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

The Terrors of the Great Tribulation, Part 2
Scripture: Luke 21:20-24
Code: 42-261

Let's open our Bibles to Luke chapter 21...Luke chapter 21. This, of course, is the chapter in which Luke records our Lord's instruction regarding His return. This is Jesus own teaching on His Second Coming, the great culmination of human history, the end of the age, the return of Christ in glory to judge the ungodly and to establish His glorious Kingdom on earth for a thousand years after which this entire universe as we know it is destroyed and replaced by the new heavens and the new earth, the eternal dwelling place of the holy and those made righteous in Christ.

The Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, of course, is the next great event in the work of Christ. He is currently in heaven, seated at the right hand of the Father, reigning over His spiritual Kingdom of those who belong to Him through faith in the gospel. He is their great High Priest. Whoever lives to make intercession for them, He secures them unto eternal glory, He hears and answers their prayers and gives them all things consistent with His will and His promise. But He is coming back.

The Bible says He will return to earth visibly so that the whole world will see Him. His feet will touch the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. He will change the configuration of that land, according to the Old Testament prophet. The land itself will split open, water will come gushing out and create a river that flows down from Jerusalem into the desert. This will launch the beginning of a restored, renovated planet which will be paradise regained, as John Milton put it.

It is a glorious thing to think of Christ returning. It is also a frightening thing because He comes not only to establish His Kingdom for those who belong to Him, but He comes to judge the ungodly in a horrific judgment which will catapult them all forever into the Lake of Fire. That's why John said, contemplation of this caused both sweetness and bitterness. He says that in regard to the vision he had in the tenth chapter of Revelation.

When we think about then the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, we have those same bitter/sweet emotions. Sweet for the glory of Christ. Sweet for those who belong to Him. Horribly bitter for those who do not. It is important for us to concentrate on what the Bible says about the return of Christ, and it says a lot.

Jesus during His ministry was asked many questions. A small fraction of those questions are recorded in the New Testament. Of all the questions recorded in the New Testament, the question about what is the sign of Your coming and the end of the age? What should we be looking for and

when will it happen? Those questions offered to Jesus by His own disciples sitting on the Mount of Olives on Wednesday night of Passion Week got the longest answer of any questions He was ever asked. In fact, the full answer recorded in Scripture takes up Luke 21, Mark 13, and in Matthew chapter 24 and chapter 25. If you want the full answer that is recorded in Scripture, you have to consider all of those chapters.

We're looking at one, that being Luke 21, in our ongoing look at Luke's gospel. This is part 10 of our discussion of this passage. Now you could do this whole chapter in one message, or three or five or any number, or 50, for that matter, which we will not do. But it behooves us to take time and go carefully, slower is better than faster, deeper is better than shallower, and comprehension is better than confusion. And in order to understand this, we have to take our time.

Having said that, it is still a challenge because we're looking at one chapter on the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and looking at only one expression of the details connected with that and the Bible has so many of them. The Old Testament has many passages that tell us details concerning the period around the return of the Messiah. Isaiah wrote about it. Jeremiah wrote about it. Ezekiel wrote about it. Daniel wrote about it. Zechariah wrote about it. Joel wrote about it. And there are others. There are references to the reign of the coming Messiah in the Psalms and allusions to it even in the book of Genesis, the law of Moses. This is a vast subject because this is the culmination of all of redemptive history and God has said much about it.

Coming in to the New Testament, you have not only the passages that I mentioned to you in Matthew, Mark and here in Luke, but you have references to the return of Jesus Christ in many of the epistles as well. Paul spoke often of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Peter wrote of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. John wrote of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and we seeing Him face to face. Jude wrote about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. And the book of Revelation is all about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now I'm saying all of that because every week after I give one of these lessons, folks will come to me and say, "But I don't understand this and I don't understand that." And that leads me to ask this question and that question and I just want you to know I feel your pain, I understand that. I know that for every question that is raised here and every suggested understanding and answer that I give you, myriad other questions are raised. So, your assignment is to find all the other passages that speak on this subject in the Bible and master them. And when you've done that, you'll have it all set.

