

The Signs of Christ's Coming, Part 3

Scripture: Matthew 24:6-14

Code: 2368

Tonight, as I promised you this morning, we're going back to Matthew chapter 24. And I'm so very excited and anxious about our message tonight and thrilled that you're all here, ready to get back into this great chapter. I think if I preached all the time this way, Sunday morning and Sunday night on the same subject, it would shorten up my reviews a little bit because we wouldn't have to bridge such a long gap in time. But we're looking at Matthew chapter 24, the great Olivet Discourse, the sermon of our Lord given to teach about His own second coming. It is a tremendous chapter.

The disciples have asked Him the questions in verse 3 that trigger this great sermon. Their questions are: Tell us, when shall these things be? What things? The destruction of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, the coming of the Messiah in His kingdom. When shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of Thy coming? And of the end of the age?

They want to know when it is that the Messiah will establish His kingdom, judge His enemies, purge Jerusalem, gather the scattered Jews, and establish His kingdom. And they have the feeling that it's very, very near, that it could happen at any moment, as we have learned in our studies already in this chapter. They have the sense that it's right around the corner, maybe only days away or at best maybe weeks away, surely no longer than that. Because Jesus had said that there was going to be desolation on Jerusalem and Israel, a time of purging. That there was going to be a throwing down of the temple. And they must have thought that meant the rebuilding of the great millennial temple would begin. And that He was coming in the name of the Lord, and surely that was very near, and surely He was the Messiah. And He had been heralded by John the Baptist. And He would have to judge the nations, the godless nations that had rejected Him and His people. It all looked like it was going to come together at this moment.

But in answer to their question, in verses 4 through the end of chapter 25, Jesus gives the longest answer to any question asked in the New Testament. He tells them that His coming is in the future. He doesn't tell them how far in the future. None of us knows that. We know better than they did because we've lived the two thousand years since, but we don't know how far yet in the future. But beginning in verse 4, Jesus says, "There are some things that are going to happen before My coming. When these things begin to happen, get ready." In fact, in verse 8, He calls them the beginning of birth pains. The birth being the coming of the Messiah into His kingdom. And there are going to be some birth pains right at the end, just before the Messiah comes in His kingdom. And so He's telling them it isn't now. There are yet some birth pains to come in the future. He doesn't tell them how far

into the future, but He does describe the character of these birth pains in the future that will bring in His glorious kingdom.

Now, remember what I told you this morning, that is that all that He says, is future. If these are the birth pains to the end, the birth pains to the establishment of the kingdom, then they have to come at the very end, even as birth pains in a woman come at the very end of her pregnancy, just prior to the giving forth of that new life. And so the Lord is describing what will happen in the very end. He sweeps us to a time called, in verse 21, the Great Tribulation. A time in the future, yet ahead of us. And all of the details that we'll look at tonight point to that time.

Now, just one other note to get us up to speed. Remember that when the disciples looked at the Old Testament prophets, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, when they looked at Zechariah and even other of the minor prophets and they saw that the Messiah was coming, the prophets never separated out a first and second coming. They just talked about the Messiah coming and doing all that He would do. And so it seemed to them that the first time the Messiah came would be the only time He would come, and He would do it all then. What they didn't see was that there would be a first coming, a long period of time, and then a second coming. We know that's true. No one denies that because we're in that long period right now. And that period was hidden from the Old Testament prophets. Paul calls it a mystery hidden from ages past but now revealed to us. And so we're in that time period, waiting for the future coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. And before He comes, He says, there will be these birth pains that will issue in the establishment of His kingdom. And there are six of them, beginning in verse 4.

Number one was deception, and we looked at that this morning – deception. “And Jesus answered and said unto them, ‘Take heed’” – or literally keep your eyes open, beware – “that no man deceive you for many shall come in My name saying ‘I am Christ’ and shall deceive” – or lead astray – “many.” And we pointed out that there will always be false Christs. There will always be people claiming to be Jesus Christ. We have them today in our world saying they are Christ, they are the anointed, and they are the savior of the world. They'll always be around. But He's not referring to those that are here now or those that were there in the time of the New Testament. He's referring to those in the future, when there will be an abundance of false Messiahs showing up to try to deliver a world that is in absolute chaos.

Because if we read the other scriptures properly, they tell us that the time of the Tribulation, the time of the birth pains, will be a time when all the systems of man begin to disintegrate, a time when the Lord removes the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit, which holds back sin from reaching its maximum potential. All that will be removed and sin will run wild. And so it is at that time, as the system begins to be destroyed by its own sinfulness, that there will arise a whole lot of false deliverers and false Messiahs trying to get people to follow them. The epitome of that group will be one called whom? Antichrist. And he will be the ultimate false Messiah, the ultimate false savior, that the world will ever see. And there may even be others competing for his power until he finally secures

power worldwide.

So the Lord Jesus says, "Before I come in My kingdom, there will be deceivers who come and say 'I am Christ' and they will lead many astray." And we read in our last message from Daniel chapter 8 and from Daniel chapter 11 and from Revelation chapter 13 and Revelation chapter 19 and 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, and all of those passages tell us about this final deceiving antichrist. And we also noted here that the period of the birth pains, called here the Great Tribulation, that period has at its beginning the coming of these deceivers. And that is consistent with what we learn in the book of Revelation. So the first mark, the first of the birth pains that begins to unfold in the time of the Tribulation is a time of great deception, particularly epitomized in the deception of antichrist who leads the whole world to follow him and worship him as if he were God, the ultimate deliverer of man.

Now, let's go on to the second of the signs. They wanted signs. He says, "Here are the signs that are the beginning of the birth pains" – not the end, but just the beginning. And we showed you that like a woman has a child and the birth pains have a certain distance or a certain space between them as they begin, they get closer and closer and closer and closer together until they are coming rather rapidly just before the child is born, so it is in the time of the Great Tribulation. The beginning of sorrows have a certain distance between them and then they get closer and closer until they're coming almost concurrently in a holocaust of exploding trauma that occurs at the very end, when the kingdom comes.

