

Matthew 24:4-8

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 11/11/2012

The Signs of His Coming

Prayer

Father, You are so gracious and so kind; You are so merciful. We do not deserve Your mercy. We do not deserve Your grace. We do not deserve Your love, but yet You have faithfully, graciously, mercifully sent Your Son Jesus and He willingly came. And He offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. We praise You that His perfect sacrifice is acceptable and was acceptable. We praise You that He bore our sins in His body on the cross that we might die to sin and live to You. We thank You for what He has done. Father, we thank You for the opportunities now to look into Your Word; to learn more about You; to grow in the grace and knowledge of Your Son. And I pray every true believer here would set aside sin: we would confess sin knowing that You are faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness; that we would receive Your Word and allow it to do its work to grow us in respect to salvation. And Father, I pray for those here who do not know You (You know the heart) that You would be working; that Your Spirit would be convicting and revealing sin and Your Son Jesus the Savior. Father, this is a difficult portion, but yet You clearly reveal what You want us to know. And I pray that we would understand; that we would humble ourselves and ask You to teach us so that we would not only learn but do what You say. We thank You for Your Word. We commit this time to You now. In Your Son's precious name, amen.

Sermon

We live in difficult times, and I think every generation that has ever lived probably has said that, right? We have all sorts of difficulties around us; there is always conflict. Ever since Cain slew Abel, we have had hatred and sin manifested in behavior in this world. We see armed conflicts. We see battles. We see fights. We see conflicts at all different levels: from national levels down to family levels down to relationships. We live in a world that is not getting better but getting worse. Now some of you after this election might be tempted (some of us might be tempted) to be discouraged. What is happening now? Where are things going? But we need to remind ourselves of the reality that if you are a true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, that God is in control; that although things happen that we may not agree with (things that might be evil – we might see in different ways and in different times) that God is sovereign over those things. And God uses ultimately evil for good. And the most beautiful and wonderful example of that is using the evil of man and Satan to deliver up Christ. But under God's sovereign, predetermined plan, that evil God used for the greatest good to bring about salvation for us. Now when we get in difficult situations, it is one thing to talk about them; it is another thing to be involved in those. And sometimes we are tempted to respond in ways that are not right. We are tempted to maybe compromise to have peace within relationships. We might be tempted to not speak the truth so that the things will not be

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difficult in those relationships. Yet there is no true peace apart from obeying and trusting the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now Israel was no stranger to the same temptations that we experience. When Jerusalem and Judah were at the peak of their apostasy in the 6th century B.C. there were those false teachers coming along saying, "Peace and safety. Everything will be fine. You are not being judged for you sin. God is pleased with you." But the reality was they were false prophets. And in the midst of impending judgment, God did bring about His disciplinary judgment on Israel. And it seems though at times when God is going to pour out His judgment upon His people (disciplinary or whatever it might be), there are always those coming around saying, "Peace and safety." Take for instance what Paul writes to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 5. He says,

¹ Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. ² For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. ³ While they are saying, 'Peace and safety!' then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. [1 Thessalonians 5:1-3]

The reality is as sin increases, as time advances, we get closer to the coming of Jesus Christ - the wonderful reality of the promise of His coming. We see very clearly that in His first coming He came in grace. He did not come to judge but He came in grace to give His life a ransom, not to be served but to serve, giving His life a ransom. But His coming again will be quite different (as we will see today) as He comes in judgment to make things right. But we believers are also looking for Him coming to take us away before this judgment. God is a gracious, God who reveals in His Word the realities of what is to come, and today we are going to see that. We are going to see some future realities of what is going to come for this world. We wonder what in the world is going on. Well, we are going to see very clearly what in the world will go on as the Lord Jesus reveals some of the future to us and then how are we to respond in light of this truth.

Will you turn with me to Matthew, chapter 24, and we are going to be looking at verses 4-8. And we are going to see that there will be terrifying times, but yet they are only the beginning of His wrath to come. You are saying, "I did not come here to hear about God's wrath; I came here to hear about God's love." Well, the reality is the two cannot be separated as we will see; that God is not a God who is divided in character; that His character is manifest perfectly in the way He behaves and acts. He is a righteous God. And we are going to see that God is patient, not willing for any to perish. But there will be a day that comes when God's patience runs out and He pours His wrath upon the world. But yet in that horrifying time, He will use that horrifying time to bring about the salvation of His people. And we are going to see some instructions to them in the midst of this difficult, horrifying time. Matthew 24, verses 4-8.

Now I want to give you the context of this before we read our passage. We have seen in the book of Matthew very clearly that Jesus Christ is the Lord Who saves; that God took on human flesh; that Jesus Christ the Lord took on human flesh. "You will name His name Jesus for He shall save His people from their sins." And He came to His own, the Jews, who were sitting in darkness in the shadow of death. They

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are in sin! They believed they were following Yahweh the Lord, but yet they were in darkness in their sins and God (a gracious God) came to His own.

But we saw very clearly throughout the book of Matthew that they rejected Him. They loved the stuff He could do for them, but they did not desire to repent. And we see the Lord's condemnation upon those cities who had seen the miraculous affirming the reality of who He was and what He had said: that it would be more tolerable in the judgment for Sodom and Gomorrah than for those who had rejected Him and not repented of their sins. We see Jesus calling the Jews an evil and adulterous generation. We see the leaders who desire to kill Him. And we saw as two-and-one-half to three years had gone by, we come to the last week of the Lord Jesus' life where we see, after having His authority challenged by the religious hypocrites after He had cleansed His temple from those robbers (those religious thieves), we see them challenging His authority, but then we see the Lord very clearly condemning them through parables and then through seven woes as we saw in chapter 23.

