

Christ's Greatest Prophetic Discourse Part 4 of 8

Let's turn to Matthew 24 as we continue our verse by verse examination of this wonderful Gospel. It's always a joy to open up the Word. Sometimes a text presents itself in such a way that you can preach it, other times it presents itself in such a way that you have to teach it. Many of these you will see are ones that need to be taught. Bear with me as I get technical with some of the things that we must learn. It is important for me to honor the One who has called and equipped me. I answer to Him, not to you. He has asked me to preach the whole counsel of God, so even when we come to the prophetic literature, we teach it. The Word of God has a way of addressing our pride, selfishness, spiritual apathy, lust of the flesh and worldly temptations that we have, especially throughout the week. We come to the pinnacle of the worship service where we have the opportunity to allow the Spirit of God to minister to us through His Word and to restore the dominion of God in our life, by transporting our souls, if you will, into the presence of God where we can delight in His glory.

We find ourselves in the fourth part of the series of Christ's Greatest Prophetic Discourse. We focus specifically on verse 15 of Matthew 24. Let me read verses 15-22. "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), then let those in Judea flee to the mountains; let him who is on the housetop not go down to get the things out that are in his house; and let him who is in the field not turn back to get his cloak. But woe to those who are with child and to those who nurse babes in those days! But pray that your flight may not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath; for then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall. And unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short."

Let me remind you of the context here. It has been during the Passion Week of the Lord Jesus just before his crucifixion. Jesus was in the temple courts and He was parrying the blows of the Pharisees and the scribes. On Wednesday evening in the final hours of Jewish rejection, in Jesus' last public sermon, you will recall He had a scathing denunciation of the false shepherds, the religious leaders that represented apostate Israel. After pronouncing seven curses of divine judgment upon them that we read about in chapter 23, He then gave one final proclamation in verses 34-36 promising judgment that would fall upon that generation. But Jesus concluded His deadly pronouncement upon Israel with a farewell promise. In verse 38 He says, "Your house is being left to you desolate!" but in verse 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!**'" Not *unless* you say, but *until* you say "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the **LORD!**"

Friends, that is an inspired refutation to those who would say that God is finished with Israel. Indeed Isaiah has prophesied in 62:2 that there will come a day when "The Gentiles shall see your righteousness, and all kings your glory" and in verse 4 "You shall no longer be termed Forsaken, nor shall your land any more be termed Desolate" (NKJV). Now this prediction of divine judgment upon Israel's temple aroused intense desire in the disciples for more information. They are asking, "What will be the nature and duration of Israel's desolation? When is this going to happen? What do you mean, 'You shall not see me until we say *Blessed is He who comes in the name of the **LORD!***'"? And then in chapter 24:3 they ask him, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

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And then in verses 4-14 He answers the disciples. I believe the disciples are representative of the Jewish remnant that will be alive during the tribulation. In verses 4-14 He describes six very specific signs, called birth pangs in verse eight, signs that will appear just prior to the Lord's coming again. We've studied those in previous weeks. They are: false messiahs, nations at war, natural disasters of epic proportions, persecution of tribulation saints, defection of and betrayal by false believers, and mass evangelism. Then He gives another fascinating prophetic revelation in verse 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)" and so on.

What does this mean, "when you see the abomination of desolation"? Literally in the original language it means the abomination which makes desolation, which causes desolation, which lays waste. First of all, abomination is a term that we don't hear much these days, especially in our culture where there's really no such thing as abomination. You can see practically anything on television. Nobody is appalled by anything they see anymore. An abomination is a detestable thing, an object of utter abhorrence, something which is repulsive. In fact, in the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, that term is used to describe idols and cultic practices, sacrilegious objects or paraphernalia, and some of the rights of the wicked pagan worship. Things that are repulsive or vile, revolting things that would desecrate a holy place. That same term is used in Revelation 17:4-5 to describe that great whore of the final apostasy. You will recall "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." This will be the ultimate ecumenical church, which will be an enormous amalgam of apostate religions led by the false prophet who deceives the world, which we read about in Matthew 24:10-13. An abomination is anything that offends the holiness of God and evokes His wrath.