But as it begins to unfold, first come the deceivers who are offering themselves to solve all the world's problems. And our world will be ready for that, believe me. They're ready for it now. This might not be very far off. Our world is ready for some who can come along and solve all the problems. But the second is not deception but dissension – dissension. Verse 6: "And you shall hear of wars and rumors of wars, see that you be not troubled, for all these things must come to pass but the end is not yet." In other words, this is just the beginning of the birth pains. "For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom." We'll stop there.

So we find out in verse 6 that that time period is going to be characterized by wars and rumors of wars. If you're not involved in one immediately, or even if you are, you'll hear about other wars. And where wars don't even exist, there will be rumors that they do – hot war, cold war, every conceivable kind of war – global warfare, nation against nation, kingdom against kingdom. And there's no distinct difference between those two unless we would say that a nation is a group of people without a king and a kingdom is a group of people with a king, and that's the only distinguishing element in those two. The point is that nations and kingdoms globally wide will be engaged in wars and rumors of wars.

Now, you say, "Well, we've always had this." You're right. We have always had it. Oh, we've had time periods of brief peace in the world, and most nations themselves have had times of war and times of

peace. And we're not denying that that will be true throughout all of man's day. There will be times of war and there will be nations fighting nations and kingdoms fighting kingdoms. But still, what our Lord is saying here is that in the end, the beginning of sorrows that bring the kingdom, there will be worldwide warfare on a scale unknown prior to that time. In massive proportions, there will be an intensification of war across the earth. And the wars will be national, nation against nation, kingdom against kingdom. There will be great groups of people, cultures against cultures.

In fact, there's another note that you perhaps should have from the Greek text. In verse 6 it says, "You shall hear," and that is a future, what we call a future durative which doesn't mean anything to most of us, but the idea of it is it carries the idea of continual hearing. You will continually hear of wars, continually hear of rumors of wars, and continually hear of nations and kingdoms fighting each other. In other words, it's a constant kind of ringing message, ringing reality, at that particular time in history.

Now, we can verify this easily. If we go to the book of Daniel, for example, let's look at Daniel chapter 11. And Daniel sweeps us into the future time period. Daniel takes us all the way to the time when the Messiah is coming to set up His kingdom. And just prior to that, Daniel describes the warfare, at least in some perspectives. Daniel 11 verse 40: "At the time of the end," this is the time of the end of the age. Daniel is taking us right to the end where our Lord is taking us. "At the time of the end shall the king of the south push at him." "Him" is antichrist. And if you study Daniel's prophecy, you will find that in the end, the antichrist rules a great kingdom basically made up of the territory that once belonged to the old Roman Empire. In other words, in a sense, it is going to be a unified Europe. He will be the king of a western confederacy. He will be the king of a revived Roman Empire engulfing Europe. And Daniel makes that abundantly clear throughout his prophecy.

And so the antichrist has established himself as a great power. Not only that, not only has he established himself as a great power in Europe, but he's a threat to the whole world. And naturally he has sights on the Middle East. And, of course, Israel, always threatened by its Middle Eastern neighbors, wants protection and so enters into league with him, chapter 9 of Daniel, verse 27, entering into a covenant with antichrist for protection by this great western empire of which he is the head. And at the time of the end, with antichrist ruling this great confederacy, dominating that part of the world and, of course, western culture being so advanced technologically and so forth, having a great, great force of power over the rest of the world, the king of the south moves aggressively against the antichrist. This is some kind of African army, some kind of African coalition and confederacy that pushes north toward the power of the antichrist.

And then it says the king of the north, no doubt Russia with all of its allies in the Middle East pushing as well, with chariots and horsemen and many ships entering into the country, shall overflow and pass through. It's kind of interesting that what happens is here comes the antichrist, here comes the king of the south, here comes the king of the north, and the place they all converge is in the holy land.

And they come into the land of Israel. It's called, in verse 41, the glorious land. "And many countries shall be overthrown, but these shall escape out of his hand," that is the hand of antichrist, "even Edom and Moab and the chief of the children of Ammon. And he shall stretch forth his hand and also upon the countries and the land of Egypt shall not escape, but he shall have power over the treasures of gold and of silver and over all the precious things of Egypt and the Libyans and the Ethiopians shall be at his steps."

And so here he is and he defeats all of these great powers. I believe he even defeats the Russian power for the moment as well as the king of the south. He wins a great and glorious victory. And then verse 44 says: "Immediately tidings out of the east and again out of the north shall trouble him." And so now he hears that the east is coming against him. "And he goes forth with great fury to destroy and utterly to sweep away many." And here the antichrist has this tremendous victory, and he plants the tabernacle of his palace between the seas and the glorious holy mountain. What he does is puts up his palace right in the middle of Jerusalem on Mount Zion. He establishes himself as God. Yet it says he shall come to his end and none shall help him.

But the point that I want you to see is that Daniel looks to the end, and talk about a world war – he sees a world war that's mind-boggling, where you have the whole force of Western power in Europe and perhaps even some way the United States could be linked into that, though there is nothing in Scripture to say that. You have the great force of the Russian confederacy, you have the great amalgamation of all that is in Africa, which today is agitated to the point of boiling over. And then you have the Orient, Red China and all of that, and all converging in Israel for a holocaust of war at the end time. And so, says Daniel, we anticipate this kind of battle.

