Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Terrors of the Great Tribulation, Part 1
Scripture: Luke 21:20-24
Code: 42-260

Let's open our Bibles to Luke chapter 21, we are confronted with words from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ which open up a huge subject in regard to the future prophecy concerning end time.

Now whenever you talk about the prophecies concerning the end time, you're talking about a vast, vast theme. There are Old Testament books that sweep us into the end times, written by the prophets of old. There are New Testament messages given by our Lord that look to the end times. There are writings by the writer of the epistles in the New Testament that look to the end of the age. And then there is the massive book of Revelation which gives a series of visions that John the Apostle received while in exile on the island of Patmos that have to do with the end of human history.

All of that simply to say, in a general sense, the end of human history has already been written. There are no surprises to God and there are no surprises to those who understand what God has revealed. God has given us in His Word an understanding of the end if we take the Scripture at face value. And, in fact, in Luke 21 the Lord Jesus Himself is giving a message, a sermon to His disciples on the future. And it comes at a most ironic moment.

Precisely during the week when He will be crucified, which is just a few hours away, it is on the Wednesday of that Passion Week and He will die on Friday, it is on the Wednesday when the people of Israel and the leaders of Israel have finally determined that He is in fact not the Messiah, when they have determined that He is not from God, He is certainly not God, you can say it is at the very high point of their rejection of Jesus Christ that He walks out of the temple with His disciples following, sits down on the Mount of Olives and tells them the future. What an irony that is. When the populous and the leaders have determined that He is not God, He then immediately does what only God can do, describes the future. In fact, He describes the future in a sweeping fashion through all of remaining history to the final culmination which will be His own return in Second Coming glory, which becomes the pinnacle of this message. His Second coming spoken of in verse 27 of Luke 21.

Here is that irony, that the one they have determined does not represent God is not God, does not know God, is in fact satanic, is the one who can not only tell the future but the one who having created the world and sustaining the world will be the very one to write its history and bring it to its consummation. And what our Lord says about the future is horrendous. According to the Lord Jesus, the future for this world and its inhabitants is very, very tragic. It is much worse than any environmentalist imagines. It is much worse than any scientist could ever imagine in any scheme that

he could concoct on the basis of select information. It is far worse than any educator could imagine, any politician could imagine, or any religious leader could imagine. We are not headed toward some humanly engineered utopia. We are not on the way to an age of peace and tranquility. It's hard living in this world today and it's getting harder, and it will continue until it becomes so hard that it will be worse than it's ever been. All history has been a battle against the effects of sin, and the effects of the curse on humanity and on creation brought by God because of sin. Jesus said, "I'm going to die, I'm going to rise again, I'm going to pay the penalty for sin and then I'm going away and while I'm gone, things will get worse." He says in verse 8 in this message, "See to it that you be not misled. Many will come in My name saying, 'I am He and the time is at hand.' Do not go after them."

The first thing we talk about is Jesus says in the period between His first and second coming, the period in which we now live. There will be dominating deception...deception. A false Christianity that will outstrip the real Christianity. There will be more false Christians than true ones. There will be more false representatives of Jesus Christ than true representatives of Jesus Christ and they will accumulate and escalate until finally the last form of Christian apostasy takes shape in the time to come called the Tribulation. And we looked at that. In the time of the Tribulation yet to come, right before Jesus returns, there will be a flurry of false Messiahs and false prophets plying their deception across the globe. So this is an age characterized by increasing, escalating religious deception. This is true, we all know it, we all see it.

Secondly, our Lord said disaster is to be expected, verse 9, "You'll hear of wars and disturbances." He defines them further in verses 10 and 11, "The wars and disturbances involve nations rising against nation, kingdom against kingdom, global war and conflict will characterize this time." There will also be natural disasters, great earthquakes, various plagues, famines, terrors which would encompass everything that we talked about such as fire storms and tsunamis and tidal waves and any other volcanic eruption, etc., etc., not included in earthquakes, famines and plagues. And there will be great signs from heaven, hurricanes and tornados, etc., etc., etc. And the world will be characterized then by religious deception and by natural disaster. And we have seen that, it is true, it is the way it is in the world. And as the earth winds down, as the second law of thermodynamics, the law of entropy that all things are breaking down, comes to its fulfillment, things disintegrate and this world becomes more susceptible to these kinds of disasters and tragedies.