Jesus warns those who will be alive in that day, "When you see this abomination that causes desolation, when you see this thing standing in the holy place (a reference to the temple), run for your life. Run for safety. Seek refuge." Now what is this abomination, this vile object? Jesus gives us a hint. He says it's that "which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet." It's interesting, Daniel spoke of this three times, in Daniel 9:27, 11:31, and 12:11. We know that in Daniel 11:21-35 this was a clear reference to the hideous defilement of the temple by the Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes IV who ruled Palestine as a surrogate of the Greek empire of that day. He did so from 175 to 165 B.C. Antiochus Epiphanes demanded to be called Theos Epiphanes. In Greek that means manifest god. That guy was filled with pride, as are most dictators even today.

He slaughtered thousands of Jewish men, he even sold the Jewish women and children into slavery. Worse yet he sacrificed a pig on the altar of the temple and forced the priests to eat the flesh of the most unclean of all animals. On top of that he erected an idol of Zeus in the temple because he considered himself to be the manifestation of Zeus. His enemies nicknamed him Epimanes rather than Epiphanes, because Epimanes means madman, the insane one. I find it ironic that at the end of his days, because he was unable to defeat the Jews led by Judas Maccabaeus, he literally went insane and died as a madman.

But obviously Jesus wasn't talking only about some past historical event when he was talking to the disciples, nor was Daniel. He was talking about something yet future. Daniel's prophecy of Antiochus Epiphanes was a preview of the ultimate abomination of desolation that will be committed by the Antichrist. Turn to the prophet Daniel, chapter 9. May I remind you of the context. Daniel has been

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exiled into Babylonian captivity. Earlier in Daniel 2 he explained the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, that great statue that Nebuchadnezzar saw. There God revealed to him the successive stages of Gentile world domination existing throughout world history, that of Babylon, then Medo-Persia, then Greece, then Rome, then a revived Rome that we believe will happen someday, and then finally how the Messiah will ultimately defeat them all and reconcile His covenant people to Himself in saving faith and reestablish them back into the land of promise.

So now he prays for his people in Daniel 9:2 we read how Daniel is recalling the years of captivity the Lord had promised through Jeremiah the prophet—seventy years—and that time is almost over. Therefore Daniel is imploring the Lord to reestablish the land of Israel back into the land of promise. Then God speaks to him through the angel Gabriel. Notice particularly in Daniel 9:24, he says something very interesting. He says “Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophesy, and to anoint the most holy place.”

Seventy weeks, he says. Literally this is referring to seventy sevens, or seventy heptads, which would be units of seven. In other words, this would be 490 years according to verse two. “(490 years) have been decreed for your people and your holy city,” before six goals can be accomplished: “to finish transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophesy, and to anoint the most holy place.” The first three of these were fulfilled partially in principle, but they, along with the other three, await complete fulfillment in a day yet future.

Here God reveals the future, far beyond Antiochus to a person we would call Antichrist. Here's the point: 490 years of judgment must occur before these six glorious objectives will be realized. 490 years before the Messiah would establish the long-awaited kingdom for which Daniel prayed. The next verse tells him when the clock will begin ticking. Verse 25 “So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; (in other words sixty-nine weeks, or sixty-nine sevens, or 483 years) it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress.”

What's fascinating is in Nehemiah 2:5-6 we read how King Artaxerxes issued a decree to rebuild and restore Jerusalem in 445 B.C. And then as God promised, seven weeks and sixty weeks, or 483 years elapse until, as Daniel predicted through divine inspiration, Messiah the Prince, the Lord Jesus Christ, passed through the cheering multitudes as He entered Jerusalem as their Messiah, even though they were very confused as to what He was really there for. Notice in verse 26, then after the sixty-two weeks (plus the seven weeks or a total of sixty-nine heptads) the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing. Here's the point: Indeed as it was prophesied, 483 years after the sixty-nine weeks had begun, the Messiah was cut off and had nothing. Literally it means He had no one. And we know that, as we read the Gospels, we see that all of His followers abandoned Him when He was arrested, even during His trial and crucifixion.