Now I want to help you a little bit with that, so I've written a book called The Second Coming, have you seen that? It's out in a new form and a new cover, it's the Second Coming of the Second Coming book. And you can get it in the bookstore and it will look at the main issues related to the return of Jesus Christ. It will help you because it looks at them categorically. And then we put together a special edition of the Revelation commentary so you wouldn't have to read through 700 pages and it's

called Because The Time is Near and it's a condensed explanation of the book of Revelation, verse by verse by verse, which will always connect that book back to the salient Old Testament texts and even the salient New Testament texts. So I would just encourage you to get those other resources to expand your understanding.

And I would also say this to you. I've been studying prophetic literature all of my adult life, certainly all of my ministry life, and there are still wonders and elements that I don't fully grasp. So it becomes one of the most wondrous, one of the most elevating studies that you'll ever do in the Scripture and I commend it to you. But it will take a little effort because there's much to understand. There also is much detail to understand. The future is not painted in big, broad brushes. It is painted with a very fine brush in very careful detail which you will find in these passages that I have commended to you.

Now let me back up from talking about that for just a minute and say to you that today I want to pick up some of the pieces from what we looked at last time concerning verses 20 to 24. People came to me after the last message and said, "What about this? And what about that? And I'm not sure I understand this, and what are the implications of that?" And one person even came to me and said, "I think you're just making this up as you go, it doesn't seem to make sense to me at all." So I want to take another look at verses 20 to 24 and maybe you'll know I'm not making it up when I'm done and maybe it will make a little more sense to you. I hope so because this is the true Word of God and you need to know it because it will bless and encourage your heart. So, let's look back at Luke 21 and verses 20 to 24. I'm not going to review any of the prior things that we've discussed at great length, just pick it up at verse 20.

"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is at hand. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains and let those who are in the midst of the city depart, let not those who are in the country enter the city because these are days of vengeance in order that all things which are written may be fulfilled. Woe to those who are with child and to those who nurse babes in those days for there will be great distress, or great tribulation upon the earth or the land and wrath to this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword and will be led captive into all the nations and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled."

Now this is very, very specific prophecy which is consistent with Old Testament and New Testament prophetic literature. It is very specific...very specific. Now in backing up from that, I want to point out something to you that is very important. God has staked His own reputation on His ability to predict the future accurately, okay? God has established His own integrity on the basis that He predicts the future accurately. If you can prove that something predicted in the Bible did not happen as predicted, then you can prove that God is not the God of the Bible and the Bible is not true. Skeptics have been trying to do this throughout all history, never have they succeeded, not one time because God is God and God is omniscient and God not only knows history, He not only knows what's going to happen,

He makes it happen. It is His story.

Now to understand how important this is, I want you to go back with me to an important portion of the book of Isaiah, chapter 41. And we'll get a little bit of a running start on our text and then I'll try to help you further understand the text that I read. But go back to Isaiah 41 and I want you to see what's at stake here.

God always is dealing with the people of Israel through the prophets with regard to their apostatizing, their defecting, their rebelling, their disobedience, and most particularly their penchant for idolatry. They were always seduced and lured away to worship idols. And so God through the prophet Isaiah here is calling them back from their idolatry and He defends Himself as the only true God and the only one to be worshiped because He is the only one who can predict the future. That proves that He is the transcendent and true God. No creature knows the future, no demon knows the future, not even Satan himself. No angel knows the future by any supernatural means. No human knows the future. The only one who knows the future is God and the only thing creatures know about the future is what God has said. But apart from the revelation of God, no one knows the future. There is no astrologer, there is no horoscope. There is no medium. There is no angelic contact. There is no one who knows your future or anybody's future or anything about the future...no one. Horoscopes, fortune tellers, star gazers, etc., etc., are a hoax. No one knows the future but God and God says that that is the proof that He is God.