Thirdly, He says, the distress of persecution will come. "Before all these things, they will lay their hands on you, you who profess to follow Me. They will persecute you, delivering you to synagogues and prisons." That was the Jewish persecution. "Bringing you before kings and governors." That's the Gentile persecution. "All for My namesake. It will lead to an opportunity for your testimony, so make up your minds not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves for I will give you an utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute, but you will be delivered up by parents and brothers and relatives and friends and they will put some of you to death and you will be hated by all on account of My name." And I told you some have counted as many as 70 million

professing Christians having been martyred since Jesus said these words until now.

This period of time between the two comings of Christ, characterized by religious deception, by natural catastrophe and disaster, and by persecution of the people of God. These are the realities of history. They are facts of history. Jesus said this was how it would be and this is exactly how it would be and how it is. And, of course, you remember the disciples expected the Messiah to come and set up the Kingdom. This is very opposite of what they expected. They had no idea of two comings with an interval in between. Jesus had to show them that, tell them that and then actually go back to heaven in His ascension and we wait for Him to return. But this is life in our world until He comes. And it's not getting better, it is getting worse.

And as I pointed out to you when we went through those verses and we've already gone through verses 8 through 19, the worst form of religious deception comes in the last seven years and the last three and a half in particular, before Christ returns to set up His Kingdom and to judge, the worst natural catastrophes happen in that same period of time yet in the future and the worst form of persecution as well. So these things at their maximum level will occur in the time known as the Time of Tribulation. In fact, that is precisely what our Lord said in this same message. Remember now, the words that Luke records are not all that Jesus said on this occasion on the Mount of Olives when He spoke of His return and the time in between. Mark 13 records His words and so does Matthew 24. And in Matthew 24 we are reminded that there will be a time that is worse than any time in the history of the world. There has never been a time like the time of Tribulation that is to come in the past, and there never will be a time like it in the future. It is the worst of all times.

Verse 21, Matthew 24, "There will be a Great Tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world till now, nor ever shall." And in that time, all of these things, deception, disaster and persecution, reach their pinnacle.

Now our Lord also says that when they begin, they are the beginning of birth pains. Matthew 24:8, the beginning of birth pains. Birth pains is a good illustration to talk about this progression because everybody understands birth pains. There's an event coming, the birth of a child. It's an event that occurs in a moment in time. Prior to that event there are escalating, increasing pains. It's a perfect illustration. What Jesus is saying that when He goes, these things will begin to happen. These are the very early, almost false birth pains. As you get nearer to the birth of Christ, the birth pains will be real, they will grow more intense and more intense and more intense at the very end.

For example, when you look at the time of the Tribulation in the book of Revelation, it is laid out under seven seals. There's a scroll that is rolled and then sealed, and rolled and then sealed, and rolled and then sealed. So it's sealed seven times. That's the way they sealed a will. It's the Title Deed to the earth, Christ is going to take the Title Deed to the earth, unroll it, take back the earth from the usurper, Satan. Every time He breaks a seal, another judgment is released. So you have the seven-

seal judgments.

When He opens the seventh seal which is the last at the end of the period of seven years, out of that seventh seal comes seven trumpet blasts. Those are more rapid fire. They all occur at the time of the seventh seal which is right at the end. So you have seven trumpet judgments that come right at the end. Out of the seventh trumpet comes seven bowls that are poured out in judgment and they are even more rapid fire than the trumpets. So you have that same birth pain intensity escalating in the imagery of seven seals over a period of seven years, seven trumpets over a period of seven months, and seven bowls over a period of days and hours. And then at the end of the bowl judgments, all judgments are finished, Christ comes, judges the ungodly, and sets up His earthly Kingdom. The birth pains then give us the idea you have escalating intensity until the very end when the pains become fierce, leading up to the very event itself.

These final pains that I just mentioned are described in the book of Revelation. You see in Revelation plagues, things that Jesus talked about, famines, earthquakes, wars, false Messiahs, false prophets, deadly persecution of believers. You see all of that in the book of Revelation at an intensity and a level that the world has never ever experienced or will experience.