So the sixty-nine weeks were fulfilled en toto, and then we know forty-nine years later that “the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary,” a clear reference to the Roman invasion in 70 A.D. It's important to understand that all of this occurred before the final seventieth week was even revealed in verse 27. God reveals what will happen after the fall of Jerusalem. “And its

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end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.” This describes the entire intervening period before this final seventieth week. In fact, a more literal rendering of the end of verse 26 would be this, “And the end of it will be in the overflowing, and unto the end there will be war, a strict determination of desolations” or “the determined amount of desolations.” Certainly there are undeniable parallels to Jesus’ predictions in Matthew 24:7-22.

When we examine the context of verse 27 and other parallel prophecies, we must conclude that many years must transpire before verse 27. We then discover that the seventieth week, the last seven years, will occur just before Christ’s second coming. Therefore it will be a long period of, as verse 26 says, war and desolations. This will be the fate of the covenant people until the seventieth week ushers in the kingdom. Indeed this has been the history of the Jew from that day to the present.

Then notice the events of the 70th week, as once again the prophetic text sweeps Daniel from the near to the distant future. In Daniel 9:27 he says, “And he.” Let’s stop here for a moment. Who is the he? Again, to be a bit technical, Hebrew grammar requires that the subject of the verb be linked to the last eligible antecedent. In this case it would be the prince of verse 26, the ruler of the Roman people who destroyed Jerusalem. Now because of the events described at the end of verse 26 and those in verse 27, and other parallel passages, this cannot refer to the Roman ruler of A.D. 70. It would be reasonable to assume that it refers to another ruler of a Roman empire, and we believe this to be the one mentioned in Daniel 2, the little horn that comes up in the midst of the ten horns that comes up in Daniel 7, as well as the ten-horned beast of chapter 2, which would be the Antichrist.

Friends, remember, Satan always tries to counterfeit what God does. Satan has his own trinity. It consists of Satan, Antichrist, and the false prophet. And certainly at the end of the age, Satan will raise up his version of Christ, the Antichrist, and he will cause him to rise to world domination, as a sovereign God allows all of this to happen. In Daniel 7:24 the Antichrist will rule a massive kingdom that comprises the old Roman empire, a western confederacy of a united Europe that Daniel describes as a ten-nation empire. This very well could be the current European Common Market.

Back to verse 27, “And he (the Antichrist) 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.” So, you must understand that sixty-nine weeks of judgment have elapsed, 483 years from the decree of Artaxerxes to the crucifixion of Christ. But there were seventy weeks that were decreed, so there’s one more heptad that remains, one more seven-year period. Here in Daniel 9:27, and remember, this is the very text that Jesus refers to as the prophetic template that indicates the chronological sequence of the beginning of birth pangs which we read about in Matthew 24:15-16 and Mark 13:14, which correlates with the seal judgments of Revelation 4:6. Here in this very text we get a glimpse into what the saints of that day must look for and endure.

The text describes a great deceiver who will lure Israel into a protective agreement, called a firm covenant. In Revelation 6:2 we have an expansion of this, in that text is a description of the first seal judgment, an era of unparalleled world peace, which will really be a great hoax, a calm before the storm. The text describes a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow. A bow with no arrows, implying a diplomatic not a military victory, a peace sealed by a covenant, not by war. That text in

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Revelation 6:2 goes on to say “and a crown was given to him; and he went out conquering, and to conquer” which is another picture of Antichrist, the one who will conquer the world in a bloodless coupe.

It's easy to understand today why modern Israel would be interested in protection, why Israel would someday want someone to give them needed protection and therefore get sucked into a covenant. Israel today is the size of New Jersey, 9,000 square miles. It is surrounded by twenty-two Arab countries, all of which want to kill them, in 5 million square miles. There are 145 million people who are supported and aligned with the Muslim world which consists of about 1 billion people in an area twice the size of the United States, and 672 times the size of miniscule Israel. Israel has approximately 5.2 million people, and only four million of them are Jews. And yet they are considered today the great Goliath.

