

## **Details of the Great Tribulation** **Matthew 24:15-22**

Well let's turn please in our Bibles to the gospel of Matthew, chapter 24. The focus of our study will be verses 15 to 22, but to pick up the context of verses 15 to 22, we want to read from the first verse of the chapter. So follow along then as I read Matthew 24, starting at verse 1.

“<sup>1</sup> And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. <sup>2</sup> And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

“<sup>3</sup> And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? <sup>4</sup> And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. <sup>5</sup> For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. <sup>6</sup> And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. <sup>7</sup> For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. <sup>8</sup> All these are the beginning of sorrows.

“<sup>9</sup> Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. <sup>10</sup> And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. <sup>11</sup> And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. <sup>12</sup> And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. <sup>13</sup> But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. <sup>14</sup> And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

<sup>15</sup> When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) <sup>16</sup> then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains: <sup>17</sup> let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: <sup>18</sup> neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. <sup>19</sup> And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! <sup>20</sup> But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: <sup>21</sup> for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. <sup>22</sup> And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.”

“<sup>23</sup> Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. <sup>24</sup> For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. <sup>25</sup> Behold, I have told you before. <sup>26</sup> Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. <sup>27</sup> For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.” Notice the subject now is the

coming of the Son of man. “<sup>28</sup>For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.”

Now here’s something we’ll be talking about in the sermon, verse 29: “Immediately after the tribulation of those days” that He just described in verses 15 to 22, “shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: <sup>30</sup>and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.<sup>31</sup> And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” I’ll stop there.

Now as we’ve been studying Matthew chapter 24 together, we saw that Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem in verses 1 and 2. He said, There will not be one stone left on top of another. Now this prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple was very shocking to the disciples, and so they asked three questions in verse 3: When will the temple be destroyed; What will be the sign of your coming; and What will be the sign of the end of the world? And Jesus took up this last question, What will be the sign of the end of the world, and He answered that first, in verses 4 to 14. From verses 4 to 14, Jesus provides a chronicle of the entire period from His first coming clear up to the end of the world. And in verses 4 to 14, Jesus tells the disciples what will be the sign of the end of the world.

Now in that section of verses 4 to 14, we have two subsections. The first subsection is in verses 4 to 8. In verses 4 to 8, Jesus tells them what the vast majority of the coming period of time is going to look like. He tells them that there will be great religious deception, in verses 4 and 5. He tells them there will be political turmoil, in verses 6 to 7a. And then He tells them there will be great natural disasters, in verses 7b to verse 8. So these things—great religious deception, great political turmoil, and great natural disasters—will characterize the time to come, Jesus says. But mark it down, Jesus says—None of these things are signs of the end of the world. These things have been going on for the last 2,000 years, and they will continue to go on until the end times arrive. Great religious deception, great political turmoil, great natural disasters are the norm for the vast majority of time between the first coming of Christ and the end of the world. These things are just the preliminary sorrows that are the prelude to the great sorrows of the end times.

Now just before the end of the world occurs, there will be a “little season,” a short period of time, in which there will be great sorrows, and great tribulation. And this short season is called the “end times,” and this is addressed in the second subsection of verses 4 to 14, namely in verses 9 to 14.

So from verses 4 to 14, Jesus goes from His day to the end of the world. In that section, we have this first subsection of verses 4 to 8, which describes the vast majority of that period in which there’s going to be religious deception, political turmoil, and great natural disasters. And then, in

the second subsection beginning at verse 9 to verse 14, He describes the second shorter period of that time, and that is the period of the great tribulation.

So after the long period described in verses 4 to 8, there will be the short period described in verses 9 to 14. And this period in verses 9 to 14 is introduced in verse 9 with the word, “*Then.*” *Then*, after the events in verses 4 to 8 have gone on for a long time, *then* the end times come; *then* there will be a severe intensification of persecution and apostasy and deception, and the abounding iniquity and the murder of Christians by all the nations of the world, in such a fashion and to such a degree as the world has never known before.