And when you begin to see those, Jesus said in Matthew 24:33, when you begin to see them at that level, at that intensity, when you see these things, know...Matthew 24:33...that He is near...that He is near. We haven't begun to see those yet. We know what those will look like because they're laid out in detail in the book of Revelation. In Matthew 24:21 Jesus said, "There will be a great Tribulation." There is Tribulation now, in this world you shall have tribulation, John 16:33, but there is coming a Great Tribulation, that describes that last seven years and most particularly the last three and a half of the last seven. Wickedness will then be at an all-time high and it will be expressed openly and without restraint. The Holy Spirit who restrains evil in the world will step aside and let evil run rampant. Satan will be given the privilege of releasing demons who are bound in hell so that they cannot escape but they will be released to run rampant over the world in one last satanic dash against God and Christ. At the same time that you have sin running amok, and demons running free, you have God's wrath systematically released with deadly force on the entire world and God's wrath even using sinners and demons for His own purposes.

At the same time you have the gospel being preached to the ends of the earth by 144 thousand converted Jews, 12 thousand out of each tribe, Revelation says, by two witnesses who literally die in view of the whole world and rise from the dead and preach the gospel from Jerusalem. They'll be seen, no doubt, by satellite television all over the world. Then you have an angel flying in heaven preaching the gospel in the sky so that all the world will be able to hear. So it will be the worst of times and yet there is a sense in which it will be the best of times because that preaching of the gospel by the witnesses, the two witnesses, the 144 thousand and by all the people who are saved from every tongue and tribe and nation will cause a great revival and multitudes will be converted to

Christ during that time.

And so, in that time of Great Tribulation, there will come an escalation of judgment that will make it clear that you are at the end. That is why in the parallel passage in Matthew 24, in the parallel passage in Mark 13, both Mark and Matthew inject into the words of Jesus a little sentence, “Let the reader understand...let the reader understand. Some people think that prophetic literature is written to make things incomprehensible. That prophetic literature is designed to create mystery and confusion. Not at all. Let the reader understand. You read what this says and you look at what is happening. I can read about what Jesus said about wars, nations and kingdoms going against each other through human history, false forms of Christianity, false Messiahs, false prophets. I read about the persecution of believers and I say, “I understand. I see it. That’s history. That’s reality. That’s the way it is.”

And in the future when these things reach the most intense level of their agonies, their birth pains, all you have to do is read the Scripture and you will know exactly what’s going on. Those words are injected by the writer because the writer of Matthew and the writer of Mark understands that people in the future will be reading this. It doesn’t say let the hearer understand. That’s not something Jesus said to His disciples at the time, but it’s something that the Spirit-inspired author says to the future generations who are looking at history and wondering what’s going on. And He says, “Let the reader understand.” You’ll see this unfold before your very eyes.

At that time Matthew 24 says, “When these judgments are released, when iniquity runs rampant, when believers are persecuted...” And by the way, when a revival is going on across the world, people are being saved, Israel will be saved at that time, there will be a great revival in the city of Jerusalem, Revelation 11, there will be 144 thousand Jews converted, identified in Revelation 7 and 14. Multitudes from the whole world are identified in Revelation 5. Satan will rebel against that and bring about the greatest persecution in history. That persecution will cause some people to defect. There will be professing false believers in that period who will defect under the heat of persecution. Others who will defect under the influence of lawlessness. Matthew 24, Jesus said, “Because of lawlessness or iniquity, the love of many will grow cold.” In other words, they won’t want to abandon their sin.

So there will be false believers even at that time who will defect. But the true believers will endure, as we remember from last time, verse 19, “By your endurance you will gain your lives.”

Now how will the readers of the future know when this comes? How will they know that Jesus is coming soon? What sign? That’s what started all of this, remember that? Back in verse 7, what is the sign when the end is coming? What is the sign of Your coming, as Matthew puts it ? What is the sign of the end of the age? What is the sign, what should we look for to know that it’s going to happen?

Of course, they thought it would happen then, soon. We're two thousand years later, it hasn't happened. Christ hasn't established His Kingdom. What is there to look for? For that generation who is alive at the very end, what should they look for? What signs? How do you know when you're getting to the end?

Well just imagine that you're living in the future described in the book of Revelation, described by Daniel, described by our Lord here. You're living in the future. Natural disasters are at a fever pitch, far beyond anything humanity has ever experienced. Persecution of the people of God is at its maximum level. Believers are begin slaughtered. There is persecution the likes of which the world has never seen.

At the same time, there is false religion abounding under the leadership of the Antichrist. It's a very hard word. It's a world more difficult to live in than any point in human history. And those true believers are going to be like the martyrs under the altar saying, "How long, O Lord, how long? How long is this going to go on because this is way more stress than we can handle? How can we possibly know when the end is going to come?" If you think it's important now, hey...how important will it be then? I'm having a hard time convincing people that it's important now because they're so comfortable. It's hard to get a people stirred up about the return of Jesus Christ because they're not living in terror.