Look at Zechariah chapter 14, and the prophet Zechariah sees the same thing. As Zechariah looks to the end time, in verse 1 he says, "Behold, the day of the Lord cometh and thy spoils shall be divided in the midst of thee" – listen to this – "for I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle." The whole world is going to converge on Jerusalem in a final, incredible battle. "The city is taken, the houses are rifled, and the women are ravished. Half the city goes forth into captivity, the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. And then shall the Lord go forth and fight against those nations as when he fought in the day of battle." And that's exactly the way Daniel ended his prophecy, that he will come to his end and he'll not be able to find anyone to help him then. So there's going to be a worldwide war, again converging on Jerusalem, and Zechariah points it out in the same, exact way. So this is a very consistent picture from the prophets as well as from our Lord Himself.

At the end of the prophet Haggai, verse 22 of chapter 2, "I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations, I will overthrow the chariots and those who ride in them and the horses and their riders shall come down, everyone by the sword of his brother. 'In that day,' saith the Lord of hosts, 'will I take thee, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel,' says the Lord, 'and make thee as a signet; for I have chosen thee,' says the Lord of hosts." It's as if

Zerubbabel is seen in his descendant – in that final time when God sends His own army to destroy the armies of the world and then sets up that one who comes out of the loins of David, out of the loins of Zerubbabel, to be the King, none other than Messiah.

So great dissension will come at the end. And we can see this now beginning to unfold as the world is simply a powder keg ready for someone to set off a match. And all of us live in this constant sort of threat of nuclear war and the constant strife and anxiety and fighting that goes on all across the globe, simply setting the stage for this final holocaust.

Now, to take you even to the end of the book of Revelation as it describes it, look at chapter 6 of Revelation. And Revelation gives us even more detail as we look at this, wars and rumors of wars and kingdom against kingdom and nation against nation and all of this great warfare that's going to come in the end. When you have the seals, you have seven seals unfolded. It's kind of an interesting thing. It's symbolic. A will, a will left to someone was sealed seven times in Roman law so it couldn't be violated without people realizing it. And this is a sealed will. It is God's willing the world to Christ. And as He opens one seal after another, He takes back the world. Each seal reveals what events take place as He retakes the world for Himself.

The second seal opens, verse 4: "There went out another horse that was red and power was given to him that sat on it to take peace from the earth." The false peace established by the antichrist is taken from the earth and they begin to kill one another. "And there was given unto him a great sword." So here you have the war, here you have the world beginning to kill itself in a massive slaughter.

"And when He had opened the third seal," verse 5, "I heard the third living creature" – or angel – "say, 'Come,' and I beheld – and lo a black horse and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand" and it goes on to describe the fact that he's balancing out grain and so forth and it is famine conditions. There's not enough food to go around and that's the result of war.

And then you come to the fourth seal in verse 7. Verse 8 describes it. "I looked and behold, a pale horse and his name that sat on him was Death and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword and with hunger and with death and with the beasts of the earth." And here is the massacre of one fourth of the population of the world. At these statistics today, one billion people are massacred in the slaughter that takes place worldwide.

Now go to chapter 9 of Revelation, and you will note further what happens in this war at the end. Verse 13: "The sixth angel sounded. I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, 'Loose the four angels who are bound in the great river Euphrates.' And the four angels were loosed who were prepared for an hour and a day and a month and a year to slay the third part of men." And here comes another host of demonic forces to massacre a third of the population that's left after the original fourth have been slaughtered.

“And the number of this army of horsemen is 200 million, and I heard the number of them.” And he describes them. “And they came and they had tremendous power to kill,” verse 18. “By these three was the third part of men killed and by fire and smoke and brimstone, their power was in their mouth, their tails, and their tails were like serpents and their heads,” and so forth. “And the rest of the men who were not killed by these plagues repented not of the works of their hands that they should not worship demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood which neither can see nor walk, neither repented they of their murders nor their sorceries nor their fornication nor their thefts.” Even after one fourth of the world is massacred in the holocaust of war, another third is massacred, some men still don’t repent.

Chapter 13 tells us another interesting thing about this war. The mighty power in this war, in part, is not only the demonic forces of hell and Satan himself but it is the antichrist, the beast. Verse 7: “It was given to him to make war with the saints and overcome them and power was given him over all kindreds and tongues and nations.” And he comes in verse 10 and he kills with the sword.

So here is the antichrist, just as we saw in the Old Testament in Daniel. He is the one who massacres the king of the south, the army of the north, defeats the army of the east. Sets up his power worldwide. You get the picture, I’m sure. Just incessant massacre in warfare at the end time. All of man’s hopes come smashing down to nothing as it all wraps up.

One other passage, 16:14 of Revelation. In verse 13, John sees these three unclean spirits, they’re demonic spirits out of hell, no doubt of great power, high ranking demons. They come out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, they are spirits of demons working miracles. They go forth to the kings of the earth and the whole world to gather them to the battle of the great day of God Almighty. Verse 16 says they are gathered to a place called Armageddon. And I believe the demon forces of the world gather all the armies of the world to converge on Jerusalem to destroy it and to keep the King of kings from coming back. And they all come there ready to fight and there’s a holocaust of war as they battle each other. And in the midst of that battle, Christ comes and destroys them all. So you can see that the Revelation, as well as the prophets of the Old Testament, support the words of our Lord that that will be a time of war and rumors of wars and nations rising against nation.

Now go back to Matthew 24. And in verse 6, again, it says you will hear of wars and rumors of wars, see that you be not troubled. Don’t raise an outcry. Don’t be alarmed. Do not immediately panic because that is not quite the split second for the coming of the King. That’s what he says. See that you do not become troubled – *throeomai*, means to raise an outcry, to become alarmed – because all these things must come to pass. It is all necessary for sin to have its final, furious fling, but the end is not yet. The end is not yet. It would seem as though it must be, but it is not yet. There’s still a few things yet to come. And they come in an ever-increasing speed.