And it is from those woes the Lord Jesus moves to condemn the nation in His final, public discourse before the nation in the temple in the end of chapter 23 where He says in verse 38: "Behold, your house is being left to you desolate." And this is after the Lord Jesus pours out His heart, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, I would have taken you under My wing, but you were unwilling. So behold, your house is being left desolate." The temple would be destroyed. We see in Luke, chapter 19, very clearly that Jerusalem would be destroyed; that they were entering into a time of disciplinary judgment. And then He said in verse 39,

"³⁹ For I say to you, from now on you shall not see Me until you say, 'BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD.'" [Matthew 24:39]

"I am leaving." God's presence was departing from Israel in the same way when they went into judgment into Babylon; we saw the glory of the Lord (in Ezekiel) leaving the temple. We saw very clearly God was visibly showing that He was backing away as they were entering into their discipline. And here we would see the Lord Jesus would do the same thing. "... you will not see Me until you say 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.'" And this brings us to our passage today. And this is a difficult passage. There is a lot of stuff concerning the end times or what theologians will call eschatology. *Eschatos* means "end." There are a lot of things here, and we need to be careful that we divide the Word rightly; that we do not misinterpret these passages. Therefore it behooves us in our heart of hearts to say, "Lord God, teach me Your statutes. I cannot understand this apart from You intervening by Your Spirit in my heart. Help me understand what You intended here." And I hope each one of us is praying that. So we are going to see there will be terrifying times and the signs of His coming, but yet it is only the beginning. Matthew 24, and I want to backtrack to the first 3 verses we looked at last week and I will read up to our verses today.

"⁴ And Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. ² And He answered and said to them "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here shall be left upon another, which will not be torn down." ³ And as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the

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disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Then here is our passage.)

⁴ And Jesus answered and said to them "See to it that no one misleads you. ⁵ For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many. ⁶ And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. ⁷ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. ⁸ But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs." [Matthew 24:1-8]

Now before we begin our in-depth study of what is called the Olivet Discourse (because the Lord Jesus is on the Mount of Olives), four of His disciples – Peter, Andrew, James, and John, we see in the book of Mark – have come to Him privately and have asked Him these questions. Before we begin this, we need to understand that there are many people, as I shared last week, who misinterpret these two chapters and misunderstand many portions. And I am not going to go through what I shared last week; you can get the tape on that. But there are many misinterpretations, and we need to recognize that every one of these interpretations that is wrong is based on poor study or inaccurate understanding of the context of this passage. Context is key in interpreting Matthew 24 and 25. And given if you hear some of these interpretations and you hear one verse or two verses, you say, "Hey, that sounds great." But when you read the whole thing in its context, you say, "Wait a second! That is not right!" So it behooves us to divide it rightly.

But before we start our look into our portion, I want to remind us of some of the things we looked at last week, some helps that help us interpret this difficult portion rightly. There are all kinds of prophecy ministries that base their ministries on this chapter. There are some people that you hear of (you will know the names if I were to share them) who have basically portions on their website where they are looking for wars and rumors of wars. They are looking for different earthquakes. They are tallying these things up. They are saying we must be getting closer – whatever it might be! But as we will see, we need to rightly divide this in its right context or we will err in our interpretation. Or we will be misled by those who err in their interpretation.

So first of all, to rightly divide this passage, I want to review some of the things that we saw last time. Again, let's read our passage. I am going to go back to verse 1. "And Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. ² And He answered and said to them 'Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here shall be left upon another, which will not be torn down.' ³ And as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?'"

Remember the Lord Jesus had been speaking to the multitudes in the temple, and He had been speaking to His disciples. And He had been condemning the religious leaders. And in that condemnation, He shared very clearly (as we saw in the end of chapter 23) that the Jews would have their house left desolate and that God would remove His presence from them. You see, He had predicted the destruction of the temple.

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We saw that in Luke, chapter 19. Turn there to Luke, chapter 19, verse 41. The Jewish people had rejected Christ, and the Lord Jesus was broken over it - a gracious, merciful, humble God, a man of sorrows acquainted with grief, one from Whom men hid their face. Luke, chapter 19, verse 41. This is just about a few days earlier when He was approaching Jerusalem. It says,

41 And when He approached, He saw the city and wept over it, 42 saying, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. 43 For the days shall come upon you when your enemies will throw up a bank before you, and surround you, and hem you in on every side, 44 and will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation." [Luke 19:41-44]

You did not recognize that God had visited you for salvation. They did not repent so they were being judged as a nation. And part of that judgment was the destruction of the temple. And the disciples obviously when they were walking out of the temple (the beginning of chapter 24), they were wondering about this. They had questioned Jesus in Mark 13, "Do You see these grand, wonderful, lovely buildings?" And Jesus' answer is, "Not one stone shall be left upon another." [Mark 13:2]

And then they go to the Mount of Olives and they want to question Him about it. They are thinking about this idea about the temple being destroyed; but yet these disciples also have in their minds, I believe, "When is Jesus going to come into His kingdom?" Again Luke, chapter 19. A little earlier in verse 11, we see the mindset of the disciples. This is roughly the same week; or it is about a week before this time. Luke, chapter 19:11,

11 And while they were listening to these things, He went on to tell a parable, because He was near Jerusalem (He is coming near), and they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately. [Luke 19:11]

The mindset of the disciples was that Jesus Christ would bring about His kingdom at some time. It would just appear. He would begin to rule and reign. That was their mindset. And so they are, in their minds, connecting this destruction of the temple with His reigning. And we see that. They then ask Him two different questions. Verse 3, back in Matthew, chapter 24: "3 And as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately (*and there are two questions even though it may seem like three – it is actually two questions grammatically*), saying, 'Tell us, when will these things be (*they are talking about the temple being torn down, brick from brick – these huge, giant, marvelous stones being torn down – and then the second question*), and what will be (*it is a two-parter*) the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" What is the sign of Your coming which is associated with the end of the age? What will that be? They are seeing these things, as we will see, together as one thing. And that is what we need to understand. Turn to Mark, chapter 13. You see we come to find out they are two different things because the temple was destroyed in 70 AD, and Jesus Christ has not come yet. And they are expecting Him to reign right then, and they are seeing these events. They believe Jesus. Okay, the temple will not remain

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here. When is this all going to happen? When will you become King? When will this happen? When will you reign as King? Mark 13:2,

² And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down." ³ And as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives (this is Mark's account inspired by the Holy Spirit) *opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew were questioning Him privately,* (Now look at this question. It seems as though as they are seeing everything together in one unit.) ⁴ "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?" [Mark 13:2-4]

They think the temple is going to be torn down and Jesus is going to come and the age is going to be ushered into. That is their question. But as we come to our passage, we see Jesus does not answer their first question because it is not at the same time. He answers the second question concerning His coming and the end of the age. And that is what the Olivet discourse is about. We need to see that. Otherwise we will misunderstand this discourse. If we think Jesus is answering their question completely concerning the destruction of the temple, we will misunderstand this passage. You see, they ask Him two questions, and He answers the second one because the first one is not connected at the same timing. That is why we see this in this way. And the second question is "What will be the sign of Your coming and the end of the age?" That is what Matthew 24 and 25 are all about.