And what will trigger the beginning of this final end-times period is the loosing of Satan, as is described in Revelation 20 and verse 3, and in Revelation 20 and verses 7 to 9, when Satan is loosed for a little while to deceive the nations and to gather them from the four corners of the earth together to persecute the believers.

Having been loosed, Satan will then be free to raise up the Antichrist, and through him deceive the whole world into a united worship of the Antichrist and a united persecution and murder of Christians, in an attempt to eradicate them from off of the face of the earth. So then, all that is described in Matthew 24, verses 9 to 14, flows out of and follows the loosing of Satan.

However, despite this great falling away of professing Christians to follow Antichrist and betray their former fellow Christians, the gospel continues to go forth to all nations; the Christians do not stop preaching the gospel, in spite of martyrdom. And when the gospel shall be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations, then the end of the world will occur.

So verses 4 to 8 of Matthew 24 describe the long period of relative protection that believers enjoy because Satan is bound. And yes, there will be sorrows during that time, but they are small, compared to the tribulation to come. Verses 9 to 14 describe the short period of great tribulation that believers will go through because Satan is loosed. *Then* there will be a united, worldwide, transnational effort to wipe the Christians from off the face of the earth. But they will keep preaching, and then the end will come.

Now this brings us to our passage today in verses 15 to 22. You recall that having predicted the destruction of the temple in verses 1 and 2 of chapter 24, the disciples then asked in verse 3 of chapter 24, When shall these things be? In other words, when will the temple be leveled to the ground so one stone is not lying on top of another? Now you remember they asked two other questions, one of which was, When is the end of the world? And Jesus spent verses 4 to 14 talking about when is the end of the world.

Now, in verses 15 to 22, He’s going to answer that question, When is the temple going to be leveled? Jesus tells the disciples it will happen when they “see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place.” Now “the holy place” was the holy land, the holy city, and the holy temple. All of them are “the holy place.” So when the

abomination of desolation stands in the holy place, that is when Jerusalem and the temple will be destroyed. But this destruction of the temple, as terrible as it is, cannot be the complete fulfillment of all Jesus says in verses 15 to 22, not only because of what those verses themselves contain, but also because of what the following verses after them contain regarding the second coming of Jesus.

Now there's an important principle we must understand in the construction of many of the passages in the Bible, and that principle is this: Very often, the Scriptures will set forth a succinct chronological summary of an event, and then they will go back and fill in additional detail by way of a recapitulation of that event. The classic example of this recapitulation to fill in additional detail is that of Genesis chapter 1 and 2.

Genesis chapter 1 sets forth a chronological summary of the creation account, and chapter 2 then goes back and fills in some of the additional details revolving around the creation of animals and man on the sixth day. And so we have Genesis chapter 1—chronological, succinct summary account of the creation; then chapter 2 goes back and fills in a whole bunch of details about the sixth day, especially revolving around man. And this is what we have here in Matthew 24.

Matthew 24, verses 4 to 14, which we've previously studied, sets for the chronology of the last days, much like Genesis 1 sets forth a chronology of the first days. Matthew 24: 4 to 14 sets forth the chronology of the last days, from the first coming of Christ clear to the end of the world. At Matthew 24:14, the world ends. But then Matthew 24, verses 15 to 22, goes back and fills in the details of that second section of Matthew 24:4 to 14, namely, that second section being Matthew 24:9 to 14 that described the great tribulation, following the word "then" in verse 9.

Matthew 24:15 to 22, which we're studying today, goes back and fills in the details of Matthew 24, verses 9 to 14. And we said last time, and we demonstrated last time, that verses 9 to 14 sets forth the overview of the great tribulation of the end times, after Satan is loosed. Verses 15 to 22 now go back and fill in some of the details that were omitted in verses 9 to 14.