In that day when the world is living in a condition of terror, how are they going to know that the end is near? The answer to that comes in verses 20 to 24, and that's our text. "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is at hand." That's the key. When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is at hand.

You say, "Wait, wait, wait. When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies? That's a very familiar sight." That has been a familiar sight for a very, very long time. Certainly 40 years after Jesus said this in 70 A.D., Jerusalem was surrounded by the Roman army who laid siege to the city of Jerusalem which finally fell in 70 A.D. And when the city of Jerusalem fell in 70 A.D., people did flee into the mountains, thousands of them fled into the mountains, many more traveled as refugees to various parts of the world. They were horrible days. Titus Vespasian, son of the emperor of Vespasian came, attacked the city and killed people until Josephus says he had no more people to kill and no more people to plunder. And then Caesar sent orders to demolish the whole city, flatten it, demolish and flatten the temple and just leave a portion of the wall, the city wall, and some towers as a testimony to the power of Rome so that the people would know that it was once such a formidable place evidenced by the greatness of the wall and the towers which was left. And this would be a testimony to Rome's great power. But apart from leaving that, Josephus says there was not enough left of the city to make those that came after believe that it had ever been in inhabited place.

Is that what our Lord was talking about? Was He talking about 70 A.D. here? I don't think so. Keep reading. Verse 21, "Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains," that happened then. "Let those who are in the midst of the city depart," that happened. "Let those who are in the country not enter the city," and they didn't. Then verse 22, "Because these are the days of vengeance in order that all things which are written may be fulfilled."

Wait a minute here. That language does not lend itself to a 70 A.D. interpretation. These are not the days of vengeance. These are not the events which cause things which have been written to all be fulfilled. The days of vengeance, just take that phrase, that is an Old Testament expression used to describe the coming time of Tribulation. It is an Old Testament expression to speak of divine vengeance from God in the end time, the time of Jacob's trouble. You read about the days of vengeance in Isaiah 34, 35, 61, 63. Daniel 12:1 speaks of the days of vengeance, Hosea 9, Micah 5, Zechariah 12, Zechariah 14. You're talking here about the final end, when God's final vengeance falls on the ungodly and on human history. The days of vengeance when all things which are written become fulfilled...that's a sweeping statement....sweeping statement. When all things which are written become fulfilled. This is far more than what happened in 70 A.D.

What are we talking about here? What event are we talking about here? Well some might suggest the Middle Ages. Some would come along and say, "Well, the Jews were under siege during the Middle Ages, the first of the Crusades, 1095, the first of the Crusades they came, sacked Jerusalem and from then to the 1500's control over the city of Jerusalem changed many, many times, until finally Sullamon(??) the magnificent, the great Ottomon's sultan in the early 1500's conquered Jerusalem. And if you were to go there today, the walls that you see today, the stone walls, the battlements encircling the old city of Jerusalem belong to the sixteenth century time of Sullamon(??) a visible reminder that Israel has been surrounded by armies through its history. Right there is almost 500 years of it. But you couldn't call any of those events during that period of time during the Middle Ages the days of divine vengeance and the fulfillment of everything that has been written.

Oh, even today someone might say, "Jerusalem is surrounded by armies." Not that they are against the edges of the city wall, but there are armies in constant readiness for war surrounding Israel all the time. Ever since they came back in 1948, declared themselves a state, it was immediately after that that a war of independence left the city of Jerusalem divided. Jordan controlling the old city, including the temple mount most of the historic sights, and that only lasted for about 20 years till 1967, you remember the Six Days War. The Six Days War in Israel forces captured the old city, reunified all of Jerusalem. The city came under Jewish control for the first time in centuries.

However, more than 30, 40 years later now, Jerusalem is still surrounded by enemies. They are at the heart of an Israeli Palestinian conflict. Arab leaders worldwide insisting that that land and that city belongs to them and that they have from God, Allah, a mandate to exterminate the Jews. Jerusalem

has been surrounded by armies. It is surrounded by armies in a figurative sense right now. Its political position, as you know, in the Middle East is so volatile that at any moment in time, Israel could be attacked by any of these massive enemies that surround it.

Is that what this is talking about? Are we talking about now? Is this it? Are we there? Are we seeing the fulfillment of this prophecy and Jerusalem is surrounded by all these Arab nations who are armed to the teeth and gaining greater weaponry including nuclear weapons to come against them? Is that it?