So our Lord says, no, this is not the time for the kingdom. This is not the time for the final judgment. This is not the time for the destruction of the ungodly. This is not the time for the renovation of Jerusalem and the purging of the temple. That's in a future time, a time when there will be deception like the world has never known, a time when there will be dissension on a worldwide scale like the world has never known.

There's a third sign, a third beginning sign of the birth pains. And it is devastation – devastation. Deception, dissension, devastation. The middle of verse 7: “And there shall be famines and earthquakes in various places.” Most of the better manuscripts do not include the word “pestilence” here in Matthew's account. I'll comment further on that in a moment.

And so Matthew says that Jesus said there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. In addition to the false Christs, in addition to the worldwide massacres and the wars, there will be disasters of staggering proportions over all the whole earth as the cursed earth itself begins to disintegrate.

Famines and earthquake, *limoi* and *seismos*, the Greek word is *seismos*, from which we get seismograph, to measure earthquakes. Mark says these are but the beginning of the birth pains, chapter 13 verse 8. And Luke, in Luke 21:11, adds the word “pestilences.” Then he adds “fearful sights and great signs from heaven.” Now, Matthew didn't include all of them, but if we put the composite together, we get famines, earthquakes, pestilences, fearful sights, and great signs from heaven. That's all going to mark that end time.

What are pestilences? *Loimoi* in the Greek, it means diseases, plagues. Fearful sights, from the root *phobos* from which we get phobia, fear. Horrible events, it means. Fearful sights mean terrorizing happenings. And signs from heaven, changes in the sky. So in that time when the whole world begins to disintegrate, there will be plagues and diseases as well as earthquakes and famines, horrible events that are indescribable and terrorizing, as well as changes in the sky itself. Now, again, the world has had its share of famines. The world has had its share of plagues, its share of horrible events, holocausts. There have even been times when there have been unusual signs in the heavens. But nothing – nothing to even come close to this.

And notice what it says at the end of verse 7: “in various places.” In other words, these things aren't going to happen here and there from time to time, but they're going to come in large doses in many places at the same time. So though we have had disasters, never to this extent and on this wide a scale in the history of the world. You see, the whole world begins to self-destruct when sin runs rampant.

See, the Lord has restrained sin. He is today. He is restraining sin for the preservation of His people, for the preservation of His earth. But when He takes that restraining back, when He removes the restraint – and I believe that is concurrent with the Rapture of the church – the church is taken out so that we're not even here when all these things happen. We go out beginning – at the beginning of the Tribulation. We're taken out. Then comes the Tribulation. When the church goes and all the redeemed are off the face of the earth, and as 2 Thessalonians says, "God takes back the restraint," then everything begins to disintegrate. And the created earth can't support the evil of the people in it when that evil is unrestrained. And everything in the universe begins to fly apart. The whole world begins to crumble. At that point, Revelation 9 says hell opens up and Satan lets loose demons that have been there through the centuries. And they multiply the demonic population. And God allows them to do signs and wonders to deceive the world and to capture the minds of the world as sin runs rampant.

Now, to take you to the end time and show you these things, I have you turn again to Revelation. And here, as John gets a vision of the end, he sees all the things we've just talked about. Earthquakes – look at Revelation 6, verse 12, "And I beheld – and here's the sixth seal as the beginning of sorrows unfolds and I beheld when He had opened the sixth seal and lo, there was a great earthquake." A great earthquake.

Chapter 16 verse 18 – and here, as the seven angel pours out his bowl, now you're at the very end, now you're way at the very end of the Tribulation. There comes a voice out of heaven, and verse 18, thunder, lightning, and another great earthquake that literally fractures the great city into pieces. And verse 20, "Every island flees away, the mountains are flattened, great hail pours out of heaven, and men blaspheme God." Now, that's the earthquake at the very end. But there's another massive earthquake we just saw in the sixth chapter of Revelation as well. So that time will be characterized by fearful earthquakes.

In Revelation chapter 11 verse 13, it tells us – and here I think we're a little closer to the beginning of the birth pains. Verse 13: "The same hour there was a great earthquake and the tenth part of the city fell and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand and the remnant were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven." That happens in the city of Jerusalem. So Jesus said it'll be a time of earthquakes and, indeed, it will be a time of earthquakes.

Now, Jesus also said it will be a time of famine. Again, look at Revelation 6 verse 6 and here is the third seal that opens in the time of Tribulation. "And a measure of wheat for a denarius, and three measures of barley for a denarius, and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine." Don't touch the rich people's oil and the rich people's wine, eke out a living. A denarius is one day's wage. A measure of wheat is a pint and a half. You work a whole day, and all you can get with it is a pint and a half of grain. Famine conditions. Disastrous conditions. And that is the reason verse 8 says, in the middle of the verse: "Power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth to kill with sword and with

hunger.” The famine will result in a part of that fourth of the earth starving to death.

In chapter 8 of Revelation – and here you have the trumpets and now you’re moving a little closer to the end time. Hail and fire mixed with blood are thrown on the earth, third part of the trees are burnt up, all the green grass is burnt up. Now, that’s going to create famine, isn’t it? The growing things, a third of them all destroyed. Verse 9: After the sea becomes blood, a third part of the creatures in the sea die, a third part of the ships destroyed, the moving of food from one place to another can’t take place. Those who depend upon the sea for their food aren’t going to have it. A third – verse 10 – part of the rivers and the fountains of waters – the fresh water is gone, not going to be able to have fresh water to irrigate and so forth and so on. And people are going to die because of the waters. And then it says a third part – verse 12 – of the sun was smitten, a third part of the moon, a third part of the stars. In other words, the whole cycle of day and night is going to change, the seasons are going to change, crops aren’t going to grow, and there’s going to be worldwide chaos when God starts changing all things.