Secondly, we need to remember some things about this passage before we begin: that this discourse itself (as you read through it) affirms the reality that it is directed towards Israel. All throughout this discourse, we see it was directed towards Jews - not Gentiles. If we miss this, we will misinterpret this passage. You see, we have the Jewish disciples asking their Jewish Messiah about the Jewish temple and the Jewish capital. And we have this Messiah, Jesus Christ, answering concerning His coming and how that relates to those Jews. We see that all throughout. Let's take a look at a few passages in Matthew 24. Look at verses 7-9. We will be looking at 7 and 8 today also.

⁷ "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. ⁸ But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. ⁹ Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you (so there is the "they" and "you," right?), and you will be hated by all nations..." [Matthew 24:7-9]

There is a contrast; there is the "nations" and there is "you." And the "you" in this context is Jews, as we will see. Look at verse 15:

¹⁵ "Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place... [Matthew 24:15]

We have the holy place – this is Jerusalem. And He is referring to Daniel, which we are going to look at today, by the way. Then if you go to verse 16:

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¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea (this is the Jerusalem area – the portion in which Jerusalem is in, that southern area of Israel) ***flee to the mountains;*** **¹⁷ let him who is on the housetop not go down to get the things out that are in his house;** **¹⁸ and let him who is in the field not turn back to get his cloak.** **¹⁹ But woe to those who are with child and to those who nurse babes in those days!** (Notice He does not say “right now.” He says “those days.” That is important to see later on. Jesus is talking to His disciples, as we will see, but He is talking about a time that is in the future.) **²⁰ But pray that your flight may not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath** (He is speaking to Jews.) ...” **[Matthew 24:16-20]**

We see very clearly even in verses 32-34 (I will not read that), He uses the parable – a parable of the fig tree which represents Israel throughout Scripture. And in the end of chapter 25, verses 31 to 40 at the tribulation at the end, the Lord is judging the nations and His judgment is based upon how the nations treated His believing Jews. He says “these brothers of mine.” If they treated them with genuine love, it was an evidence they had come to faith. If they did not, it was an evidence they did not know the Lord. That is how this judgment plays out in the end of chapter 25. But it is in relationship to believing Jews in the tribulation. We need to understand these chapters 24 and 25 have nothing to do with the church, and it has everything to do with Israel. If we do not see this, we will misunderstand this passage. Brother and sister, do not entertain interpretations that would ultimately prove God to be unfaithful to His promises. God is faithful and the gifts and calling are irrevocable. He has made promises and He is faithful to this. And this portion, 24 and 25, reveal His faithfulness to His promises to the nation of Israel.

Thirdly, another element that we must understand before we really delve into these chapters (we need to keep this in mind as we go through it or else we will misinterpret it) is that the events in Matthew 24 and 25 occur during the tribulation. Now we are going to look at that later on today from the book of Daniel. We are going to explain what the tribulation is. We are going to see from Scripture where we get this terminology and what it encompasses. But it is during the tribulation; it is not during 70 AD when the temple was torn down. It is during the time that would conclude with the coming of Jesus Christ visibly in great glory where everyone will see Him. That did not happen in 70 AD. Again back in verses 6-9, we see it is speaking of tribulation. He says – actually I will go down to verse 8:

⁸ "But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. ⁹ Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name." [Matthew 24:8-9]

Then we see in verse 10:

¹⁰ "And at that time many will fall away and will deliver up one another and hate one another. ¹¹ And many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many. ¹² And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. ¹³ But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved. ¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come." [Matthew 24:10-14]

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It is speaking of that time before the end. And if you look down at verse 15:

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)... [Matthew 24:15]

And I read how He tells them to flee and go. And then look at verse 21:

²¹ for then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world (the other writers say "since the beginning of creation." Nothing has ever been this bad and will never be this bad again) until now, nor ever shall. (And He says) ²² And unless those days had been cut short, no life (not just Jews – no life) would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short. [Matthew 24:21-22]

These events have not already happened. There is no possibility if you read that verse and understand it correctly. It is speaking of a future tribulation which closes with the coming of Christ. Look a little farther down. Verse 29:

²⁹ "But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken, ³⁰ and then the sign (notice He talked about signs, right, earlier. "What is the sign of Your coming and the end of the age?" That was their question) of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory." [Matthew 24:29-30]

The events in Matthew 24 and 25 happen right before Christ comes again in this tribulation period. We have to see that rightly or we will misinterpret these passages. There are a lot of bad interpretations. You can get the CD; I went through a lot of them last week. There are a lot of people who do not divide the Word rightly, who take their theology and throw it over the text rather than allow the text to form their theology. And that is the way we always need to come to Scripture. We should not have a paradigm, a system of interpreting that forces the Word into its own mold. We should allow the Word of God to inform our hearts and minds. And that is what we need to do here. The end of the age is associated with the coming of Christ, not what happened in 70 AD when the temple was destroyed. There are those who say that is what this is talking about; that Christ came in a spiritual manner. That is not true! This is speaking of His visible coming in the end of the age with great signs and wonders. It is the end of the age when He will then pour forth judgment. That has not happened yet.

