord intended in mentioning Daniel's Prophecy.

193 years after the Maccabean Revolt, Jesus spoke of the Abomination that causes Desolation as something still in the future. And a careful reading of his 70 weeks prophecy shows that Daniel placed it in the middle of the 70th week, long after both the Messiah's arrival and rejection, and the destruction of the city and sanctuary. Since nothing like this has happened since the Lord gave His warning, it means that one day soon another foreign invader will muscle his way into Israel, calling himself God and demanding worship. There'll be another Temple desecration, and more unbelievable persecution ending in another war of liberation, only this time the entire planet will be affected, not just Israel. According to Daniel, it will begin half way through the last 7 years of human history establishing its duration as 3 1/2 years just like it's earlier model. In 2 Thes 2:4 Paul expanded Daniel's account, connecting it to the antichrist at the End of the Age. These things confirm that the sacrilege that kicked off the Maccabean Revolt serves as a preview to help people recognize the sacrilege that will kick off the Great Tribulation. (See also Rev. 13:14-17)

There are three factors here that underscore the "Jewishness" of the Lord's warning: First there will be a desecration of their Temple, second the warning is given specifically to those in Judea, the region of Jerusalem in Israel, and third, there's an admonition to pray that it won't happen on the Sabbath, a day when Jewish law forbids traveling.

Clearly, the Lord was saying that there will be a nation of Jewish people observing His Law in Israel at the End of the Age and they will have rebuilt their Temple prior to His return.

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 Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect-if that were possible. See, I have told you ahead of time.

"So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' 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. (Matt. 24:22-28)

The Great Tribulation is the most specifically documented span of time in all of Scripture. In one place we're told it's 3 1/2 years long (time, times and half a time; one year plus two years plus half a year as in Rev. 12:14), in another, 42 months (Rev. 11:2) and in still another, 1260 days (Rev.12:6). Use the original calendar for Earth, 12 months of 30 days each for a 360 day year, and you find all three measurements identical from a time standpoint. Moreover, there isn't a single hint anywhere that it will be of a shorter duration. Most scholars who read the passage above literally, conclude that the phrase cut short means that for the sake of His elect the Lord will step in on the 1260th day and put an end to the warfare instead of letting it run to its logical conclusion; the destruction of every human on the planet.

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"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.' At that time the sign of the Son of Man will

appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, 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. (Matt.24:29-31)

In bringing the Great Tribulation to an end, the Lord cause the Sun and Moon to be darkened. Then His sign will appear in the sky, and finally He Himself will come in power and glory just as He promised Caiaphas, the High Priest, at His trial 2000 years ago (Matt. 26:64). All the nations will mourn because His appearance rings the closing bell for the Age of Grace. Too late, the people of Earth will realize that He is just Who He's always claimed to be, and they've missed their last chance at salvation.

At His signal, His angels will gather His elect (believers) from all over Heaven to return with Him to Earth to establish His Kingdom. This is one of two vague hints in the Olivet Discourse that there will be a body of believers in Heaven awaiting His 2nd coming. According to Mark's account, believers on earth will also be summoned (Mark 13:27) to witness His triumphant return.

"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. I tell you the truth, 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. (Matt. 24:32-36)

The fig tree is the last to bud, so when it does we know Summer's almost here. Through His disciples, the Lord told the people on Earth at the End of the Age that when all these things begin to happen, it means the end is very near. Indeed, of the 6000-year history of Man, only 3 1/2 will remain.

The Greek word translated generation also means race and can be interpreted as the Lord's promise that the Jewish race wouldn't be extinguished before the End comes. And that's remarkably true. The vicious and oft-repeated attempts to rid the world of Jewish people have all failed, and Israel has risen from the grave after a 2000-year absence to once again become the focus of world attention.

Yet there's also a sense in which the Lord's promise can be rendered, "I tell you the truth, the generation that sees the beginning of these signs will also see their culmination." In other words, they will all be concluded during the lifetimes of those being born as they begin. There's precedent for this too. All the prophecies concerning the Lord's first visit were fulfilled within the lifespan of the generation into which He was born.

Please note that if this view is the correct one, as I believe it to be, the Lord didn't promise that, once they begin, all End Times prophecies would be fulfilled before the next generation is born, but only that they would be fulfilled during the lifetimes of those being born at their commencement. A Biblical generation is nominally 40 years, but a lifetime is more like 70-80 years (Psalm 90:10). The folks who added 40 years to Israel's 1948 rebirth and predicted the Rapture would happen in 1988 were off on two counts.

- 1) They should have added a lifetime, not the length of a biblical generation, and...
- 2) It's the 2nd Coming that will happen within a lifetime of the first signs. The Rapture could happen at any time prior to that.

If we're still here next week, we'll finish up this series and show you why those who are looking for signs of the Rapture of the Church in the Olivet Discourse are looking in the wrong place. Until then, if you listen closely, you can almost hear the footsteps of the Messiah.

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