Notice in Isaiah 41:13, "I am the Lord your God who upholds your right hand, who says to you, "Do not fear, I will help you." And He's comparing Himself with these ridiculous idols that they are worshiping. Verse 14, "Do not fear, you worm, Jacob, you men of Israel, I will help you, declares the Lord, and your Redeemer is the holy one of Israel."

And the context here is...why in the world are you going after these non-gods in the form of idols. I am the Lord your God.

If you go down to verse 21, He asks those who have gone after idols to present a case for their defection. He calls them, as it were, into His court and says, "Show Me why these idols are worthy of your trust. Present your case," the Lord says. "Bring forward your strong arguments," the king of Jacob says.

Here's His argument. "You say they are supernatural, you say they are divine, you say they are real gods, let them bring forth and declare to us what is going to take place. Let them tell the future. Verse 23...end of verse 22, "Or announce to us what is coming. Declare...verse 23...the things that are going to come afterward that we may know that you are gods."

Turn to chapter 44. This whole chapter is about the stupidity of worshiping an idol, carving an idol out of wood. But in verse 6, “Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel,” 44:6, “and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts, I am the first and I am the last.” That’s a way of saying I am everything in between. “There is no God besides Me. And who is like Me? Let him proclaim and declare it. Yes, let him recount it to me in order from the time that I established the ancient nation and let them declare to them the things that are coming and the events that are going to take place.” Again, the challenge to anyone who claims to be God or anyone who claims to be worshiping a god, let that god tell the future.

In chapter 45, verse 11, “Thus says the Lord, the Holy One of Israel and His Maker, His fashioner, His Creator,” speaking of Israel, “Ask Me about the things to come...ask Me about the things to come.” That’s God putting His reputation on the line in His ability to tell the future.

Go down to verse 18. “For thus says the Lord who created the heavens, He is the God who formed the earth and made it. He established it. Did not create it a waste place, but formed it to be inhabited. I am the Lord and there is none else. I have not spoken in secret in some dark land, this is not some kind of mysterious revelation that we have to find in dark places. I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, ‘Seek Me in a waste place.’ I the Lord speak righteousness, declaring things that are upright.” This is characteristic of God. God is a speaking God. He is by nature a revealing God. He doesn’t hide anything, He reveals everything He wants us to know.

So, verse 20, “Gather yourselves and come, draw near together, you fugitives of the nations.” They have no knowledge to carry about their wooden idol and pray to a god who cannot save. This is the height of insanity. “Declare and set forth your case. Step up in My court and defend your God. Who has announced this of old? Who in the past predicted the present? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I the Lord and there is no other God besides Me, a righteous God and the Savior, there is none except Me, turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God and there is no other.” Why? Because He announced things from of old, He long ago declared things that were going to happen.

And then one final text in chapter 46. Again He is talking about comparing Himself with the gods that the people have followed. Verse 5, He says, “To whom would you liken Me and make Me equal and compare Me that we should be alike?”

Then down in verse 9. “Remember the former things long past, for I am God and there is no other. I am God and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning.” Which is to say, at the beginning God tells us the ending. From ancient times, things which have not been done, saying, My purpose will be established and I will accomplish all My good pleasure.

God knows the future because God controls the future. His purpose is being established. The end of verse 11, “I have planned it, I will do it.”

So again, here God stakes His divine integrity and right to be worshiped on the fact that He alone knows the future because He alone determines the future. If He inspired prophecies of Scripture then is the test of God's character, in the inspired prophecy of Scripture is the test of God's truthfulness, veracity, omniscience. And history has verified that. The Old Testament is full of prophecies that God gave, the record of their fulfillment is also in the Old Testament. You can study the Old Testament, God says something's going to happen and it happens. And sometimes specifically naming the nation, the location, the city and even the name of the person centuries before the person is ever born.