Anti-Semitism is sweeping across the globe like a wildfire. It's even in the churches. According to FLAME, which stands for Facts and Logic about the Middle East, there was a recent poll taken in Europe. They “found Israel to be the greatest menace to the peace of the world—far ahead of such murderous regimes as those of Iran or of North Korea.”

Today, in Israel we see that they are fighting for their lives. They are the most hated and vulnerable nation on earth. Their only ally is the United States, and that is gradually waning. Most of the world hates the United States, as well as Israel. All you have to do is go abroad and you will see that. That is evidenced by the escalating animosity of the Arab/Islamic world and their Russian and Chinese allies. Due to the proliferation of nuclear weapons, we see brutal, totalitarian regimes today threatening the civilized world, not to mention the very planet on which we live. Every day it gets worse.

You see much about Iran in the news today. It's well known that they consistently support terrorism including al-Qaeda and Hezbollah. It's well known that they have been concealing nuclear research for the past eighteen years despite their signing in 1970 of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. Since 2001 Iran has made significant progress in its nuclear program, but not without a great deal of help from Pakistan and North Korea, as well as research institutes and commercial companies in Russia and China. Western intelligence sources report that Iran has constructed a number of nuclear facilities and they continue to build more.

While this is a threat to the United States, it is far more a threat against Israel, just 2,000 kilometers away. Iran refuses to recognize Israel and their top officials frequently call for the destruction of the Jewish state. In fact, I was reading about a major military parade on September 22, 2003. There, Iran showed off six of its Shehab-3 missiles, which were decorated with anti-Israeli and anti U.S. slogans, including one saying “Israel should be wiped off the map.”

Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz, in a lecture delivered to top Israeli Defense Force commanders defined Iran's nuclear efforts as “the gravest danger to Israel's existence in the future.” I was reading in the Jewish World Review, a man by the name of Ed Koch, who was talking about his dismay at the Iranian president Ahmadinejad's statement “Israel must be wiped off the face of the map” which we've seen on the news. He says, “If Iran were to launch a nuclear attack against Israel,” he feels, as many other people including Israel do, “that there would be little chance of any of these supporters coming to Israel's defense.” Maybe some from the United States, but they're not even sure of that, given the climate in our country today. Koch goes on to write, “Regrettably, it appears that world opinion does

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not accept the fact that the fanatic Islamists, comprised of many millions of Muslims worldwide, believe that Christians, Jews, Hindus and other infidels, not accepting the supremacy of Islam, should die.”

In a recent poll of the Al-Bawaba.com website, which covers news throughout the Middle East from an Arab perspective in both English and Arabic, they had a question that people could respond to. The question was: Do you think Arab governments should rally behind Iranian calls to wipe out Israel? 77.8% of the respondents agreed. Only 22.2% voted no. Even today we witness the terrorist attacks on a weekly basis in Israel. The Gaza Strip—I've been there—has really turned into an Islamic, fundamentalist terror state supported by Iran. Knesset member Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel says, “I think the Palestinian state was already established in Gaza and constitutes an Islamic terror base in our region, not too far from central Israel. This new state is also being sponsored by Iran, whose arming intentions are in the area of nuclear weapons and its feelings toward Israel are well-known.”

May I remind you that in Ezekiel 38 there is a detailed description of a Satanically led coalition of nations that will come upon Jerusalem (Israel) at the end of the tribulation, the battle synonymous with the battle of Armageddon. It includes Magog, which is Russia, Josephus, the ancient historian even identified Magog as Russia, along with many other Muslim nations including: Meshack and Tubal, which would be a reference to other nations in Asia minor, especially modern Turkey. It mentions Persia which is modern Iran, Afghanistan and possibly even Pakistan. Also Ethiopia, which is modern Sudan, and Put which is modern Libya and Egypt.