So famine and earthquake. What about pestilence or plagues? Look at chapter 16, and as you move toward the end, closer to the end of the birth pains, and you see the pouring out of the bowls, which I believe come in rather rapid-fire succession, verse 2 says: “When the bowls of wrath are poured out, there fell a foul and painful sore upon the men who had the mark of the beast and them who worshiped his image.” Some kind of terrible plague is going to come that brings a grievous sore on people, some kind of cancer. And then the second angel poured out his bowl in the sea and it became like the blood of a dead man. You remember back in the seals when it happened, it was only a third of the sea, now it’s all of the sea. Now, you’re at the end and it’s really coming fast. All of the sea. And then in verse 4, all the rivers and the fountains of waters became as blood. And then verse 8, the sun begins to burn people, scorch people with great heat. And then verse 10, “The earth is full of darkness, the sun goes out, and people begin to gnaw their tongues for pain.” All these terrible, unimaginable plagues.

Now, if that’s not enough, as I told you, Luke says horrible events, frightening events, are going to take place. And you can go back to chapter 6, as we’ve been looking at it – you don’t need to do that now, we’ve already looked at it. And you see the horrible things there as war and death and famine and massacre comes. As the sky begins to fall apart, as the earth begins to shake – horrible fearful events. You come to chapter 9, and as I told you a moment ago, the bottomless pit is opened and demons begin to ooze out of the bottomless pit, demonic beings, and men are going to be so tormented – in verse 5 – it says their torment’s going to be like the torment of a scorpion and men are going to seek death – verse 6 – and not find it, desire to die and death will flee from them. And the leader of these demons is – in verse 11 – his name in the Hebrew tongue is *Abaddon*, but in the Greek tongue has his name *Apollyon*, that means destroyer, Satan. Frightening when hell belches out all of its remaining demon sources.

And you go to verse 13 of that same ninth chapter and you have this horrible massacring army that comes. Go to chapter 12 for a moment. Verse 12, it says: "Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea for the devil is come down unto you." Not only is the pit going to belch out all its demons, but Satan is going to be thrown out of heaven and he's going to land on the earth and he's going to bring forth all of the evil that his mind can conceive. Another fearful sight is in chapter 14 verse 20, a horrible, unimaginable event as the bloodshed is so great that the blood comes out of the winepress up to the horse's bridles by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs. For two hundred miles, the horses' bridles will be dragging in blood. Two hundred miles, the northernmost to the very southernmost tip of Israel will be a blood bath. An incredible and inconceivable event.

And then you're into chapter 16 verse 3 where, as we just saw, the sea turns to blood and the fresh water turns to blood. Sun burns people, darkness comes. They gnaw their tongues for pain. You can't even imagine the pain of being in absolute darkness and injuring yourself and running into things and being in fear. And then in verse 13 of 16, here come three more evil spirits out of hell who work wonders and gather the world to Armageddon. It's just inconceivable things, staggering.

Then in verse 18, the thunders, lightnings, earthquakes, and all that. The whole earth begins to fall apart. Go to chapter 18, starting in verse 8, and you see that man's system here is described. And it disintegrates right then and there. Verse 8 says: "Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death and mourning and famine, she shall be utterly burned with fire for strong is the Lord God who judges her." And the "her" here is the worldwide economic system called Babylon. And the rest of that chapter describes her devastation.

And the other thing that Luke said, finally, there will be earthquakes, famines, plagues, horrible events, and finally signs from heaven. And we've already noted some of them. The whole of the heavens begin to fall apart. Back to chapter 6, verse 12, an earthquake, the sun becomes as black as sackcloth, and that, of course, was prophesied by Joel in Joel chapter 2, repeated by Peter in his sermon in Acts 2. And the earthquake followed by the sun becoming black, the moon becomes like blood, the stars of heaven fell unto the earth. Can you imagine that? Like a fig tree casts her untimely figs when she's shaken by a mighty wind. You have little figs that just come out on a fig tree and a great eastern wind comes by, shakes that tree and blows all of its figs and they all come tumbling to the ground. So it will be when God shakes the heaven and all the stars fall. And the heaven itself will depart like a scroll. You take a scroll, you pull it apart, let go of it, and it just rolls up. The whole of heaven just rolls up like a scroll. And every mountain and island is moved out of its place. Staggering.

Chapter 8, and we're back to verse 12 again. A third part of the sun is smitten, a third part of the moon, and a third part of the stars, a third part of them darkened and the day shone not for a third part of it and the night likewise. The whole of the calendar's off, all the weeks are off, all the seasons are off. The tides are off. Everything – everything – as this judgment is poured out. Signs from

heaven. And then, of course, when the final bowls are poured out, as we saw, and every island flees away and the mountains aren't found, and hail comes out of heaven weighing about a hundred pounds each, plague that's inconceivable.

And the Lord says, "All these are just the beginning of the end." Just the beginning. And I've given you a glimpse of the things at the beginning and I've taken you, also to the bowls which is the final culmination. But there's a beginning of these things, earthquakes, plagues, signs from heaven, horrible events, famine, and they escalate to an unbelievable proportion toward the end. Now, these are the birth pains. Notice what it says there in verse 8: All these are the birth pains – the beginning of birth pains, I should say. All these are the beginning of birth pains. Now, that would have been understood. You say, "Would the Jews understand that?" Yes they would.

Let me stop for our travels through Scripture to just speak for a moment. The Jews had been taught that before the Messiah came, there would be birth pains – very familiar Jewish concept. Edersheim, the great Jewish scholar says, and I quote, "Jewish writings speak very frequently of the labor pains of Messiah." So when He said, "This is the birth pains," they would have known what He was talking about. Familiar terminology. And all of these things tell us that the coming of Christ is near. And they will all come at the end time in such a way that it is far beyond us to even conceive.