No, no, that's not it. You say, "Well what is he talking about?" We have to go to Matthew to answer the question. Turn to Matthew 24. Matthew records that our Lord said something even more specific...our Lord said something even more specific. He said, "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, that's the sign. That's the sign that the great part of the Tribulation is to begin. That's the sign that the worsts is coming and it's the darkest darkness before the dawn. And here he takes it a step further. Verse 15, Matthew 24, "When you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place," and here's where that phrase is, "let the reader understand." "Then those who are in Judea flee to the mountains," and He goes through the same series of warnings to get out of the place. "If you're on the housetop, don't even go down inside to get your belongings. If you're in a field, don't go back to get your coat. And woe to those who are pregnant, those who nurse babies, even as we saw recorded in Luke, pray that your flight might not be in winter or on a Sabbath. There will be a Great Tribulation."

What launches the Great Tribulation at the midpoint of the seven years, the Great Tribulation is the last half and Daniel points this out even by numbering the days in chapter 12, as the book of Revelation numbers the days. What triggers the last half, the worst half, just prior to Christ's return, what launches that Great Tribulation is when the armies surround Jerusalem and there is the committing of what Daniel calls the abomination of desolation...the abomination of desolation. Jesus is very specific. Jesus then relates Daniel's prophecy of the abomination of desolation to the end time. When you see the abomination of desolation, you know that's the time. That's the end time. Right after that, verse 29, comes the Tribulation, its final form. The sun is darkened. The moon doesn't give its light. The stars fall. Then the sign of the Son of Man appears in the sky. This is all eschatological. This is all in the last days.

So our Lord is talking about a period in the end of history, when the armies encamp around Jerusalem. And they encamp around Jerusalem with the purpose of desolation. That's simply a word that means to ruin, to destroy. They camp around Jerusalem with a view of coming in and creating desolation. What specific desolation? The abomination of desolation, says Matthew. So he fills out our Lord's words, just exactly what is an abomination? It is a blasphemy...it is a blasphemy. That's the meaning of the word. There is committed at this time a blasphemy.

In fact, an abomination to God is any act of idolatry, anything that blasphemes His name, His honor, His worship, His glory, His place. Certainly spiritual uncleanness is a blasphemy and an abomination. Certainly immorality of any kind, unrighteousness is an abomination. But in particular, idolatry is an abomination.

So we have here then, in the end time the prophecy of nations surrounding Jerusalem and inside Jerusalem there is committed an abomination of desolation which is spoken of by Daniel. Let's go to Daniel 9:27 and see what it is. And here's our great challenge. I can't possibly take you through all of this on this occasion. I suggest to you if you have further interest, get some of the material on Daniel. Read the sections in the Study Bible, get the CD on Daniel 9:27 and you will get a greater insight into the abomination of desolation. Or study the material from Matthew 24:15 where the abomination of desolation is referred to. I have messages on that as well as the Matthew commentary with an extensive section on that.

There's also a chapter in the book, The Second Coming, which deals with this as well. But look at 9:27 in Daniel. "And he will make a firm covenant," talking about the Antichrist. In the end time, there will come the final Antichrist, the final false Messiah, the final false prophet and he will make a covenant, firm covenant, with the many for one week. What does that mean? He makes a covenant or a pact with Israel. He becomes the protector of Israel. Amazing.

They are still in unbelief when the Tribulation begins. The church has been Raptured. Now the Tribulation begins. Israel is still in unbelief. The Antichrist comes along. He offers himself as the protector of Israel because Israel is sitting in a still very, very hostile world. So the Antichrist comes along, offers himself as the protector of Israel. They make a covenant with him for a week, in the middle of the week. It's a week of years, by the way, as 70 weeks of Daniel means 70 periods of seven years. And this...the detail of this is very important in prophecy. The first 69 years were completed when Jesus was crucified. There's one week left to go, the seventieth week in the future. During that week there is a covenant made with the Jews and Antichrist, he becomes their protector. However, in the middle of the week, he puts a stop to sacrifice in grain offering.