But some of you might be saying, "I am confused. Why then is Jesus speaking to His disciples on this matter as though they are the ones that are going to go through the events?" Right? Notice what He says. He says, "See to it that no one misleads you." (Verse 4) Who is He speaking to? His disciples, right? People say, "It has to be them. It has to be their generation. That is why." How do we reconcile this, that

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He appears to be speaking to the disciples (and He is), but yet we are saying here from the Word that it is later in time after they have passed away. Well, folks, if we understand a little bit of how God spoke to the prophets in the Old Testament, it fully helps us understand this prophetic portion in Matthew 24 and 25. God many times in the Old Testament through His prophets would address people and they would say a message which was directly related to people in the future – not the people they were speaking to. Let me give you an example. Go to Zechariah 9:9. Prophets would say, “You will do this. You will do that,” and they are speaking to the nation of Israel at that time, but the audience is not the nation of Israel. The audience is a future generation. And God often would do that prophetically. And that is what He doing here. Zechariah 9:9. Notice this command to Israel at the time of Zechariah. This is being spoken at the time of Zechariah. Zechariah 9:9:

⁹ Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, Humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey. [Zechariah 9:9]

“Shout for joy right now! He is coming!” Wait a second; He was not coming yet. We see many places in which God will speak to the nation of Israel. And you can see it in Isaiah 33 and Isaiah 66 where He will say through the prophet and speak to that generation, but it is actually pointing towards a future generation. So there is a precedent in God’s Word that He will speak to someone in the moment, but yet is pointing to something in the future. And we see that here. Although He is speaking to His disciples, He is actually in the context pointing to those who would be right before the time when He comes in great glory, as we will see. The fact that Jesus spoke to His disciples does not prove He was speaking to their generation. The context proves the generation that He was speaking to, and we need to see that. The Olivet discourse is about the tribulation period ending in the coming of Christ. And last week I gave you an overview of end time events, an overview of the end times going from start to finish – that whole paradigm. And you can grab the outline for that online or if you need that, we can get that to you. There is a brief overview of all the passages from where we are right now all the way to the eternal state.

And I am not going to do that today, but what I do want to do is address one last portion before we get directly into our passage. And I want to talk about what this tribulation thing we are talking about is. Where do we get this understanding of the tribulation period? Where do we get this understanding of a seven-year tribulation? We need to understand this. Where do we get this? Is it just because we heard it on TV? Why do we say this? Well, if you turn with me to Daniel, chapter 9, I want to show you from the book of Daniel this portion. This is a difficult portion. But yet we can understand it if we have the Spirit of God: if we ask God to help us understand His Word. And I pray that you are saying, “I do not understand it; but God, help me understand what You are saying in Your Word.” Daniel, chapter 9. And I am going to go through this, and I want to explain this. We would be here for a couple hours if I shared everything I wanted to share about this so I am just going to give you an overview of it. But I think it is enough for us to see the paradigm in which God lays out concerning the nation of Israel. Daniel, chapter 9. This is a fantastic chapter, by the way.

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In the book of Daniel, obviously Daniel was taken on the first deportation in 605 BC to Babylon. There were three deportations, the third deportation ending with the destruction of Jerusalem and the complete exile of Jerusalem and Judah. Daniel was taken on that first deportation when they took the wisest and brightest men and took them to Babylon. And in the book of Daniel, the first six chapters are really, generally speaking, historical even though there is prophecy in there. It is historical. But the seventh through the end are definitely prophetic, and we need to see that and understand it. And when we come to chapter 9, we see very clearly the prophetic in this portion. And Daniel, as we will see, he is realizing after reading the prophet Jeremiah in God's Word that seventy years have elapsed, that that was the time that God had allotted for their deportation. Daniel, chapter 9. Let's take a look. And I will go back. I was debating whether to read the whole thing or not; but it is so wonderful, let's read it. Let's look at Daniel, chapter 9. Actually let's go to verse 1 here.

¹ In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of Median descent, who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans – ² in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was revealed as the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. [Daniel 9:1-2]

He was reading Jeremiah's prophecy and he realized the completion of their exile and desolation was seventy years. Now an interesting side note: Israel had very clearly for four hundred and ninety years – that is seven times seventy years, right – since they had come in as a nation, they had not done the seven-year Sabbath that God had ordained. They had broken His law for that entire four hundred ninety years. And God at that end of four hundred and ninety years sent them to a seventy year exile. And we see in the book of Daniel that He says there are four hundred and ninety years left. And we will see that today. Daniel 9:3,

³ So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. (That is the way we ought to respond to the Word, isn't it?)

⁴ And I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed and said, "Alas, O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, ^{5a} we have sinned... [Daniel 9:3-5a]

We can learn so much from Daniel's humble prayer. I mean we always come to God, "O God, please do this; please do that. Please this, that." He comes and gives God thanks and glory and honor and then admits sin. He says:

^{5b}...committed iniquity, acted wickedly, and rebelled, even turning aside from Thy commandments and ordinances. ⁶ Moreover, we have not listened to Thy servants the prophets, who spoke in Thy name to our kings, our princes, our fathers, and all the people of the land. ⁷ Righteousness belongs to Thee, O Lord, but to us open shame, as it is this day-- to the men of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and all Israel, those who are nearby and those who are far away in all the countries to which Thou hast driven

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them, because of their unfaithful deeds which they have committed against Thee. ⁸ Open shame belongs to us, O Lord, to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, because we have sinned against Thee. ⁹ To the Lord our God belong compassion and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against Him; ¹⁰ nor have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in His teachings which He set before us through His servants the prophets. ¹¹ Indeed all Israel has transgressed Thy law and turned aside, not obeying Thy voice; so the curse has been poured out on us, along with the oath which is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, for we have sinned against Him. ¹² Thus He has confirmed His words which He had spoken against us and against our rulers who ruled us, to bring on us great calamity; for under the whole heaven there has not been done anything like what was done to Jerusalem.

He is saying, "Everything You predicted in the law of Moses, You did. We have sinned greatly. We did not obey Your Word; we did not walk in Your ways." Right? That is what he is saying. And he says:

¹³ As it is written in the law of Moses, all this calamity has come on us; yet we have not sought the favor of the LORD our God by turning from our iniquity and giving attention to Thy truth. (That is repentance. When you recognize sin and you turn from your sin to the Lord God through His truth.) **¹⁴ Therefore, the LORD has kept the calamity in store and brought it on us; for the LORD our God is righteous with respect to all His deeds which He has done, but we have not obeyed His voice.** (How many times have you ever said that when you have sinned? I hope you do; I hope you do.) **¹⁵ And now, O Lord our God, who hast brought Thy people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand and hast made a name for Thyself, as it is this day-- we have sinned, we have been wicked. ¹⁶ O Lord, in accordance with all Thy righteous acts, let now Thine anger and Thy wrath turn away from Thy city Jerusalem, Thy holy mountain; for because of our sins and the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Thy people have become a reproach to all those around us. ¹⁷ So now, our God, listen to the prayer of Thy servant and to his supplications, and for Thy sake, O Lord, let Thy face shine on Thy desolate sanctuary. ¹⁸ O my God, incline Thine ear and hear! Open Thine eyes and see our desolations and the city which is called by Thy name; for we are not presenting our supplications before Thee on account of any merits of our own, but on account of Thy great compassion. ¹⁹ O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and take action! For Thine own sake, O my God, do not delay, because Thy city and Thy people are called by Thy name.** (And look at what happens!) **²⁰ Now while I was speaking and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God in behalf of the holy mountain of my God** (he says... and in this case, when this happened, he says in verse 21) **²¹ while I was still speaking in prayer, then the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision previously, came to me in my extreme weariness about the time of the evening offering. ²² And he gave me instruction and talked with me, and said, 'O Daniel,**