When this occurs, not if it occurs, but when this occurs—because it is prophesied that it's going to happen, and when God says it I believe it—but when this occurs, Israel will have no choice but to turn to a European confederacy for help. As a footnote, people ask if the United States will be a part of this. The Bible really doesn't say. I believe that when the rapture occurs, the United States will crumble in many ways and will probably be absorbed in the European confederacy. It will only be a shadow of its former self.

Back to Daniel 9:27. He says, “And he (this Antichrist) will make a firm covenant with the many (which are the Jews) for one week, but in the middle of the week (after three and a half years) he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering.” Obviously this implies that there's going to be a temple. A temple has to be built. I've been there and talked to some of the people in Jerusalem and there are plans for a temple just waiting. They say they could put it up in less than a year. The Antichrist is going to demand that their worship be stopped in the middle of the week after three and a half years. Let me give you some context here. In Revelation 12:7-9 we read how Satan and his minions will be cast to earth in the middle of the seven year period. This will infuriate Satan who becomes even more desperate and more determined to thwart the purposes of God and to annihilate Israel, God's covenant people. In Revelation 12:12 we read, “Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time.”

In Daniel 9:27 at the end of the verse it says, “...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.” Remember, in Matthew 24:15 Jesus is saying “I want you to go back to Daniel, go back to this text and look at it.” Here in the middle of the week, after three and a half years, this Satanically possessed Antichrist will seize the temple, betray the Jews, and demand to be worshiped,

just like his forerunner Antiochus Epiphanes. The Word of God tells us that this will happen for forty-two months, according to Revelation 13:5. In other words, the last half of the seven years.

This is the one, dear friends, that is pictured in Revelation 13:5 as the beast coming up out of the sea. He was given "a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies; and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him." In verses 7-8 it says "It was given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them; and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him. And all who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain."

What will he do? What is this abomination that makes desolate? What will he do that is so utterly abhorrent to God? 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 gives us an understanding of this. It describes him as "the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship..." and it goes on to say that he will "take his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God." If you want to evoke the wrath of God, display yourself as God and see what happens. Satan has always wanted to be worshiped. That has always been his goal. This is why he is so determined, even to this day, to bring about so many false teachers and false doctrines. Satan doesn't care what you believe as long as it's not the truth. This is why he will cause a proliferation of false messiahs and false prophets as Jesus has predicted, right before the Lord returns. He is the father of lies. In 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10 it goes on to describe him and it says he is "the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved."

In the Greek grammar, it indicates that this "detestable thing" *standing in the holy place*, will be some kind of permanent image or idol. Probably some display of the Antichrist himself which will be permanently displayed in the temple itself. This is the abomination that makes desolate to which Jesus referred in Matthew 24:15. As a footnote, we read more about this in Daniel 12:11 where it says that "from the time that the regular sacrifice is abolished, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days." Which is interesting, that's thirty days beyond the three and a half years. I'll explain that in a moment. In Revelation 12:6 it indicates that this period of unprecedented persecution against Israel, this great tribulation when God will miraculously protect His people, it says that it lasts for 1,260 days, thirty days less than Daniels' 1,290. I believe, as many do, that the additional thirty days in Daniel's prophecy is thought to account for that period of time between the time the Lord descends upon the Mount of Olives and when He ultimately judges the nations which we read about in Zechariah 14:4-5. You will recall the prophetic literature, especially in Joel 3 when He descends, it will cause a great valley to occur, the Valley of Jehoshaphat, perhaps the Valley of Decision as Joel describes it. In Daniel 12:12 he even adds forty-five more days that would seem to allow for the establishment of the leadership throughout the glorious earthly kingdom.

In summary, God has decreed 1,260 days of unprecedented tribulation, then an additional thirty days after the Lord's return to judge the nations, and perhaps even forty-five more days to establish His kingdom around the world. Friends, I have to pause for a moment. It is beyond me, and I say this with all due respect for those that would differ with me, but it is beyond me how you can spiritualize all of these precise numbers of days, or how anyone can possibly torture the events of all these prophetic texts and somehow squeeze them in the narrow box of an A.D. 70 fulfillment. I believe people do so for philosophical, not exegetical, considerations.