Now the fact that there is a double reference in verses 15 to 22 to both the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., and also to the great tribulation that will occur at the end of the world seems very clear. The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, which did occur in 70 A.D., and was predicted in Matthew chapter 24, verses 15 to 22, is a foreshadowing of the even greater tribulation and defilement of God's temple and assault upon God's people that will occur in the end times, with the loosing of Satan. Now I know I've given you a lot of information in this introduction, but we're going to now develop what I've introduced to you. So let me just recapitulate my introduction.

Jesus said the temple's going to be destroyed. The disciples ask three questions: When's that going to happen, when are you coming back, and when's the end of the world? Jesus, in chapter 24, verses 4 to 14, says, Okay—here's how it's going to go from this time to the end of the

world. During the first period, from verses 4 to 8, there's going to be this long period of religious deception, political turmoil, and great natural disasters. But during that time, Satan's going to be bound, so these are moderate sorrows.

But then, beginning at verse 9, Satan's going to be loosed. The result is, the Christians are going to be hated of all nations, they're going to be betrayed, they're going to be slaughtered, the love that used to exist is going to disappear, and then the end is going to come. So verses 9 to 14 describe the great tribulation—that short time, which are the end times, of this period of time from the first coming of Christ to the end of the world. Then verses 15 to 22, in talking about the destruction of the temple, go back and fill in some of the missing detail in verses 9 to 14.

Now in verses 15 to 22, Jesus does talk about the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D., but clearly, He's talking about more than just the destruction of the temple. He's also talking about a future event that's going to take place at the end of the world and the end times, because the nature of the language in verses 15 to 22 clearly describes far more than what happened in 70 A.D. Furthermore, immediately after what is described in 15 to 22, Jesus comes back.

So whatever is going on in verses 15 to 22 immediately precedes the second coming of Christ. Jesus didn't come back in 70 A.D., so clearly, whatever is being described in verses 15 to 22 is going to happen, not only in 70 A.D., but also just before Jesus returns. That's why there is a double fulfillment of verses 15 to 22, both immediately in the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D., and then ultimately in the great tribulation of verses 9 to 14, just before Jesus returns and the end happens. Well, I can't make it any simpler than that.

All right, let's then consider the passage and seek to understand its meaning. In the first place then this morning, we want to consider the reference in Matthew 24, verses 15 to 22, to the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. I just want to read our passage again. Our passage is talking about, first of all, the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D.

“<sup>15</sup> When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) <sup>16</sup> then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains: <sup>17</sup> let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: <sup>18</sup> neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. <sup>19</sup> And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that [are nursing] in those days! <sup>20</sup> But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: <sup>21</sup> for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. <sup>22</sup> And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.”

Now notice then first of all, the sign that Jesus provides. The sign that Jesus provides of when the temple's going to be leveled is in verse 15. Verse 15 says, “When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place,” that's when it's going to happen.

Here in verse 15 is the sole sign that Jesus gives to His disciples as to when the temple is going to be destroyed. Now notice that Jesus does not give a date. Instead, He gives a sign. Jesus is not a date-setter. He says, Nobody knows the date. But He says, I will give you signs, and the signs will tell you it's imminent, but I'm not going to set a date. So the disciples didn't know if this was going to happen in 5 years, 10 years, 20 years, 30 years. As it turned out, it was 37 years later, but they didn't know. Jesus didn't tell them. He says, But here's the signs. So Jesus did not give them a date. He instead gives them a sign. And when this sign is seen, then they know that the destruction of the temple is imminent.

What then is the sign that Jesus speaks of? Well, very clearly, verse 15—It is “the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet.” Now Daniel spoke of this abomination of desolation at least four times in his book. He spoke of it in chapter 8 and verse 13. He spoke of it in chapter 9, in verse 27. And even more explicitly, he spoke of it in chapter 11 and verse 31. And then finally, he speaks of it in chapter 12, and verse 11.

So this abomination of desolation business is a pretty major theme in the book of Daniel. And what is it? Well, the answer is, this abomination of desolation consisted of the defilement of God's temple by ungodly men. Let me repeat that: This abomination of desolation consisted of the defilement of God's temple by ungodly men.