So our Lord says the end time will be marked by deception, by dissension, and by devastation. Let me give you a fourth: desecration. Desecration. And here we turn away from the world to the believers. We turn away from the world to the believers. Now, watch this, verse 9: "Then they shall deliver you up to be afflicted and shall kill you and you shall be hated of all nations for My name's sake." There will be a desecration. What do I mean by that? To desecrate means to treat a holy thing in an unholy way. And that's exactly what it says here. The holy people of God will be treated in an unholy way. There will be an outright and widespread persecution of the redeemed that exceeds all other persecutions. There is no other persecution to even compare with this.

So He says you who are believers in that day, you will be delivered up. That is a technical word often used for arrest – often used for arrest. In fact, Matthew, I believe, uses it that way on several occasions. In fact, in Matthew 4:12, when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, it there uses *paradidmi*. It's a word that means to be arrested. So He says in that time, the true believers are going to be arrested – arrested. And they're going to be afflicted and they're going to be murdered. And they're going to be hated by all nations "for My name's sake." In other words, because they identify with the Lord Jesus Christ, they will pay with the hatred and animosity of the world.

In Mark 13:9, the comparative passage, it says, "Take to your – heed to yourselves for they will deliver you up to councils and in the synagogues you will be beaten." The Jews will be in on this. The Jews initially, in the beginning of the end, will be in on the persecution of the believing people.

You say, “Well, where do the believers come from if the church has been raptured?” When the church has been raptured, God sets loose in the world two witnesses listed in Revelation 11 and they go everywhere proclaiming the truth. They are murdered by the world but they rise from the dead. And that will be a very convincing miracle because it says every eye in the world is going to see them. It will probably happen on national television, international television, satellite television. And they’ll rise from the dead. And they’ll have an impact in winning some people to Christ. And there will be people who come to the Savior during that period. And they will be the objects of persecution, not only by the world but by the Jews as well because they will deliver you not only to be killed but in the synagogues to be beaten. And by the way, the land of Israel today is literally filled with synagogues. They’re everywhere. So that’s not a remote possibility at all. At all.

And the rebels at that time who refuse to believe in the Messiah – and there will be rebels, by the way, among the Israelites, according to Ezekiel 20:38. There will be rebels who must be purged out. There will be Gentiles coming to Christ, there will be Jews coming to Christ. There will be rebel Jews and rebel Gentiles, of course, who will persecute the true believers. It will be a time of severe persecution and martyrdom.

I think of that, as I remember standing on the balcony in a hotel in Tiberius and looking down at a synagogue having their meeting on Shabbat. And someday, in that synagogue where all those Jews are meeting now, if they would be alive at this particular time in history, there would be a fracture that would be terrorizing in that synagogue. Some of them would have believed in Messiah, or will believe in Messiah, some will not and the ones who will not will be beating the others in that very place and perhaps even taking their lives. So there will be a time of severe persecution and martyrdom for true believers.

Desecration, treating holy objects shamefully. They will kill you, notice verse 9. They will kill you. That is the word for murder. You will be hated not only by the Jews but you’ll be hated by the whole world and all the nations; therefore, there will be no refuge, no place to hide, no place to escape. And why do they hate you? “Because of My name.” That’s the issue. They hate Christ. The world hates Christ. They always have and they’ll hate Him then – especially when they’re under the control of whom? Of antichrist who sets himself up against Christ. Always believers have been hated, always believers have been killed, but then it will be beyond anything ever experienced. Worldwide desecration of the saints. They will be martyred and massacred from one end of the globe to the other in that period of time.

In fact, the Bible gives us so much detail on this. Look at Revelation chapter 6, and here we look again to the future of the beginning of the birth pains. Verse 9” “He opens up the fifth seal, and I saw under the altar” – that’s the place of atonement, these are redeemed souls seen in his imagery under the altar, the symbol of atonement, they are saved, they’re under the blood, as it were. “He sees there

the souls of them that were slain for the Word of God and for the testimony which they held.” There they have been massacred right in the Tribulation and John in his vision sees them there. “And they’re crying with a loud voice, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?’ And white robes were given unto every one of them and it was said unto them that they should rest yet for a little season till their fellow servants also and their brethren that should be killed as they were should be fulfilled.” In other words, John sees some of the martyrs crying, “How long?” and the Lord, in a sense, says not until all the rest of those who are to be killed are killed.

In chapter 7, in verse 9, John has a vision and he sees a great multitude which no man could number of nations and kindreds and peoples and tongues and they’re standing before the throne and before the Lamb and they’re clothed with white robes and palms in their hands. And they’re crying out and saying, “Salvation to our God who sits upon the throne and the Lamb.” And he sees these people and who are they? Verse 14: He says, “These are they who came out of the Great Tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” How did they get out of that Tribulation? Very little doubt, they were martyred. They were killed for the sake of the Savior – sake of their commitment to Him.

You have chapter 11 where they murder the two witnesses. You have chapter 12 where it says the dragon, Satan, makes war with the remnant of the sea; that is, the believing people, probably referring to Jewish believers. And then in chapter 13, you have it again. Verse 7: Power is given unto him to kill and he makes war with the saints and overcomes the saints, does the antichrist. And so does the false prophet.

And you have it in chapter 17, the great harlot, the great prostitute, the false religious system of the Tribulation, is drunk with the blood of the saints, and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And in 16:6 it says they have shed the blood of saints and prophets. They have shed the blood of saints and prophets.

Now go back to Matthew 24 and listen carefully. There will be desecration of the redeemed, but listen to this: Because of that – and I want you to just listen very carefully for another five minutes or so and you’re going to see something I think is very, very tragic – the fifth sign is defection. Defection. You have deception, dissension, and devastation. And that’s worldwide and that happens to the whole unbelieving world. And then He turns to talk about the believing people, or the people who identify with God and Christ, and He says first, there will be desecration. There will be a treating of these people with great persecution. As a result of that, there will be the fifth sign, defection. Look at verse 10: “And then shall many be offended and shall betray one another and shall hate one another.” This is just so tragic.