Beloved, prophetic scriptures are replete with the descriptions of a coming tribulation which will end man's reign upon the earth and will inaugurate God's reign upon the earth. When He establishes His glorious kingdom, just as Jesus predicted in Matthew 24. There are predictions all through the Old Testament, and even through the New, of inconceivable calamities that will encompass the whole world, but will specifically focus on the nation and the people of Israel. There will be a time of great war between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light. There are numerous texts that describe this, that not only describe the subject of Israel and the nation, but even the sequence of events that we have looked at here.

In Isaiah 10:20-22 the Spirit of God tells us through the prophet, "Now it will come about in that day the remnant of Israel, and those of the house of Jacob who have escaped, will never again rely on the one who struck them,"— the one who struck them is the betrayer, the Antichrist—"but will truly rely on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel. A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God. For though your people, O Israel, may be like the sand of the sea, only a remnant within them will return: a destruction is determined,"—now here's the good news—"overflowing with righteousness."

The abomination which makes desolate will ultimately usher in, at the end of that three and a half years, the glorious righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ when He comes back again in power and great glory. Jeremiah the prophet speaks of the same thing in many places. I'll give you but one in Jeremiah 30:5-9. "For thus says the Lord, 'I have heard a sound of terror, of dread, and there is no peace. Ask now, and see, if a male can give birth. Why do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in childbirth? And why have all faces turned pale?'" Literally what he's describing is that the suffering will be so great that men will be writhing in pain. We see this in so many other passages. He goes on to say, "'Alas! For that day is great, there is none like it; and it is the time of Jacob's distress (Israel's distress, Jacob's trouble), but he (Israel) will be saved from it. And it shall come about on that day,' declares the Lord of hosts, 'that I will break his yoke from off their neck, and will tear off their bonds; and strangers shall no longer make them their slaves. But they shall serve the Lord their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.'"

In Daniel 12:1 we read that "Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a great time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued."

Zechariah 13:8-14:2 says, "'And 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*. Behold, a day is coming for the Lord when the spoil taken from you will be divided among you. For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished, and half the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city.'"

Jesus is warning of this time that is coming, in Matthew 24 as He speaks to the disciples, the representatives of the Jewish remnant that will remain during this time of great tribulation just before the Lord comes. In Matthew 24:15-16 He says, "Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation

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which is spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.”

I believe the world's stage is set right now for the coming of Antichrist. I don't know when any of this will happen, when the Church will be snatched away. We don't know the time, but we do know that it's coming, and that when the Antichrist comes according to Revelation 13:3, “the whole world was astonished and followed the beast.” You see how naïve people are today even in ostensibly Christian churches. They will follow anybody.

I want to share a quote from Dr. David Larsen from his book Jews, Gentiles and the Church, a very scholarly work that I recommend you read. Here's what he says: “The stage for the Beast and his religious cohort, the False Prophet, is the Tribulation period, “*the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world*” (Revelation 3:1) or the time of “messianic woes” as the Jews have spoken of them. In this time frame certain gigantic collectivisms will arise to form the driving wedge of Satan's massive effort to frustrate God's purpose. Problems on earth seem insurmountable; no human leadership seems competent to address the complexity of the issues. A demographic explosion with moral, social, economic, ecological, and political ramifications baffles the think tanks of the world. Humankind's vaunted self-sufficiency evaporates in the face of insoluble questions. The church, notwithstanding her frequent impotence and perennial failure, is now gone, and the salt and light she has afforded are missing. Homo sapiens are adrift, rudderless.”