Now there are going to be three subsequent fulfillments of these prophecies of Daniel about there being an abomination of desolation that's coming. Daniel says, Abomination of desolation is going to happen. Ungodly men are going to defile God's temple, and it's going to happen three times. Now Daniel doesn't say it's going to happen three times, but in fact that's what the Bible reveals—it's going to happen three times. There's going to be a triple fulfillment of this prophecy.

Fulfillment number one: After Israel's captivity ended, the 70 years she was in Babylon, she returned to the land and she rebuilt the temple. And about 240 years later, during the intertestamental period, during the time of the Maccabees, Antiochus Epiphanes invaded Israel and he performed the first abomination of desolation in the temple when he offered a pig on the altar in the temple in Jerusalem. This was the first abomination of desolation that Daniel spoke of that occurred in history as a fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy.

Now both Josephus and the Book of Maccabees record this event of this abomination of desolation taking place in the temple. And Daniel chapter 11, the whole chapter, very clearly gives a detailed reference to this military campaign that takes place between the southern Roman kingdom and the northern Roman kingdom. They went back and forth through the Holy Land, and in one of those excursions, Antiochus Epiphanes offered a pig on the altar, defiled the temple, and performed the abomination of desolation. And so Daniel 11 unmistakably refers to that event as being the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy that was given 250 years or more earlier. So that's the first fulfillment of the prophecy. It happened.

The second fulfillment is the appearance of the pagan Romans with their idolatrous images of Caesar worship, who entered the temple in 70 A.D. and destroyed it. And Jesus is telling His disciples in Matthew 24 and verse 15 that the Roman defilement of the temple and the destruction of the temple is also a fulfillment of Daniel's prediction of the abomination of desolation in the holy place. And so just as in the past the holy place of the Lord had been desecrated, Jesus says, So will it happen again in the future.

So Jesus Himself authorizes us to see a double fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy, when it was already fulfilled in the intertestamental period, and Jesus is saying, Oh, no—there's still another fulfillment that lies ahead, which was of course when the Romans came with their images of Caesar worship and brought them into the temple, and then burnt the temple to the ground.

So when the Christians see the Roman legions land and march up to Jerusalem and stand on that holy ground with their pagan images, to prepare to assault and defile the holy ground of the temple, Jesus makes it clear that they will succeed, and He makes it equally clear that the Christians need to flee, lest they be trapped in Jerusalem by the surrounding Roman armies and be slaughtered along with the rest of the Jews by the victorious Roman legions. So this, then, is the sign that Jesus provides, verse 15

Now having seen the sign that Jesus provides in verse 15, notice secondly, the counsel Jesus gives in verses 16 to 22. The counsel Jesus gives to the Christians is this: When they see the Roman army approaching, who are coming for the purpose of defiling and destroying the temple, they must with great urgency flee out of Jerusalem and flee into the hills. They are not to worry about their possessions, they must only worry about preserving their own lives and getting away before they are surrounded and destroyed.

Verses 16 through 18: "let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains: <sup>17</sup> let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: <sup>18</sup> neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes." When they see the Roman armies coming in the plain, they're just to drop everything and run, because they come so rapidly, that if they fooled around trying to pack a suitcase or two, the city would be surrounded, and they wouldn't be able to escape. If they're working out in the field, they look up, see the Romans coming—drop your stuff and go. And if your jacket's 50 yards away, you just leave it there.

Then He says, not only are they not to worry about their possessions but only to be concerned with preserving their own lives, He says to them, Any impediment to their flight could be fatal. Notice verses 19 to 20: "And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!" You know, when you've got a child, a nursing child in your hand or a little child, you can't run very fast, and you needed to go!