And then, of course, in the Old Testament you have prophecies concerning the coming of Messiah, at least 300 of them were fulfilled the first time Jesus came...300. All the way to the cross. I'm in the middle of writing the second volume commentary on the gospel of John and going through the prophecies that are fulfilled on the cross, every tiny detail of Jesus' experience on the cross can be connected directly to an Old Testament passage...every detail fulfilled at the cross, in the resurrection. And there are many more prophecies, Old Testament ones and New Testament ones and some right out of the mouth of Jesus concerning His Second Coming that must be believed because all that God has said has been proven true if those prophecies have met their moment in history. When the Scripture speaks concerning the future, it is accurate...accurate. There have been an endless line of non-believing skeptics who have failed to break the Scripture...it is proven true.

So when you come to Luke 21, the truthfulness of God is at stake...the truthfulness of Christ is at stake. He's talking about the future. He's not talking about it in broad brushes, He's not talking about it in vague generalities, He's talking about it in very specific things. Can we know that what He said there is true? Sure. Back in verse 8 He said in the future, before My return there will be people claiming to be Messiah, claiming that the time of the Kingdom is at hand. What He's introducing here and He says more about it in this speech as Matthew records later, what He's talking about is deception. Remember that? False forms of Christianity will flourish and lead people astray. Did that come to pass? Sure. You can open your eyes, look in any direction today and you can see that there's more false Christianity than true Christianity, there are more false Christians than true Christians, there are more false prophets than true prophets. There is more false gospel than true gospel in the name of Christianity. He said it would happen and it did.

He also spoke of disasters, wars and disturbances, nation rising against nation, kingdom against kingdom. That defines human history, one long saga of conflict at every imaginable level. He talked about great earthquakes, that has happened and continues to escalate, plagues, famines, terrors which would encompass anything that hasn't specifically been named yet, signs in the heavens, hurricanes, tornados, you name it and all the resultant chaos and havoc produced by these kinds of catastrophic natural events. On top of that He talked about persecution, didn't He, starting in verse 12, how that the people who belonged to Christ will be persecuted through human history and some

number as high as 70 million professed Christians have been martyred since Jesus said these words.

Look at history. And we've been doing that in the last number of weeks, and see what He said is exactly the way the world is, exactly. But now as you get to verse 20, it gets much more specific because they're asking the question, if you go back to the query that started all of this in verse 7, what will be the sign when these things are about to take place? What will be the sign? What one thing can we look for? Not this era of events which do not immediately precede His coming because He says that in verse 9. It will not happen immediately after you see these things. They're going to go on for a long time. Here we are 2000 years later. What is the sign? What can we look for and know that this precedes immediately Your return? And He says it in verse 20, here's what you need to know. "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is at hand."

You say, "Well that could describe just about any time in Israel's history. That happened in 70 A.D., does it refer to that?" No. That has happened many, many other times through Israel's history, we went through those last time. But this is talking about something that is at a terminus point that is the final desolation of Jerusalem from every other attack and assault by enemies Israel has recovered, been revived, survived. But there is coming on Israel a final desolation. We know it's final because verse 22 further describes it in these words, "These are the days of vengeance." The Old Testament says, "The vengeance of our God." This is final divine vengeance on an apostate religious system, a revived last days Judaism.

Further, verse 22 says, "For the purpose that all things which are written may be fulfilled." This is the consummation of everything. The language there is talking about the vengeance of God, an Old Testament term that's equal to the day of the Lord, the final eschatological judgment of God that fulfills everything. So this looks forward to some time in the future when Jerusalem will be assaulted and become desolate in a final sense. "In the vengeance of God for the purpose of the fulfillment of all that has been written." We looked at that last time and I told you that Matthew gives us further words of Jesus. Jesus said this event, the surrounding by the armies, will lead to what Daniel called the abomination of desolation...same word, desolation, but it will be triggered by what is called the abomination of desolation. Daniel refers to it three times, chapter 9, chapter 11, and chapter 12.