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I have now come forth to give you insight with understanding. ²³ At the beginning of your supplications the command was issued, and I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed; so give heed to the message and gain understanding of the vision.
(And then this is the portion of Scripture in which we understand the future of Israel comes from. He says here in verse 24:) ^{24a} ***Seventy weeks have been decreed*** (and notice whom they have been decreed specifically for) ***for your people and your holy city...***
[Daniel 9:1-24a]

Remember His prayer was all about how Israel had sinned. He recognized that seventy years was up, and he was supplicating before the Lord God, understanding that His disciplinary hand could be lifted. And he was acknowledging his sin and the sin of the people; he is acknowledging God's desolation on the temple. And we see here "Seventy weeks have been decreed" and notice it is for "your people and your holy city." It is really important now that we see this. It is for the Jews and it is for the temple. That is what the seventy weeks thing is about. We need to understand. You are going "I do not understand this seventy weeks thing," but we will see it. Notice what he says seventy weeks have been decreed for: for the Jews and for the holy city. And he says, (Look at it here),

(Number one) ^{24b} ... ***to finish the transgression,*** (number two) ***to make an end of sin,***
(three) ***to make atonement for iniquity,*** (four) ***to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy place.*** **[Daniel 9:24b]**

Seventy weeks have been decreed to take care of Israel's sin and bring in everlasting righteousness. That is what this seventy weeks is about. Okay? We need to see that. And you say, "Okay, seventy weeks to do this, but what about this seven-year tribulation?" Let's keep going. Verse 25:

²⁵ ***So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem*** (we will see that in Nehemiah, chapter 2) ***until Messiah the Prince*** (and by the way, they were exiled. The term *prince* was used to speak of rulers at that point. They did not have kings while they were in Babylon; they had princes in a sense. For the Jews, you have the leader being called a prince in a sense. That is all it means. Messiah – the leader or the ruler) ***there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress.*** **[Daniel 9:25]**

So, seventy weeks decreed to get rid of sin, make atonement, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up prophecies not needed anymore, to anoint the most holy place that it would be brought up again. He says here, "seventy weeks" and then he says, "There are seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress." So he is to discern. Now what does sixty-two and seven equal, kids? Sixty-nine, right? That is a total of sixty-nine weeks. You have seventy weeks decreed and now he is going to tell you about sixty-nine of those weeks, right? Okay. So we have from the decree to Messiah the Prince, there will be sixty-nine weeks total. The decree to rebuild Jerusalem was found in Nehemiah, chapter 2, where Nehemiah is given permission; it is decreed that he can go back and rebuild Jerusalem – not the temple, but Jerusalem. And that happened and the date is

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specifically shared in Nehemiah, chapter 2. And it comes out to be exactly 440 BC in the month of Nisan which is March or April of that year. (440 BC - that is when it was decreed.)

Now if you go sixty-nine weeks, you will see when that is. You say, "What is this term *weeks*?" Well, the reality is that the term *weeks* could speak of a group of things. We have what we call a week of days, right? When we think of a week, we think of a week of days. Seven days, right? Well, it is also used in Scripture to speak of a group of things – of sevens – a week of years, as we will see here. It is a week of years. Just like there would be one week of days, there is a week of years. And the Jews would understand this terminology. So he is saying there are sixty-nine weeks of years from that decree to rebuild to the time of Messiah the Prince (the Messiah, the Christ). So what would that turn out to be? It is important to realize that a Jewish year was three hundred sixty days, not three hundred sixty-five days. And you kids can do the math later, but if you take 360-day years and you have sixty-nine times seven which is four hundred eighty-three, it comes out to be exactly 32 AD in March or April. It says from the time there (we have it right in Scripture) at that point, you have Messiah the Prince – sixty-nine weeks of years then Messiah the Prince. Does that make sense? Sixty-nine weeks. Seventy weeks is decreed so there is one week left, right? So let's keep reading. Verse 26. And notice this is all in relationship to the Messiah and Israel's salvation, by the way. That is the context.

²⁶ ***"then after the sixty-two weeks* (now in context, he says there are seven, then sixty-two. Then after that sixty-two week block –that means sixty-nine weeks, by the way. Does that make sense? Seven, sixty-two. And after that sixty-two week block which is sixty-nine total, then it says...what does it say in verse 26?) ***the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing.."*** [Daniel 9:26a]**

Daniel the prophet (probably around the very early portion of the 6th century), we see Daniel the prophet five hundred years before prophesying the reality that the Messiah would be cut off. And we have pretty close the exact timing when He would be cut off and have nothing. Sixty-nine weeks of years. Now it is not sixty-nine days; we know it is weeks of years because if we go from 440 BC to when the Messiah was cut off, it comes out to be exactly in the context of sixty-nine weeks of years. Okay. So then notice what will happen. Verse 26 (middle):

...and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city* (some people say that is the Messiah. That is not the Messiah. The people of the prince that is to come will destroy the city) ***and the sanctuary. (So you have after sixty-nine weeks, Messiah being cut off. After sixty-nine weeks, you have the destruction of the city and the sanctuary.) ***And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.*** [Daniel 9:26b]**

What is interesting is you have sixty-nine weeks of years and then you have the Messiah coming right at the time that He comes. And then after that point, He is cut off. And it appears there is a gap; the Lord is not working yet in the seventieth week. And he says the temple is destroyed and the sanctuary. And he says here "the people of the prince who is to come." We know who destroyed it. Rome did, right? Was