And He says, verse 20: "Pray ye that your flight be not in the winter"—much harder to travel in the winter rapidly, or on the sabbath day—much harder to get provisions and things you need in

order to facilitate your escape as you go. If you're traveling on the sabbath day, modes of transportation aren't available, the whole country's shut down, you can't buy stuff at the store, there's no market. It would be hard. So any impediment to flight from the city could be fatal.

And then He says in verses 21 and 22 that the city and the temple will be leveled, and terrible cruelty and mayhem and slaughter will be carried out by the Romans. Notice verse 21: "for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. <sup>22</sup> And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." So there's going to be, when the Romans come and take over Jerusalem, terrible cruelty and mayhem and slaughter. And in fact, that's what happened. Josephus records this in graphic detail in his writings, and it's horrifying to read.

Jesus is very clear in verses 15 to 22. He is saying, Israel will not win this war. Jerusalem and the temple will not be delivered. And the Jewish people in Jerusalem will not survive. So that's the reference in Matthew 24, verses 15 to 22, to the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. We saw the sign Jesus provides in verse 15 and the counsel Jesus gives in verses 16 to 22.

In the second place, having seen the reference in Matthew 24:15 to 22 to the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D., now notice secondly the reference in Matthew 24:15 to 22 to the great tribulation that will occur in the end times.

Now then, while Jesus had a concern and a care to warn His disciples about the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the temple so that they would not be slaughtered along with the unbelieving Jews, this was not His primary emphasis or concern in His prophecies about the destruction of the temple. Jesus knew that some of these people He was talking to were going to be alive in 70 A.D. He didn't want them to get caught. He didn't want them to get slaughtered. So He tells them, Here's the sign, and here's when it's time to go. But that wasn't His major concern, and that wasn't His primary emphasis.

Jesus saw the destruction of the temple and the abomination of desolation that stood in the holy place in 70 A.D. as a foreshadowing of the ultimate and final fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy in the appearance of the Antichrist in the New Covenant temple, which is the church, and in the wicked destruction he would bring upon the people of God in the end times.

Now why do I say that? For two reasons. I'll give them to you by way of summary, and then we'll develop them both. The reason why I say that Jesus saw the destruction of the temple and the abomination of desolation in 70 A.D. as foreshadowing the ultimate and final fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy in the end times is, number one, because of the language that is used in verses 21 and 22. And number two, because immediately after the great tribulation described in verses 21 and 22, Jesus comes back—verses 29 to 31. Now let's look at those two reasons in more detail.



First of all, notice the language in verses 21 to 22. “<sup>21</sup> for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. <sup>22</sup> And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened.”

Now verse 21 says “there shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time.” Verse 21 cannot possibly be describing what happened in Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Now granted, what happened in 70 A.D. was bad, but it was no different and it was no worse than what happened when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and Solomon’s Temple and took Israel captive in 586 B.C. What happened in 70 A.D. was just a repeat of something that had already happened before.

You remember that Solomon built the temple, right? And Israel was wicked, and the kingdom divided, and ultimately Nebuchadnezzar comes and he surrounds Jerusalem, destroys the city, and defiles and destroys the temple. And this was before Daniel, so Daniel didn’t prophesy about that; that’s not one of Daniel’s abominations and desolations. Daniel was written after that. So, Nebuchadnezzar slaughters the Jews and drags them off to captivity. And that’s what the Romans did. They came, they surrounded Jerusalem, they destroyed the city, they destroyed the temple, and they scattered the Jews to the nations—same thing. So what happened in 70 A.D. was no different and no worse than what happened when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and Solomon’s Temple and took Israel captive in 586 B.C.

But this tribulation that is described in verse 21, this tribulation that is to come, Jesus says is entirely unique. This tribulation has no parallel in any previous historical event, from the day of creation until the time of the end. This tribulation spoken of in verse 21 will be a singular event that is far beyond anything that has ever occurred, and that is entirely unique. This will be a tribulation like the world has never seen before. And the tribulation that occurred in 70 A.D. had been seen before, almost identically, in 586 B.C.