This event will trigger the worst time the world has ever known, just three and a half years prior to the return of Jesus Christ. Daniel wrote of it, Daniel 12:1, "There will be a time of Tribulation such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time." Our Lord reiterated that in Matthew 24:21 on this same occasion. "For then there will be a great Tribulation such has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will be." Really echoing the words of Daniel. Daniel 12 looks at the end time and before the establishment of the Kingdom at the end there will be a time of horror coming upon the world that Daniel calls a time of Tribulation. Jesus says it's a time of Great Tribulation. And so, this time of Great Tribulation our Lord here is saying is triggered by Jerusalem

being attacked and assaulted.

Now remember what I told you. These are the nations of the world who have gathered in the future under the leadership of the final Antichrist, the beast as he's called in Revelation, and they have gathered around Jerusalem to assault Jerusalem and attack the people who are the Jews. They are such a massive force that they stretch from the city of Jerusalem all the way north, 60, 70 miles, to the valley of Megiddo in the plain of Megiddo where the battle and the conflagration is known as the battle of Armageddon, all these enemies of Israel collected from around the world surrounding Jerusalem. This has a purpose, does it? Yes, Scripture is clear about it.

Zechariah 13, as I pointed out, verses 8 and following says the purpose of this is to bring judgment on the unbelieving people in Israel. The Jews who at that time will not have embraced the gospel, they will be judged. This is God's day of vengeance, even though He uses Antichrist and his forces, world forces, anti-Semitic, anti-Jewish forces, anti-Christian, anti-Christ forces as well. But it will be a judgment on Israel. Zechariah 13 says that two out of every three Jews will be purged. The rebels will be purged out and the rest will be saved.

In Jeremiah 30, verses 1 to 8, Jeremiah says the same thing. There will be a time of purging judgment on Israel but a remnant will be saved. So Antichrist operates only within the framework of God's power. Antichrist, a demon-possessed, Satan-possessed world leader leads the forces of the world to assault Jerusalem. They are trying to thwart the purposes of God because Satan wants to destroy all the Jews so there will be none to enter into the Kingdom which has been prophesied, and Satan knows that prophecy. So he wants to wipe out...it's an effort at genocide, the slaughter of all the Jews, God protects the remnant that belong to Him. In fact, He protects them out in the wilderness for the period of Antichrist's reign of terror for the last three and a half years so that they can, who believe in Him, enter into the Kingdom that long ago was promised to them. So it has the purpose of judging Jewish unbelievers as well as manifesting the true believers in Messiah who are protected and preserved. It is a period in which Antichrist has a reign of terror over the whole world. It is also a period when the gospel is being preached, 144 thousand Jews, 12 thousand from every tribe, have come to faith in Jesus Christ and been preaching the gospel everywhere. The gospel is being preached in the sky by an angel who is flying through the sky in some way that we can't even imagine. People were being saved from every tongue and tribe and people and nation. Revelation tells us during that period of time the greatest revival in human history will take place as God gathers in the final element of His elect people. Many of them, most of them perhaps, will be slaughtered and they are seen in heaven. Those who have come out of the Great Tribulation having had their garments washed but they've been martyred by the Antichrist so he will slaughter believers wherever he can find them throughout the world. He will assault Jerusalem in an effort to create genocide so there are no Jews to go into the Kingdom, thus thwarting the plan of God.

Now Daniel tells us about this event. Let's go to Daniel 12 and I want you to see how specific this is. I just read you verse 1, "There will be a time of Tribulation such has never occurred," the same thing Jesus said in Matthew 24:21. But I want you to go down, just to get a little more of the information, to verse 7 and this is so interesting. "And I heard the man dressed in linen..." There's an angel who appears in this particular vision and this angelic visitor is above the waters of the river, he raises his right hand and his left hand toward heaven and swears by Him who lives forever. Here is an angel who swears that what he's going to say is the truth of God. Here's what he says. "This judgment, back in verse 1, this time of tribulation that has never occurred before, would be for a time times and half a time." It's going to last time...that's one...times...that's two...add one to two, that's three, half a time is three and a half. Specifically this lasts for three and a half years. And as soon as they finish shattering the power of the holy people, all these events will be completed. Just three and a half years in which Antichrist goes after Jews.