What that means is the temple will be rebuilt of some form. They will be offering sacrifices again. Judaism will be restored to some place in that time. The Antichrist will offer himself as the protector of Israel. He's not labeled the Antichrist, he's a man of peace, a leader, a great world leader of peace. They're very possibly out of the Roman Catholic system. He comes in, sets up some kind of pact with them, becomes their protector. However, in the middle of the week puts a stop to their offerings, their sacrifices, and creates what is called the abomination which makes desolate. This is what our Lord is referring to. In the middle of the last seven years of human history before the Lord's return, the Antichrist is violated in the middle by something the Antichrist does to create an abomination...an abomination that produces destruction and desolation. This is the abomination of desolation.

What is it? Ah, the New Testament makes it clear what it is. The New Testament tells us that the Antichrist in the middle of the week will go into the holy place in the temple and set up an idol of himself and demand that the entire world worship him. That is an abomination to God...an abomination to God. Scripture talks about this very specifically, and I'll refer to that in a moment.

But, there's another component. And I'm going to try to hurry and give this to you. We're looking eschatologically at the future, at the end time, the Antichrist makes a pact, breaks it in the middle, breaks it by setting up an idol of himself in the middle of the Holy Place in Jerusalem, trying to create a world religion, cause the whole world to worship Him. Obviously this is Satan worship at its pinnacle in its final form. All the nations of the world are encamped around. Jerusalem is the focal point of everything and this idol is set up in the Holy Place.

Is there anything like that in human history? Is there anything that you could look that would be a preview of that kind of behavior?

Yes there is. In the same prophecy of Daniel, in Daniel chapter 11, you'll have to study it on your own, throughout chapter 11 you have the history of a particular ruler, a ruler that has been well-known to students of history and Scripture as Antiochus. Antiochus...one of the major Seleucid kings. That is, he came from Syria. The powerful kings in Daniel 11 are the King of the South, the Ptolemies from Egypt, and the king of the north, the Seleucids from Syria that bordered Syria.

In Daniel chapter 11 the Seleucid king is called a vile person to whom they will not give the honor of royalty but he shall come in peaceably and seize the kingdom by intrigue. This is referring to Antiochus IV who was a Seleucid.

Now you need to know just a little bit about this particular guy and I can't take you into a whole lot of detail. He came in the third century. Daniel prophesied in the sixth century, he says there's going to be a king and he gives all kinds of details about him and he comes three centuries later. He offers himself as the protector of Israel. He's from Syria in the north, he will protect Israel from the south. He will protect Israel from the Egyptians, the Ptolemies in Egypt. That's going to be his commitment. He pretends to be the defender of Jerusalem. So he goes to war, this is what Daniel said he would do and history said that's exactly what he did. Daniel said he would go to war against Egypt. He would then plunder Egypt, take all the spoils of Egypt and buy influence in Israel. That's why in Daniel 11:24, says he shall enter peaceably, even into the richest places of the province, he shall do what his fathers have not done, or his forefathers, disperse among them plunder, spoils and riches, devise his plans against the strongholds but only for a time. So what he comes to do is bribe them, buys his way in as the protector of Israel by giving them some of the plunder he stole when he conquered Egypt.

He goes back, he is to go back and make a final devastation of Egypt. That was Antiochus' plan. In the year 168, history says he was going to Egypt to make a final plunder of Egypt. He had already defeated Egypt. He had already made his alliance with Israel. It came to pass three centuries after Daniel said it would, exactly as he said it would. On his way to Egypt he receives orders from Rome via Cypress because the Roman fleet was stationed at Cypress. That's very important. The Roman fleet is anchored at Cypress. The word comes to him, Caesar says, "Do not make war against the Ptolemies, do not make war against Egypt." He is humiliated. He is angry. He is infuriated. So he withdraws from Egypt and he heads back to Syria. He is so mad that he decides to vent his rage. He's so made he needs to kill somebody, so in passing he decides to kill the Jews. As he goes north, he stops at Jerusalem. This is what Daniel said, Daniel 11:30, "Ships from Cypress shall come against him, therefore he shall be angry, return in rage from the holy covenant and do damage."

The word came from Cypress to him by ship not to go to Egypt, but to go back to Syria. And Daniel knew that three centuries before it happened because God revealed it to him. He stops and he's going to sack Jerusalem. He waits until the Sabbath when he knows the people will be most vulnerable, orders an army of 250 thousand soldiers to slaughter the Jews. Now remember, he's been their protector and their benefactor. He met with very little resistance.