My point is this, people, the tribulation of 70 A.D. is simply not severe enough to fulfill the language contained in verse 21. This tribulation described in verse 21 is so great that it will completely overshadow and eclipse any previous tribulation, by far. And then there’s verse 22. Look at verse 22. “And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened.” Now here in verse 22, what is in view is the total eradication of all of the saved, that is, all of God’s elect, by means of a violent death.

Now it says, “except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened.” Now the elect are always saved, right? So the salvation—when it says, “no flesh shall be saved,” in verse 22—the salvation there is clearly referring to physical salvation; that is, salvation from this great persecution and this putting to death that’s going on, of which the Romans were a foreshadow. What did the Romans do? Did they kill anybody spiritually? No, they killed people physically, didn’t they?

So the salvation that is being spoken of in verse 22 is the salvation from physical slaughter, and what God is saying is, for the sake of the elect—so they won't all be physically slaughtered—I'm going to shorten the tenure of this persecuting Antichrist.

So here in verse 22, the total eradication of all of the saved, that is, all of God's elect by means of a violent death, is in view. This was something the fall of Jerusalem and the temple could never begin to threaten, since that was merely a local event, and by this time, the elect were scattered. The saved were all over the world. I mean, Paul had been on his missionary journeys and spread the gospel across the Roman Empire. And since the believers were not even going to be in the temple anyway, having fled to the hills, then clearly verse 22 could not be referring to the events of 70 A.D.

The events of 70 A.D. couldn't wipe out, physically, all of the saved people in all of the world, or even in Jerusalem for that matter, because it's a local event and the Christians aren't even there. They've fled. But a unified, transnational, worldwide persecution of believers by all nations could fulfill verse 22 and could eradicate all of the elect by a violent death, if that unified, transnational, worldwide persecution of believers was allowed to go on long enough.

But it won't be allowed to go on long enough. Though the political powers of the earth surround the believers on every side to destroy them, as Revelation 20 and verse 9 says, Jesus will return in time to prevent such an eradication. It says that they will surround the camp of the saints, just like the Romans surrounded Jerusalem, but before they can actually crush the believers, Jesus comes back and destroys them with the brightness of His coming.

So this is the first reason why I say that the section in verses 15 to 22 can't just refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., it has to refer to the great tribulation that occurs just before the end times, because the language in verse 21 and 22 cannot possibly be describing and be exhausted by what happened in 70 A.D. What happened in 70 A.D. was no greater tribulation than what happened before, and what happened in 70 A.D. couldn't possibly physically wipe the elect off the face of the earth through a violent death. Right?

But there is a second reason why what is said in verses 15 to 22 is not just fulfilled in 70 A.D., but is a reference to what's going to happen in the end times, and that is not only because of the language in verses 21 and 22, but also because immediately after the great tribulation described in verses 21 and 22, Jesus comes back.

Now I want you to notice verse 29. We're going to expound this next time, God willing, but notice verse 29. It says, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days"—what days?—the days of verse 21, "for then shall be great tribulation." Verse 29: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days." Now in-between, in verses 23 to 28, there's some discussion about false Christs, and people saying, Oh, He's over here, and He's over there, and He's somewhere else. And Jesus said, Ignore all that talk. When I show up, there won't be any question about

where I am. Okay? That's what's being discussed in verses 23 to 28. So it's kind of not really relevant to the flow of thought and the sequence of events.

Verse 21 says, "for then shall be great tribulation," and verse 22, "those days shall be shortened." Verse 29, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken." This is speaking of the melting of the universe that happens in Second Peter chapter 3—the heavens being on fire with a fervent heat, the elements melting, okay—Jesus making the new heavens and the new earth, because He destroys the first heavens and the earth.

Verse 30: "and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn,"—uh-oh, we were on the wrong side—"and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." So the people on the earth, the unsaved people, see Him coming with their eyes. They see the disintegration and melting of the universe.