He goes on to say, “‘Nature abhors a vacuum,’ the old adage has it. The Scriptures depict a brilliant, charismatic personality, a demagogue of the first order, striding dramatically onto the stage of human history. It is George Orwell's 1984 and Aldous Huxley's Brave New World. So desperate is the human race for solutions and answers that freedom easily becomes a casualty in the panic for security. As the late Paul-Henri Spaak, prominent Belgian diplomat and astute European strategist put it so boldly: ‘We do not want another committee—we have too many already. What we want is a man of sufficient stature to hold the allegiance of all people and to lift us out of the economic morass into which we are sinking. Send us such a man be he god or devil, we will receive him!’”

Dear friends, the mood of helplessness is by no means isolated. The distinguished European economist and banker Paul M. Mazur stated that “the large number of governmental bureaus that will have their orbits in the atmosphere of our planet cannot be allowed the freedom to compete and collide with one another. So, in order to control the diverse bureaucracies required, a politburo will develop, and over this group organization there is likely to arise the final and single arbiter—the master of the order, the total dictator.”

I will close with a true story. On June 7, 1967, in the final moments of the Arab-Israeli Six Day War, the Jews finally repossessed the temple mount area for the first time in 1,897 years. It is said that the Israeli soldiers, as they were overcoming their Arab enemies, were so filled with tears and passion that they literally ran past their Arab enemies who were finally beginning to put down their guns. They ran past in their final assault, driven by their intense passion to finally get near their precious temple mount. When they did, a half-track pulled up in the midst of all of this. The Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi Shlomo Goren stepped out of that half-track with his beard and his long black robe. He approached the Wailing Wall that we see today. He took out the shofar, the ram's horn, and he blew it, signaling to all

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of the Jews in all of the world that it was time to come back home. He announced, "The days of Messiah have begun."

Many of the Jews believe and have been taught that the generation that recovers the site of the temple must rebuild the temple. In fact, Rabbi Mendel Lewittes has stated: "The rebuilding of the Temple will be the acme of the Redemption process." On that very same day, General Moshe Dayan approached the Western Wall and said: "We have returned to our holiest of holy places, never to be parted from it again. We earnestly stretch out our hands to our Arab brethren in peace, but we have returned to Jerusalem never to part from her again."

It is said that several hundred thousand Jews rushed to the Wailing Wall that first week, because that's the closest they can get to where they believe the original holy of holies was. While we would never want to use current events to interpret Bible prophecy, I believe nonetheless that we would be fools not to see the miracle of modern Israel as at least a demonstration of divine protection, if not a harbinger of the tribulation.

In summary, I believe that the Church will someday be snatched away, the Antichrist will appear, he will offer a phony peace plan to the world and certainly to the Jews. The Jews will need protection, and after three and a half years, according to the prophesies, he will betray them. He will demand to be worshiped, which will be the abomination that causes desolation, and that will result in unprecedented desolation throughout the last half of the tribulation period when Satan tries to destroy Israel through Antichrist and his vast armies. That is the time Jeremiah calls Jacob's trouble. Jesus will return as He has promised, only this time He will not come in humility but in power and great glory. He will crush Satan. The nations of the earth and Israel will repent. Israel will be reconciled back to Jehovah God. They will be restored back to their land and the establishment of the millennial kingdom will take place. We will reign with our Lord and Savior for a thousand years.

I am convinced that God is not finished with Israel. In Isaiah 62:11-12 we read, "Behold, the Lord has proclaimed to the end of the earth, Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Lo, your salvation comes; Behold His reward is with Him, and His recompense before Him.' And they will call them, 'The holy people, the redeemed of the Lord'; and you will be called, 'Sought out, a city not forsaken.'"

These amazing truths should impact all of us who know and love Christ. How should they impact us? They should cause us to rejoice that we serve and worship a sovereign God who has determined the end from the beginning, that He has decreed all things for His glory. He has even been so gracious as to reveal some of His eternal purposes in this Book. As we learn the truth we know that truth is what strengthens our faith. Once again, faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. While you may not remember all of the details and the intricacies and nuances of things I have mentioned this day, you will remember that God is a sovereign God who is orchestrating all things for our good and His glory. What He says you can take to the bank. We all need to live in the light of His glorious return. Amen.

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[All Scripture quotations are NASB unless otherwise noted.]

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