He then took control, set Jewish apostates, defectors from Judaism, enemies of Israel's covenant with Jehovah, he set them in all the positions of power in the city. Daniel said he would do that, Daniel 11:30, "He shall return and show regard for those who forsake the holy covenant." Daniel said he would put apostates in places of power...he did. He was trying to set up a thoroughly new religion of paganism, he demanded no more sacrifices to be made to God. He demanded that all sacrifices be made to idols. The Sabbath was to be profaned. All laws of Judaism, both biblical and traditional, were to be eliminated. He wanted one people, one religion just like Daniel said he would. And he was to be the object of everyone's worship. He called himself Epiphanes the Great One. The people called him Epimanes the mad man. And at that time when he took power there, this is what he did. It says in the history of the Maccabees, the fifteenth day of the month Kislev, a hundred and forty and fifth year he set up the abomination of desolation on the altar.

You know what he did? We know. History says. He went into the Holy Place where the Jewish altar of sacrifice was, where God was being worshiped and he put an image of Zeus on top of the altar where offerings were made to Jehovah. And he did exactly that. He abominated the Holy Place and that brought desolation. Daniel 11:31 says, "There he committed the abomination of desolation."

So you have a wonderful picture in Daniel. You have an illustration of someone in the third century, or actually 168, you have an illustration of this individual just two centuries before the Lord who abominates the Holy Place and is a picture of the future abomination of desolation at the end time. It is Daniel 11, by the way, that refers to Antiochus, but the other abomination of desolation in 927 can't

refer to Antiochus because it refers to the very end of all history in the final seven years before the Lord establishes His Kingdom. There's a further reference to it in Daniel chapter 12 as well which is looking at the end time abomination of desolation.

So in a pattern that is pretty frequent in prophetic literature, you have a future prophecy illustrated in a near prophecy. Antiochus becomes an illustration of what the final Antichrist will do. And so we know Daniel 9:27 is referring to the future, go back to Luke 21, because that's what Jesus refers it to. Jesus is interpreting Daniel and when our Lord says, as He does in Matthew 24, "This is that which was written by Daniel the prophet concerning the abomination of desolation," we know it's connected to the time of His return. It's connected in Luke 21 to when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that the desolation is at hand. It's that same desolation.

So the Lord sees this as an eschatological event. Yes, Jerusalem has been surrounded by armies throughout its history. There have even been a couple of times through history when the temple has been desecrated, of course, and abominated, the place where God is supposed to be worshiped there. There is that most notable time laid out in Daniel 11 and fulfilled in history by Antiochus where a kind of abomination of desolation happened and he did things that were absolutely atrocious. The story of what he did, beyond what I told you, is that he slaughtered a pig on the altar and stuffed pork down the mouths of the priests as a way to desecrate the place and desecrate them as well. And so the picture of what he did is only a preview of what that final Antichrist will do. And if you ask just exactly what will the final Antichrist do? Revelation 13 says, here's his abomination, "In his vision was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast." He sets up his image in the temple in the Holy Place, his idol. There was power given to him that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed, Revelation 13:15. So he doesn't set up an altar of Zeus, he sets up an idol of himself. Paul describes it in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 and 4 with these words. The Apostle Paul says this, "The son of sin when he's revealed...that's the Antichrist...the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." That's the final abomination. That's what Antiochus did in a preview of the final abomination.

So, let the reader understand. When you see in human history a world leader at the end of the age who makes a pact of protection with Israel to protect them and in the middle of that period of protection while judgments are beginning to move that are unlike anything in the history of the world, and you see the armies of the world surrounding Jerusalem to put an end to Israel and you see this Antichrist going into the Holy Place, putting up an idol of himself to establish one world religion, calling the whole world to worship him, you know that the coming of Christ is near...is near. He will turn against Israel whom he has feign to protect. He will call the armies of the world to come and they will amass in Israel from the city of Jerusalem clear north to the plain of Megiddo, all these forces set against God and against Israel, and he will then desecrate the Holy Place and this will trigger the return and the judgment of Christ who will destroy all the armies of the world, all the ungodly and

unrighteous and establish His Kingdom.

Now back to our text of Luke 21 quickly. When this happens, these are the days of vengeance when all things written are to be fulfilled. “Woe to those who are with child and those who nurse labor in those days.” Why does He want everybody to run? Why does He want them to flee? Well in the sense it’s metaphoric, get out, the disaster is going to be so horrible, you don’t want to experience the horror of what’s going to happen in that place when Antichrist ascends on that and starts the massacre that’s going to be going on there.