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Rome a godly entity? Do we see Rome as those who are of the Lord? Absolutely not! If you look in prophecy you see that ultimately Satan is the leader of this world and every world empire has been ruled by him. That is why he has the ten horns and seven heads as we see in Revelation 12. And we will get to that later hopefully. So notice what happens then in verse 27:

27^a And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week... [Daniel 9:27a]

There is that last week, okay? You have sixty-nine weeks. Seventy is decreed total to finish and save Israel, right? We have sixty-nine. Messiah comes. After that sixty-nine, He is cut off. The sanctuary and Jerusalem is destroyed. Then you have now in the same passage, the last week being spoken of. And what does he say? "And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week." Who is the *he*? If you read it in context, it is the prince. He says "...and the people of the prince will destroy the city." The *he* is the prince. It is speaking ultimately of the antichrist as we will see. He will make an agreement for one week with the many. That is what a covenant is, a firm covenant. And evidently this covenant had to do with allowing Israel to do their sacrifices because it goes on (in a minute) to say in the middle of that week, he stops the sacrifices. And evidently from other passages, it appears that this covenant seems to have some type of protection for Israel as we will see in our passage when we finish today.

But notice what happens,

27^b ...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 (that is the abomination of desolation – the antichrist), even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate. [Daniel 9:27b]

Remember what we saw in Matthew 25? "Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet standing in the holy place (*that is what we are reading here*) let the reader understand..." Our passage speaks of this portion of Scripture. The portion of Scripture that happens in Matthew 25 is happening in this seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy. Does that make sense? I hope so. If it does not, that is okay. Ask the Lord to help us. Jesus affirms it by mentioning it.

So we have a seven-year time of tribulation that begins with a covenant being made by the antichrist in the beginning of the week. And in the middle this antichrist's reign, he breaks that covenant as we will see. And at the end of those last three and one-half years, at the end of the tribulation, we see that he is ultimately destroyed. We have a seven-year tribulation, but yet in the middle there are major changes. He breaks the covenant with Israel.

Now I wanted to go into this (I actually had the passages here), but we just do not have the time. For those of you who were with us when we went through Revelation, we went through this in depth in chapter 12 and chapter 13. And if you remember the book Revelation is laid out this way; we have the introduction in Revelation. Then we have Jesus' current, present messages to the churches at that time. And then we have in chapters 5-11, we have God's judgment upon those who dwell upon the earth. That is the focus of it – there is a little demonic activity, but not much. And then from chapters 12 – 19, we

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have a parallel picture of that judgment: His judgment upon Satan, the beast, the false prophet, the harlot of the beast, and the followers of the beast. That is how Revelation is laid out. And when you come to chapter 12, He begins by introducing Israel as the woman and Israel's relationship to Christ and then Israel's relationship to Satan. And we see in Revelation, chapter 12, that in the middle of this tribulation that Satan is cast out of heaven (not the first casting out but finally cast out for good), and he knows his time is short. Read the end of Revelation 12. And he goes and puts all of his attention to pursue the woman – to hunt down Israel – but Israel is supernaturally protected as we see, and he goes to hunt down those who are of the Lord. And if you go to Revelation, chapter 12, we see that the antichrist is introduced. The beast is introduced and Satan gives him all of his power. And for three and one-half years (twelve hundred and sixty days, for three and one-half years – that is the last half), he goes out and pursues and persecutes, and authority was given him to overcome the saints. So you see this picture here: in the middle of the tribulation, something happens. He breaks a covenant. And if you go to 2 Thessalonians (you can read this on your own), chapter 2, verses 1-4, it says that the abomination of desolation, this antichrist, will declare himself to be God. And that is in that middle when Satan gives him all his power in the middle of that last seven years. That is when you enter into the great tribulation. You have the tribulation as a whole, but in the middle that is when things drastically change.

So you have a three and one-half year midpoint. Satan is cast out of heaven for good. He pursues Israel. His power and authority is given to the antichrist (Revelation 13) and he will break this covenant (Daniel, chapter 9). We just read that. In the middle of the week, he will declare himself to be God (2 Thessalonians, chapter 2). He will enter the most holy place (Revelation 11). We see very clearly in verses 1-2 that the Gentiles will overrun the sanctuary for forty-two months – that is three and one-half years. And this last year (three and one-half years of Daniel's seventieth week), we have great tribulation which ends with ultimately the coming of Christ personally. If this great tribulation of the days had not been cut short, no life would have been spared, we see. And this great tribulation is what is spoken of – this Day of the Lord. We see God's wrath in the first three and one-half years poured out very lightly and slightly, but we see it increasing. You know, when someone has birth pains, they begin to be light but they increase in intensity and pain. And that is what this tribulation is like. And our passage is speaking of the beginning of this portion where it is very light and it is starting, but it is going to get worse. That is what our passage is speaking of.

And at the end of this seven-year tribulation, we see very clearly that Christ will come personally and He will deliver Israel. This tribulation is called "the time of Jacob's trouble." We see that in many passages. And He will deliver Israel personally. He will pour out His wrath on the nations – those nations who were persecuting Israel - and then at that point, He will put His feet on the Mount of Olives in the battle of Armageddon and He will deliver Israel. And I wanted to share a ton more with all of you so hopefully you can get that Revelation portion. I would love to if you want to have a Q&A on this. I would love to sit down and go through these passages. There is just not enough time today. But we have (what I want you to understand) the tribulation which is the seventieth week of what God has declared for Israel; and it is to bring an end to sin to make atonement for sin and to bring in everlasting righteousness. And the way God does this in the last seven years of focus on Israel is to allow the nations to pour out their wrath on

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Israel and then God pours out His wrath on them. And through that purging, He saves Israel. That is what He is doing in this last week. It is all about Israel although Gentiles get saved – yes. It is all about Israel and it is all about the judgment of the nations – the day of God’s wrath, the Day of the Lord, the day that He saves His people Israel.