Verse 31: "And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet,"—that's the trumpet at the rapture—"and they shall gather together his elect"—they'll be caught up to be with Jesus—"from one end of heaven to the other." And then of course, Jesus will come back and there'll be the great white throne and judgment, which is described in Matthew 25.

So we have in verses 21 and 22 a description of the great tribulation of the end times, far greater than what happened in 70 A.D. And then notice in verse 29, immediately after this great tribulation described in verses 21 and 22, Jesus returns, showing that the events of verse 15 to 22 cannot only be referring to the fall of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 A.D., because clearly, Jesus did not return then. He hasn't returned *yet*.

So if the events of verses 15 to 22 are immediately followed by the return of Jesus Christ, and they are, then the events of verse 15 to 22 must be referring to things that occur in the end times, after the loosing of Satan, and not just to the events of 70 A.D., though they do refer to them as well.

Now comes the time to expound verses 15 to 22. I want you to consider how the events of verses 15 to 22 not only refer the fall of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 A.D., which we've already explained, but now I want you to consider how the events of verses 15 to 22 refer to the time of great tribulation spoken of in verses 9 to 14 of this chapter, after Satan is loosed for his little season.

Now notice the same subheadings, First, The sign Jesus provides. The sign Jesus provides, verse 15. "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place." Now what is this referring to, with reference to the end times? We saw what it was referring to with reference to 70 A.D.—it was talking about the Romans showing up, right? This is now talking about the Antichrist showing up.

Now verse 15 is referring to what is described in Second Thessalonians 2, verses 3 to 4. So keep your hand here and turn to Second Thessalonians chapter 2. Paul says in verse 2, the day of Christ is not at hand; the second coming is not at hand, it's not imminent. And he tells us why, verse 3. He says, "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come," that is, the second coming will not happen, "except," on until, "there come a falling away first"—that's the great apostasy of the professing church—"and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;" that's Antichrist.

Now notice what he does: "4 who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth" where? "in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God." He is the abomination of desolation in the temple at the end times. Now what temple is this? What New Covenant temple do we have? Answer: the church. The church collectively is the temple of God, as we are told in 1 Cor 3:16-17; Eph 2:20-22, and 1 Pet 2:5

And so this man of sin, this Antichrist, enters into the church and is an abomination of desolation *in* that church, in that he is set up as the god of the Christian church, defiling that church, declaring himself to be the head of the church. Who fits that description better than the Pope of Rome? And this is why our Confession calls the Pope the Antichrist.

Now First John 3:18 says there have been many Antichrists, but there is going to be *the* Antichrist, and he is going to be someone who claims to be a Christian, who claims to stand at the head of the church, and who is in fact an abomination of desolation, because he is saying, I am God on earth. Worship me. And you already see that in incipient form in Roman Catholicism, and it's going to take place in universal form in the last day.

So the Antichrist isn't going to be a Muslim sitting in a mosque somewhere. The Antichrist is going to be someone who is enthroned as the head of the worldwide Christian church. And the false Christians are going to fall away and go after him—they're going to be caught up in the deception because they love their iniquity, and he will justify them in it; and the true believers will not. And then that whole church will turn on them at the direction of Antichrist and begin to hate them and persecute them and kill them. And he will rally all the nations of the world around himself, and he will unify them in the hatred and the persecution of the true Christians.

So the sign Jesus provides in verse 15 is that of the Antichrist stepping into the New Covenant temple, declaring himself to be God, demanding to be worshipped, and then destroying the true believers. And what's restraining that from happening now? Satan's still bound. But when he's loosed, it'll happen. So when you see the great apostasy, and when you see the Pope standing as the head of the church, you know then that the end is near. You know then the day of Christ is at hand. Until then, it's going to be more of verses 4 to 8. So that's the sign Jesus provides.

Notice secondly the counsel Jesus gives. The counsel Jesus gives is in verses 16 to 20: "16 then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains: 17 let him which is on the housetop not come

down to take any thing out of his house: <sup>18</sup> neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. <sup>19</sup> And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! <sup>20</sup> But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day.”