The pressure is so great as the world begins to massacre believers that some people who have superficially identified with Jesus Christ, like the seed that fell in the thorny ground, it doesn't really have any root but it pops up and it looks good to start with, some people who initially identify with Jesus Christ, when they see the price to be paid, they are scandalized. They are offended. And they're not willing to pay that price. So they begin to turn in their offense, and they don't only reject Christ, they betray to the persecutors the true believers. See that? They start betraying the true believers, turning them in, giving their names and addresses, telling where they can be found – to be killed.

People say, "Are they real believers?" Of course not. If they were real believers, they would continue in the truth, right? If they were real believers, they would give their life, if need be. If they were real believers, they'd follow on in obedience. John says it in 1 John 2. "They went out from us because they were not of us, if they had been of us, they would have remained with us, but they went out from us that it may be made manifest they never were of us." 1 John 2:19. Jesus said it in John 8:31, "If you continue in My Word, then you're My real disciple." And our Lord Himself laid out the principle of discipleship in Matthew chapter 10. Listen to what He said – you know it, very clear: "The disciple is not above his teacher, nor the servant above his lord." Verse 24: "It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher and the servant like his lord. If they've called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?"

In other words, if they said Jesus was of Satan, they're going to say it of you. But it is enough for you to be like Him. The true disciple is willing to suffer like his Master suffered. So fear them not.

And then the Lord says, "Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess before My Father who's in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father who is in heaven." And He also said this: "He that taketh not his cross and followeth after Me is not worthy of Me." The person who says, "I don't want the cross, I don't want to die, I'm getting out," that person is not even worthy to be a disciple. That person is not even a belonging one to Christ. The person who belongs to Christ continues. The person who belongs to Christ is willing to pay the price because – not because he has some special character of his own but because if he's a true believer, the Holy Spirit grants him sustaining grace. That's the key.

You see, in Hebrews 3:12, it says: "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God." When somebody departs from the living God, they manifest an evil heart of unbelief. And Paul said to Timothy, "If any man denies Him, him will the Lord deny."

So these people attached themselves outwardly to Christianity, but when the heat got turned up, they got out. They were offended – stony ground, seduced away because they would not pay the price. Like the disciples who said, "Well, we'll follow you as soon as we go do this," and Jesus said, "Any man who puts his hand to the plow and turns back is not worthy of My kingdom."

They opt out for safety but they don't stop there. They betray each other. What a tragic thing. This is going to happen in that time. The wonderful redeemed and godly people are going to be betrayed by the people who are offended and aren't willing to pay the price. They're going to turn informer and turn them in so they can be killed – slaughtered.

Mark writes about it in chapter 13 verse 12: "Brother shall betray brother to death. And the father his son, and children shall rise up against their parents and shall cause them to be put to death." I mean, it will come right into the family – right into the family – as people under the pressure of having to give their life for Christ bow out and then turn in their own parents, their own relatives. Luke 21:16: "You'll be betrayed by parents, brothers, kinsfolk, and friends, and they will cause you to be put to death." That's defection.

And some of them will defect because the price is too high. But some of them will defect – look at verse 11: "Many false prophets shall arise and deceive many." Not false Christs now, but false teachers. Some of them will defect because they don't want to pay the price, and some of them will defect because they've been what? Deceived. So the defection will be a twofold defection at that point. Many false prophets will arise. And it says the same thing, doesn't it, over in verse 24: And these false prophets are going to teach Satanic, devilish, hellish error.

Now, listen very carefully to what I say. If Satan is running all over the world, and Satan is primarily disguised as an angel of light, that age is not only going to be filled with all kinds of overt evil, but it's going to be filled with all kinds of false religion. And all you have to do is read Revelation 17 to see that because in Revelation 17 you have this unbelievably evil, vile, wretched world religious system called the harlot, the great whore, the prostitute. It is a prostitution of religion. If the church is a bride, this is a harlot. And so there will be all kinds of religious deception flourishing as Satan does everything he can to call people away. So those people who outwardly attach to Christ, perhaps appear interested, are going to be torn away and deceived as cults and isms and all those kinds of lying groups have great effect on the world – great effect.

And by the way, in Revelation 9:21, it says the word "sorceries." It's the word *pharmakeia*, it means drugs. And perhaps drugs will be a part of that quote/unquote "religious deception." People will take the mark of the beast. They will worship the vile, wretched image of the beast. All of this a part of the deception.

Now, I want you to see something else. This is just staggering. Look at verse 12. "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many will grow cold." That's the third element of defection. Some defect because they won't pay the price and die. Some defect because they're deceived. And some defect because they choose iniquity. Iniquity is the word "lawlessness." It is the word that means they violate God's law. It's just sin gone mad. And the sin will be so abundant that it will draw people who

are moving toward the truth right back out of it. I mean we see that today. We see that today.

I heard today about a girl who came to our church, worked in our youth department. And wickedness came into her life and tore her away. And the wickedness then is so much more powerful than it is today that what will happen will be the abundance of vile, wretched, wickedness all over the world. It would be like one – take the most gross pornographic magazine you can conceive of and that will be what will be going on across the face of the earth in public. Okay? And that kind of gross evil is going to woo people away and that, it says, will cause the love of many to grow cold because iniquity abounds, widespread wickedness.

Paul wrote to Timothy and described that last day. He described that wickedness. “Men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy” – 2 Timothy 3 – “without natural family affection, truce breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God; and the love of many will grow cold because they love pleasure.” Global wretchedness, global lawlessness, vice gone rampant, men engulfed in it unrestrained. And it’s coming fast, isn’t it, folks? I mean, these things don’t seem as remote to us as they might to our society 20 years ago. And their affection, though it’s shallow, their affection for Christ grows cold. It grows cold. They’re wooed away by the love of evil, the wretched love of evil.