I've been to Yan-hash-minah(???), the Museum of Remembrance of the holocaust in Israel, I've been to the really incredible one in Washington D.C., and always they tell you we want the world to remember so it never happens again. So we do remember, but it will happen again...it will happen again under the vengeance of God against those who reject the Messiah. Jews who die today without the Messiah perish in hell, just like Gentiles who die without Christ. And in the future when the divine judgment falls upon the whole world of believers, it will fall upon the Jewish unbelievers as well. It will be a holocaust. And the agent of that purging, according to Zechariah, is going to be this great force led by Antichrist that comes against Israel. God used, by the way, pagan nations in the past as His instruments of judgment, didn't He?, on Israel...the Chaldeans, the Babylonians, the Syrians and others. But it will be a time, times and half a time, says Daniel, three and a half years.

Now just to show you how consistent this is, turn in the book of Revelation for a moment, in the book of Revelation to chapter 11..chapter 11. It starts out in chapter 11 with a vision of a measuring rod, used to measure the Temple of God in the altar and those who worship in it. It seems to be that this is being measured out for a purpose. Verse 2, it says, "It's been given to the nations." The Jews will reestablish their temple. They will reestablish their system of worship, "But it will be measured out, as it were, by God for judgment and given to the nations and the nations that surround Jerusalem that come against it, that time of Tribulation of Daniel 12, those nations are going to overrun Jerusalem, they're going to bring desolation to Jerusalem and Israel and they will tread underfoot the holy city...verse 2...for how long?...42 months," that's three and a half years...three and a half years. Consistent. Verse 3 adds that this will be 1260 days...1260 days is three and a half years when you count 360-day years.

Turn to chapter 12 and verse 6, here's a picture of the woman, the woman is Israel...in this imagery the woman is Israel, she gave birth to the Son who is the Messiah, but the woman who is Israel, "Fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God." The remnant that survive, that belong to God that He's protecting to go into His Kingdom on earth alive, He will preserve. This remnant of

Jews will flee into the wilderness where there's a place prepared by God so that there she might be nourished for one thousand, two-hundred and sixty days, three and a half years. So while the three and half years of terror goes on in Jerusalem, the remnant is protected for the same period of time by God in another place.

Go down to verse 14 and the language is exactly the language of Daniel 12. "Two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman in order that she might fly into the wilderness to her place." This remnant, how are they going to get out of Jerusalem when the Antichrist comes? How they going to flee? The Lord's going to take them to a prepared place, how? Two wings of the great eagle. Is that an angel? Perhaps angelic deliverance. It's going to be a period of supernatural activity so it's not hard to imagine that. But wherever they're going in the place that God's going to protect them in the wilderness, this remnant called "she" because the woman pictures the remnant, is nourished for...here's the language of Daniel...time, times...time one, times two, half a time, three and a half from the presence of the serpent. The serpent is Satan, Satan through the Antichrist goes after Israel. God uses them as an agent of judgment. Two third of the rebels are purged out, judged...one third protected, redeemed, carried by God, protected for the same duration of time as Jerusalem is trampled underfoot.

One more passage that is worthy of our brief look is Revelation 13 and verse 5. All of this, of course, is under the dragon, verse 4, "They worship the dragon who is Satan who gave authority to the beast, who is the Antichrist, and there was given to him, this Antichrist, a mouth, speaking arrogant words and blasphemies and authority to act for 42 months was given to him." Again, the language is crystal clear, the time whether you're talking 42 months, 1260 days, time, times and half a time, it all comes out to three and a half years.