So that is God’s plan with Israel, temporarily discontinued after sixty-nine weeks when they crucified the Messiah. It says, “After sixty-nine, the Messiah is cut off.” They rejected Him so He was cut off. And after the temple was destroyed, the plan is stalled at that point. In God’s gracious, wonderful wisdom, we see in Romans, chapter 11, that through the rejection of the Jews, God brought forth this mystery which is the salvation of Gentiles and the church. We have this time which God has moved away in between sixty-nine and seventy weeks. And yet, I believe we see in Scripture, the Lord will come for His church. First He will remove them; we will not go through wrath. And the seven-year tribulation will begin when the antichrist makes a covenant (Daniel 9:23) and it is going to roll through. And that is what we are seeing in Matthew 24 and 25. Does that make sense? I hope so. If not, we can talk about it more. So with that in mind, let’s just finish up and look at the beginning of this tribulation in our passage in Matthew, chapter 24. That is where we get our seven-year tribulation – the seventieth week of Daniel’s prophecy very clearly.

Okay, back to Matthew, chapter 24, verse 4. “And Jesus answered and said to them ‘See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will mislead many.’” It is very interesting that Jesus begins His discussion to those tribulation disciples (Jewish disciples in tribulation) by saying, “See to it that no one misleads you.” That is the first thing that He says. He says, “For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ...,’” speaking directly to the generation that will experience the tribulation as He speaks to the disciples. We see here He declares, “See to it that no one misleads.” The term *misleads* means to deceive. See to it that no one deceives you. “For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ.’” The reality is, as we will see in this portion, Christ does not come until He comes in great glory. Everyone who says they are the Christ is a liar (you see?) because He will come in great glory. “See to it that no one misleads you or deceives you. Many will come in My name.” The tribulation period will be a time in which there is a lot of “Christ-like stuff” going on. You think of it being all this terrible worldliness. Yes, but He says, “Many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ.’” And will what? Mislead or deceive many.

Now why would people fall for this? Well, as Nick read earlier in Deuteronomy 13, God allows false prophets and false teachers to test us to see if we love Him or not. He allows it; it shows where you really are. It shows where you really stand with the Lord – if you will be swept away by that. But yet, there is a temptation. That is why He says, “Do not let them mislead you. Do not let them deceive you.” And what would be the temptation? Things are getting worse and worse and worse, but they can bring peace and safety, can’t they? Not true. The truth is God’s wrath is coming, and it is only getting worse. And some may even die for the Lord. Many will die, but yet God is sovereign. God is sovereign over it. It is not getting better. It is getting worse.

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So Jesus is saying right off the bat, “Do not let anyone deceive you, saying they are the Christ.” He is not going to come until the end of the tribulation in great glory. They are all false Christs. The reality is Satan’s deceptive activity will increase in this portion. We see very clearly in 2 Corinthians 11 that he disguises himself as an angel of light. Many false Christs will arise. Look at the warning we see towards the end here in Matthew 24:23. Notice how this is really threaded into this passage.

²³ "Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There He is,' do not believe him. ²⁴ For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. ²⁵ Behold, I have told you in advance (in advance). ²⁶ If therefore they say to you, 'Behold, He is in the wilderness,' do not go forth, or, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe them. ²⁷ For just as the lightning comes from the east, and flashes even to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. (He is saying He is going to come immediately with great glory. If they say He is here or there, they are lying. That is not what He is going to do. And He says...) ²⁸ Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.” (Where there is this death, the vulture gathers – these false prophets and their wicked ways among people who have rejected Christ, being led astray ultimately to their judgment.) [Matthew 24:25-28]

Now He continues and notice He says back in the earlier portion of 24 it is going to be increased armed conflict and disasters that will come. Verse 6: “And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not the end yet.” And folks, it just kills me as I study this that I remember parts in my childhood where there were these teachers that I saw on TV that were saying, “There are going to be wars and rumors of wars. We got more wars.” They are taking today and saying it applies to this. This is not from today. Yes, we have a lot of wars; rumors of war. But this is for people in the tribulation, not for us. Do not be looking and saying, “Wow, there are earthquakes and famines. Christ must be coming soon.” That is not what this passage is saying. This is for those in the tribulation time. We need to see it that way.

And actually the statement is very interesting. He says, “You will begin to hear of wars and rumors of wars.” You are going to begin to hear of it which sound kind of interesting because in verse 7, He says, “For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom...” This leads to the fact that I think Israel is going to be protected initially from these wars. They are going to hear about them. While nation is going against nation, Israel is going to hear about this. They are going to hear about it, and they are going to be possibly disturbed, disturbed. And notice what He says, “You will be hearing (or literally begin) to hear of wars and rumors of wars...” Notice what He says - here is the command. “(Tribulation disciples) ...see to it that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end.” See to it you are not frightened. Do not be disturbed when you hear of these wars and rumors of wars. When you hear about earthquakes and famines, do not be disturbed or dismayed. He says (Why?) “...these things must take place.” God is sovereign over it. Do not be disturbed. A good, gracious God who (although He is good) is pouring out His wrath. They must take place. They are going to take place. Do not let it throw you off. It is God’s plan; it is His schedule; it must take place.

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Now I wonder how this relates to verse 5 in terms of being led astray by false Christs. Folks, if you are frightened or worried about world events or things, you are going to be more susceptible to false teachers who come along to you and say, "Peace and safety," aren't you? You are going to be more susceptible of those who will comfort your fears through false realities. Not real realities, right? Through falsehood. The reality is that Jesus' wrath must come upon sinners. I want to read really quickly a couple passages. Isaiah 13. Let's turn there. His wrath must come, and it will come. Isaiah 13, verse 6:

⁶ Wail, for the day of the LORD is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. ⁷ Therefore all hands will fall limp, And every man's heart will melt. ⁸ And they will be terrified, Pains and anguish will take hold of them; They will writhe like a woman in labor, They will look at one another in astonishment, Their faces aflame. ⁹ Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, Cruel, with fury and burning anger, To make the land a desolation; And He will exterminate its sinners from it. (It is pretty serious. The day will come – it must come – when God's wrath comes upon this world. But we will see these disciples are to be encouraged. It is supposed to come. It is going to come. But God is going to take care of them. If they endure to the end, they will demonstrate they have truly been saved as we will see. Not endure physically, but endure in the faith as we will see. He says) ***¹⁰ For the stars of heaven and their constellations Will not flash forth their light; The sun will be dark when it rises, And the moon will not shed its light. ¹¹ Thus I will punish the world for its evil, And the wicked for their iniquity; I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud, And abase the haughtiness of the ruthless. [Isaiah 13:6-11]***

There is a lot of sin and God is going to eventually deal with it. But we see in 2 Peter, He is a gracious God not willing that any should perish. He is delaying, but the day will come. Right now this is the day of salvation. I praise the Lord He has not come yet. He could have come when I did not know Him, and I deserved His wrath. But He graciously called me unto Himself, and He has called hopefully all of you unto Himself. The day is coming. The day is coming. It must take place, and it begins like this. They are going to hear (these Jews) of wars and rumors of wars. They are going to hear this. These are the signs of the coming of the end. They are going to hear it. There are going to be famines and earthquakes. This is in that seven-year tribulation.