When Antichrist is enthroned in the church, the New Covenant temple, and he begins to launch his transnational, worldwide persecution of the believers, the Christians are going to have to flee with great urgency to wherever they can to avoid the persecution of the Antichrist and his united nations, which he will unleash on the Christians. And this persecution, of course, is that which is spoken of in verses 9 and 10 of this chapter: “<sup>9</sup> Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake. <sup>10</sup> And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.”

When that happens, we’ve got to run. I mean, you know the address you are living at now. When that happens, you’ve got to go. And when you do, you’re going to lose your possessions. You’re going to have to leave them behind. And in the process, many will lose their lives, and great difficulties and impediments will hinder the flight from the persecutors. You think it’s tough to flee when you have a little child or a nursing baby, or there’s snow on the ground, or it’s the sabbath day—think of how hard it will be to flee when they have electronic surveillance and infrared tracking. It’s going to be very hard to flee.

Verse 21: “for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.” The Christians will be persecuted in a way at that time that they have never experienced since the foundation of the world. Now have Christians been killed or Christians martyred? Yes, but they will be martyred to a degree and persecuted to a degree that they have never known when Antichrist arises and begins to direct the united nations against the believers. Verse 22: “And except those days should be shortened,” there would be no one that would not be slaughtered. “There should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened,” so that they can’t fully carry out their intent to its end, and totally eradicate every single believer from the earth.

Now turn in your Bibles to Revelation 20. It says in verse 7: “And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, <sup>8</sup> and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.” And who are they going to fight? Verse 9: “And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and [surrounded] the camp of the saints.” They’re not going to be fighting each other. They’re all going to be united. They’re going to be fighting us. They’re going to surround us. Wherever we are, we’re going to be surrounded. All across the face of the globe we’re going to be surrounded. Maybe we’ll flee into little groups, and they’ll all surround us.

But, oh, notice: “and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. <sup>10</sup> And the devil that deceived them,” that is, all those nations that united against the Christians, “was cast

into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. <sup>11</sup> And I saw a great white throne.”

God will mercifully bring this great tribulation—the degree to which the world has never seen—God will mercifully bring it to an end before the church is wiped off the face of the earth. And how will He bring it to an end? Verse 29, Jesus will return. Matthew 24:30 “and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth,” what? Mourn. They will go from triumphalism—“We’re finally going to wipe out these Christians”—to mourning—“Uh-oh. Jesus really is real, and we are in a world of trouble.” Revelation 6:12-17

Now all of this is portrayed in Revelation chapter 11, and in light of it, you might just read it sometime, and you’ll see the two witnesses represent the church. They’ll virtually be defeated, but they rise from the grave, and then Jesus comes back. And the idea is that the gospel witness is going to go out to all nations, and it will seem like—it will *seem like*—the Antichrist and his united nations have triumphed. But then they will have their “uh-oh” moment when it turns out they haven’t, and Christ comes back and the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever. That’s the conclusion of Revelation chapter 11.

Well, that’s our passage. Hope it makes sense to you. I think that’s exactly what it means. Let’s pray together.

Father, we thank you so much for this passage. Thank you for helping us to figure out what it means and what it teaches. And Lord, I pray that you might help us to recognize that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. We who are living in the period of verses 4 to 8 are not exempt. We have sorrows. But, O Father, there’s going to come a day of great sorrow, and only those who truly love Jesus will not be offended and start betraying Christ and His people. Only those who love holiness will not have their love grow cold towards Christ and His people because of indulgence and sin.

Father, help us to just keep preaching the gospel, no matter the level of persecution. Thank you that we have signs that tell us when the end is near. And until we see those signs, then we don’t need to worry about that great tribulation breaking out upon us. But when it does, and if it does while we are alive, Father, may we endure to the end—either the end of our lives or to the coming of Christ, whichever comes first—and thus demonstrate ourselves to be the saved, the elect of God. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.