When you see Jerusalem surrounded, when you see the abomination of desolations spoken of by Daniel the prophet which is the Antichrist, goes into the holy place and on the very altar where God is worshiped, sets up an image of himself, according to Revelation 13, according to 2 Thessalonians 3, he causes the whole world to worship him, starting a new religion, the worship of this great world leader who is possessed by Satan, that is the desecration, that is the abomination that launches the desolation against Israel. It is judgment on unbelievers, but it is the purging out of the true believers who are then rescued and kept safe for that period of time so that they can go into the Kingdom. The gospel will continue to be preached during that time by two witnesses, according to chapter 11, who die in front of the whole world, the whole world will see them, it can only happen in a world where there's satellite television. Three and a half days later, symbolically they will rise from the dead in front of everyone and this will launch a revival of salvation in Jerusalem. So it probably happens at that very initial point. People in Jerusalem are going to be terrified and then they're going to give glory to the true God.

Now go back for a moment to Daniel chapter 12 because there's more specificity here. We're talking about the end time, folks, that's clear from verse 9, Daniel 12:9, "Go your way, Daniel, for these words are concealed and sealed up until the end time." This is talking about the end time. "Many will be purged, purified, and refined." We said that, right? There's going to be a real purging, the remnant. "But the wicked will act wickedly and none of the wicked will understand but those who have insight will understand." The people who belong to God, the people who believe the gospel, Jew and Gentile, they're going to understand because the Word is written. They can look at the Bible. The people living at that time will sort it out, the rest will not. "And from the time that the regular sacrifice is abolished," that's the abomination of desolations, the Jews will have a constituted temple, they will have their system going again of sacrifices, the Antichrist comes in. The first three and half years he lets them have that. He makes a pact with them, according to Daniel 9. He's their protector. Then he abominates that, goes in, desecrates the place, sets up an idol of himself...that is the abomination of desolation. This says, "From then to the end there will be 1290 days." Oh, now we have 30 more days...30 more days. Then verse 12 says, "How blessed is he who keeps waiting and attains to the 335 days." There's one verse of hope in the middle of all of this. If you get to the 335 days, you're blessed, which means that all judgment is passed, all devastation is passed, all the activity of Satan and Antichrist is passed, you are now in the Kingdom. So we conclude that there is a 75-day period, 30 to the 1290, 45 more to the 1335 that is laid out for us by the prophet with amazing specificity of transition between the desolation, disaster, the holocaust when Christ comes, remember, at the very end, He massacres the gathered forces of the Antichrist and all the ungodly across the earth are slain. The carnage is a feast for birds described in Revelation chapter 19. The dead bodies will be being buried. There's a 75-day period between the judgment that falls and the cleanup before the inauguration and initiation of the Kingdom of Christ.

You say, "Well then you can know that it's near." Yes. You can't know the day or the hour, remember Jesus said that. Nobody knows the day or the hour. But if you're alive at that time and you will be among those who understand and you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies and the abomination of desolation and you turn on your television and you see the two witnesses die and rise again, you'll know where you are. You may not know the day or the hour that He comes but you will know that His coming is near. And that is indicated to us in this very passage in Luke as you look a little later in chapter 21 where Jesus says in verse 28, "When these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads because your redemption is drawing near." The people alive then will know that it is near. Some will repent. Some will believe the gospel from every tongue, tribe, people and nation. There will be a great revival among the Jews, great repentance. A third of them will be saved and protected and cared for. Some believing Jews, perhaps martyred, believing Gentiles massacred by the Antichrist all around the world and they end up in heaven. Once this happens, you know the end is very near.

That's not the only sign. Verse 25 says, "There will be signs in sun, and moon, and stars and upon the earth, dismay among nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting

from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world for the powers of the heavens will be shaken." This is just what starts it. And then all heaven and earth begin to be devastated before the eyes of the watching world.