But notice what He says here. He explains. Back to our passage. He explains it in verses 7-8, and we will be done here. "For nation (*He is explaining*) will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. But all these things (*the things of these wars and the nations rising against nations and famines and earthquakes*) are merely the beginning of birth pangs." For every lady that has ever had a child, you understanding the reality of pain during childbirth.... We have medical wonders right now where women do not have as much pain at times because of certain things; but the reality is that childbirth is painful, and it begins with small pain that increases in intensity and frequency. And once it starts (the labor pain starts) the labor is coming and that is the point here: the time has started. Do not be afraid. It must happen. It has started. Does that make sense? It is the

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beginning. It is the start of birth pangs. And as God pours out His wrath on the earth, the beginning is light and it increases until it is devastating for sin and sinners.

We see, if you remember in Revelation 6 (and you can see how I wanted to share so much today, but I cannot), Revelation 6, those first seal judgments (not *seals* like the animals but *seals* like on a piece of paper), those first four seal judgments were all about wars and famines and pestilence and things like that; things that the world could chalk up to just “mother nature.” But no, it is God bringing forth judgment and He says, “These are the beginning of birth pangs.”

So what is the lesson for these tribulation believers? Jesus is commanding them, and He wants them to understand that they should not be deceived and misled by false Christs (the temptation during that time will be to be misled); that they should not be frightened; that they should not be frightened. It must take place. We are not in the tribulation. But brothers and sisters, as things get worse because of sin, we should not be frightened. We should not be frightened. God is in control. We should not be frightened about the future of our nation. God is in control. We should not be frightened about what might happen. Now here, God is saying it will happen, and He says do not be frightened. God is in control. Do not be dismayed. Be on your guard for false prophets who say “peace and safety” when the opposite is true. God is pouring out His wrath.

So then we see the beginning of His explanation concerning the tribulation. For those who have placed their faith in Him, it is merely the beginning of labor pains. It is going to increase in intensity and timing. So you say, “Greg, I believe the Word. I believe all that is being said here, but as you stated many times, we will not go through the tribulation. And by the way, I am not a Jew. How does this apply to me?” Well, first of all, the church will certainly not go through the tribulation. We are not destined for wrath. That is what God’s Word says. But we will have tribulation in this life. We will. It is guaranteed. We will have trouble. In Matthew, chapter 6:34, Jesus says, “Each day has enough trouble of its own,” doesn’t it? Right? Do we have trouble? We certainly do, don’t we? And some of that trouble can be scary. John, chapter 15. Turn there. We are going to finish with John, chapter 15, and a portion of 16. Jesus says in verse 18 in John 15:

¹⁸ "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also." [John 15:18-29]

We can be tempted when we know trouble is coming for following Christ. Even as I think about it for my children... what will the world be like with people who hate Christ becoming more and more? You could be tempted to fear, right? Or be dismayed. No, do not fear. God is in control. God is in control. John 16:33,

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³³ "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." [John 16:33]

Although things may appear to be spiraling out of control, God is in control. God is in control of everything. He is sovereign over everything. Do not be fearful. Do not be frightened. In Him, we have peace. God uses the difficulties of our lives to make us like Christ. Those horrible things that come about (because of sin and Satan) He uses them for good. We can count it all joy when we encounter these trials. We know that "God causes all things to work together for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Do not fear. Do not fight it. Trust Jesus. Trust Jesus.

Now there are some of you here who should be really frightened. You should be really frightened based on what God has said is going to happen. He is not going to allow sin to continue. He is patient that no one should perish. He has not brought His wrath yet, but He will bring His wrath. And if you reject Christ and this time comes, you will go into it. And you will experience His wrath. You will experience tribulation such as the world has never ever seen. And if you die before that time in your sins, you will experience His wrath and His judgment. It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. God hates sin and He will deal with sin. And yet He did deal with sin: He sent His Son Jesus in His first coming to die for our sins. The second coming is not about saving from sin; it is about judgment except for Israel. See to it that you are not afraid nor troubled.

Prayer

Lord God, thank You for Your Word. We know from Your Word it does not apply directly to us; that we are not Jews in the tribulation but yet, we see Your character in this: that You are a faithful God Who will pour out Your wrath on sin and sinners; that the day will come. And yet within this, You are so gracious to use Your wrath on sin to bring about the salvation of the nation Israel. Father, I just pray for those of us here that we would see things through the reality of Your control over all; that we would not be frightened by events in this world; we would not be frightened by what happens in government; we would not be frightened by what happens physically speaking concerning illness or whatever it might be; that we would not be dismayed, but that we would understand that You are in control and that for us, true believers, You are using these things to make us like Christ. Help us to turn from those fears to trust You instead. And Father, I pray for anyone here who does not know You. This is just the beginning, as we study this, of Your declaration of the horrors that will come upon the world for rejecting Your Son. I pray that they would recognize that You are not mocked; that whatever a man sows, this he shall reap; that they will realize there is judgment coming; that You have been gracious and patient but yet, Your patience will run out. I pray for anyone here who does not know You that they would realize and understand that Your Son Jesus came and died for their sins and rose from the dead; and that if they call out upon Jesus as Lord for forgiveness of sins, He will save them. I pray for that. Lord, may we not live with a focus on this life. Lord, when we get caught up in it, rebuke us, Lord God with Your Word that we would set our minds on the things above, not the things of earth; that we would truly focus on the things of Your Son

Matthew 24:4-8

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and walk in a manner worthy because of Christ. Thank You for Your Word. It is in His name that we pray, amen.

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