And then verse 13: “But he that shall endure to the end, same shall be saved.” How can you tell the saved? Because the saved don’t what? They don’t defect, do they? They don’t defect. They’re not going to go away because the price is too high. They’re not going to go away because they’re deceived. They’re not going to go away because they love evil. And so you just keep watching, and the ones that endure to the end, they’re what? They’re the saved. And they will be delivered out of that. Some will die and some will live, but they will all be delivered, whether in life or death, they will be delivered from the wrath to come. Endurance is always the mark of the mark of the saved – endurance is always the mark of the saved. They endure. They endure to the end.

In Matthew 10:22, Jesus said it: “And you shall be hated of all men for My name’s sake, but he that endures to the end shall be saved.” The man who, in that statement, Jesus was saying, who goes to the end of his life and endures whatever comes, gives demonstration that he is one who in the end will be saved. He’ll be delivered out of this life into the glories of heaven. And so it will be in the future, the one who endures all of that, the one who in the terms of Revelation 2:10 is an overcomer, he is an overcomer, and he is the one who will be saved – no matter what the persecution, no matter what the price. What a wonderful promise.

Luke 21:19 put it this way – marvelous statement: “In your endurance, you will gain your souls.” What a great statement. It is the one who endures by God’s power, God’s grace, who wins in the end. The faith that perseveres is the faith of the saved, the faith of the redeemed.

So in the end there will be terrible defection – terrible defection as people who identify with the church all of a sudden run. You know, if this were all to break loose on us right now, we'd find out who the defectors were, wouldn't we? We'd find out the people that didn't want to pay the price of death. We'd find out the people who could be wooed off by the false prophets. We'd see the ones who loved their lawlessness more than they loved God. I mean it would all become clear. And so will it then – so will it then. And only the enduring ones will be delivered. And we see them in Revelation 7, brought out of the Great Tribulation in garments of white. We see them in Revelation 19 as Christ comes back and they're riding with Him in garments of white. They endured. And they were given a robe of white.

The last point: declaration. The final sign of the coming, the final beginning birth pain, is declaration. And before the Lord comes, this has to happen. "The gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations and then shall the end come." Before the end comes, before the establishing of the kingdom, this has to happen: worldwide proclamation of the gospel.

In spite of persecution, in spite of defectors, in spite of false prophets, in spite of false Christs, in spite of hell belching out its demons all over the earth, in spite of all this terrible, horrible, inconceivable mess, in spite of people with diminished love, in spite of antichrist ruling and reigning, in spite of Satan trying to fight against Christ, in spite of wars and famines and earthquakes and all the rest and signs in heaven, in spite of all of that, the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations. And then it's going to come, the kingdom.

You say, "Man, how's that going to happen? How is that gospel going to be preached?" Look at Revelation 14. This is the last passage we'll look at. Revelation 14 verse 6: And here we are, just before the bowls are poured out, just before the final rapid-fire birth pains issue in the kingdom, right toward the end, just before the final holocaust begins to break loose, "I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven," says John. "And he had the everlasting gospel." Why? "To preach unto them that dwell on the earth and to every nation and kindred and tongue and" – what? – "and people." There is the fulfillment of Matthew 24:14.

That preaching of the gospel of the kingdom to the whole world isn't talking about what's going on now, folks, it's talking about what this angel's going to do in one great, supernatural, miraculous, final evangelization of the world. And it happens right before judgment. And that's why the angel says, "Fear God and give glory to Him." That's the message he's preaching. "For the hour of His judgment is come and worship Him that made heaven and earth and the sea and the fountains of waters." And another angel comes behind that angel and says, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen." In other words, man's day is over. You better get right with God. This is the great evangelistic effort carried on by glorious angels in the heavens flying all over the globe just before the final holocaust breaks loose. And the everlasting gospel is the same gospel God has always given, that He judges sin and rewards righteousness. And these angels will call the world to the Savior and then shall the end come – but

not before that, says our Lord.

So those are the birth pains. Those are the birth pains. But those are only the beginning of the birth pains. As we move through the chapter, we're going to see more and more detail.

Now, somebody's going to say this: "How do we know when the birth pains start? How do we know when they really begin?" And that's going to be our study of verse 15 through 28, and that's a few weeks off. Don't hold your breath. But you may read ahead. Let's bow in prayer.

Father, we've had a wonderful time tonight. We thank You for this great time. Thank You for the love of these people toward You and Your Word and allowing us to indulge a little more time tonight that we might cover this great truth. Thank You, Father, for our fellowship around Your Word.

And as we see this coming to pass, we hear Peter say, "Seeing that you know all these things, what manner of persons ought you to be in all holiness and blamelessness?" Oh, Lord, how our lives ought to be pure when we see the God that You are. How we ought to call men to the Savior before this day comes, or before we're removed from this earth and have no more opportunity. We thank You, Lord, that we can look forward to the day that Jesus comes to set up His kingdom. It's a glorious day and yet it leaves us with so much to do, to go out on the highways and byways and compel folks to come to the King, to be ready for His kingdom.

Thank You for this wonderful day You've given us. May we ever live in the light of Your soon return, for if all these things seem so near, and we are to be raptured before they even begin, it must be soon. And we say with John, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." Come, Lord Jesus. Help us to live with eternity in view and not time, to live with heaven in view and not earth, to live with eternity in view and not the temporal things. And to lay up our treasures where moth and rust doth not corrupt and thieves cannot break through and steal. And to set our affections on things above and not on things on the earth. And we await with thanksgiving, and yet with sadness for those without Christ, the day of Christ's return. We pray in His name. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).