But there’s another element to it and it is this, that this is the end of evangelism. For those who are believers He doesn’t say, “Endure persecution, endure suffering, take it, don’t worry if you’re arrested, don’t worry if you’re incarcerated, don’t worry if you’re martyred. It will fall out to be a testimony to the goodness of the gospel and you’ll make a good confession.” There’s no more evangelism, it’s over. It is done. Just leave. God wants to protect and will protect certain of His people in order to enter in to the Millennial earthly Kingdom. Time to get out. It’s going to be more difficult for pregnant women and women who have nursing babies. Obviously they can’t move as fast, they’re encumbered.

There will be great distress upon the earth and wrath to this people. It will be the wrath of Satan but it will be executing the wrath of God. They will fall by the edge of the sword, there will be a massacre led captive into all the nations. This happens at the midpoint for the final three and a half years. The people who aren’t slaughtered are going to be sent all over the world, as we also read in Matthew 24. Jerusalem will be trodden underfoot by the Gentiles. Only until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.

What are the times of the Gentiles? It’s a period of time from 586 B.C. when Israel first went into captivity, until the end of the Tribulation when Christ comes to establish His Kingdom. Through this whole time they have been, to one degree or another, under the attack, the oppression, the influence of Gentiles. But the times of the Gentiles will end. It didn’t end in 70 A.D., so this can’t refer to that. It didn’t end in 160's, so this can’t refer to that. The end of the times of the Gentiles is concurrent with the day’s vengeance of God, when all things will be finally fulfilled. This is the future of the world.

The Old Testament understood this. The Old Testament prophets said it. Let me close with this. Zechariah 12, “The burden of the Word of the Lord concerning Israel. Thus, declares the Lord, He stretches out the heavens, lays the foundation of the earth and forms the spirit of man within Him. Behold, I’m going to make Jerusalem a cup that causes reeling to all the peoples around and when the siege is against Jerusalem, it will also be against Judah.” As I said, all the way through that land. “It will come about in that day that I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples, all who lift it will be severely injured and all the nations of the earth will be gathered against it. In that day, declares the Lord, I will strike.” That’s not talking about anything that happened in 70 A.D. The Lord didn’t strike in 70 A.D. That’s not happening either in the time of Antiochus. This siege of Jerusalem is the very one our Lord is referring to, same one Zechariah spoke of.

Zechariah 14, he talks of it again. “I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle. The city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished,” that’s why you want to run. “Half of the city exiled, the rest will not be cut off from the city. The Lord will go forth and fight against those nations as He fights in a day of battle.”

That great conflict at the end is where the Lord comes down and brings the final victory. That didn’t happen 70 A.D., didn’t happen in Antiochus’ day. It will happen in that day. So when you look at the history of the world and you understand what Jesus is saying, He laid it all out. Laid out just exactly how it would go, that it would escalate, that it would get worse, that it would have its final form in the horrors of the time of Tribulation described in the book of Revelation. The trigger event to let people know that the end is near is the armies of the world gathering against Jerusalem after a feigned protector has been sort of accepted as the one to defend them and keep them safe. He turns on them, he goes in, desecrates the temple, sets up an idol of himself, wants the whole world to worship him, have one world religion when obviously they won’t respond to that, both Jews who have been converted to Christ and who have not, at that particular point he turns on them a massacre begins, a massacre takes place followed by another massacre by the returning Christ. But that’s the subject for next time.

Father, this is so weighty and so amazing that You have given us all this truth and barely contain it like drinking from a fire hose to take it all in. And there’s so much more to be said throughout the writings of Daniel in great, great careful detail. And also, throughout the writings of the New Testament in the words of our Lord and in the words of John who received visions of the end. Lord, help us to understand that You’ve given this to us that we might be warned, that we might understand the way the world is going, that we might be safe from these horrors because our lives are hidden with Christ in God. I pray, Lord, that even today You will draw to Yourself sinners who will be caught in the disasters if they tarry until that hour, if that’s in our lifetime, we can’t imagine the horrors of how many will perish under the deception and the delusion of Satan and under divine and demonic judgments. Lord, rescue souls today by having them put their trust in Christ and be safe from all these things. We know Your church will be raptured even before anything begins, anything begins. And yes, Lord, we understand that even the worst of times will also be a time when You will begin again to gather a people to Yourself to live forever in heaven and praise and glorify You. We thank You, Lord, that You are a God who redeems through all the eras of history. We pray for Your own glory that You would redeem sinners even today in the name of Christ. Amen.

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