So, the people alive at that time are going to know when the coming of Christ is near. There's grace in that. That's the epitome of a warning system, isn't it? Talk about code red, or orange, or whatever. This is a very gracious warning to the people living at that time and the gospel will be preached. Still many will not believe, they will curse God. Many will believe and be saved and enter into the Kingdom. For us, however, we believe that Scripture teaches a pre-Tribulation Rapture, and I'm not making it up...I'm not making it up. Three times in the New Testament there's an event mentioned...John 14, 1 Corinthians 15, 1 Thessalonians 4, that is called the catching away of the church. There's no judgment in any of those three passages. There's no description of wrath or vengeance. It simply talks about believers that are alive being taken to heaven and believers that are dead, their spirits already with the Lord, receiving glorified bodies coming out of the grave and joining with their glorified spirits...this is the Rapture, the dead in Christ rise first, the rest caught into heaven. This event has nothing of judgment connected to it in any of the passages where it's described. It's a non-judgmental event. I believe the Bible is saying to us that before all of this breaks out on earth, the Lord gathers His church.

Revelation 3:10 is testimony to this. Revelation 3:10, speaking to the church, particularly the church in Philadelphia, but all these letters are for all churches, verse 10, this is our Lord speaking again. He says, "Because you have kept the Word of My steadfastness, or perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world to test those who dwell upon the earth." This is not some localized test. What is this hour of testing that is going to come on the whole world? It's the time of Tribulation. And it begins to be discussed immediately after this...as immediately in chapter 4, you go to heaven and the divine judgment machinery of God starts to move. You will be kept from that hour, tereo ek, kept out, kept out, which again fits the picture of the church being gathered together.

In Daniel's prophecy of the history of Israel, he prophesied 70 weeks, 70 times seven years. The first 69 ran from the decree of Artaxerxes untill the triumphal entry of Jesus. There's one week left, one week of Israel's history. The church wasn't in the first 69, the church is not going to be in the seventieth. That's when God redeems Israel then uses them to do what He's always wanted them to do, become a means by which His testimony is given to the world. The church is a unique group caught up and out before god finishes His work with Israel. However, when we all come to the New Jerusalem, the final state, we'll all be one bride with Christ. And that's a subject that we'll talk further about, the Rapture of the church.

Now one closing thought or two. What does this say to us? Turn to 2 Peter 3 for a moment. There are just some exhortations as you think about the end time, verse 11, 2 Peter 3, "Since all these things

are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness?" You certainly don't want to get caught in the destruction, right? So what kind of people should you be now that you know this is going to happen? You know the day of the Lord, the day of judgment is going to come like a thief. The heavens are going to pass away with a roar. Elements melt with fervor heat. The earth and the works are going to be burned up. You know that. Verse 12, "The heavens are going to be destroyed by burning the elements again, melt with intense heat." Verse 14, "Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found in Him in peace, spotless and blameless." The only way you can be in peace, spotless and blameless, is to be in Christ.

And then verse 16, "Don't get led astray to your own destruction. Be on guard," verse 17, "don't be carried away by the error of unprincipled men falling from your steadfastness, but grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen." Since we know the end, we know exactly what it's going to involve, now is the time to make sure that you've settled your eternity. You're pursuing holiness and godliness, that you're pursuing a relationship of peace with God in which His righteousness is granted to you so that you're spotless and blameless, in which you're not being deceived about the future. And there's so many liars out there and deceivers, telling people wonderful stories of the blissful future that is not true. Who knows how long till all of this launches? The Rapture of the church could happen at any moment, and then it begins. We need to be growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, proclaiming the gospel, pursuing godliness that we might be sure that we'll be among those caught up before this all begins.

And what do we do before that seven-year period before we come back with Him? The Marriage Supper of the Lamb, we have a celebration with our Christ and we go to the Bema Seat judgment, receive rewards for what we've done for Him. We'll be enjoying the bliss of heavenly reward and fellowship with Christ while the earth is being devastated. So make sure you're ready for this, to be caught away with the saints to be with the Lord.

Father, we thank You for this future look and even though it's limited, as far as what we can convey, it's clear. We know You stake Your reputation on it. Your integrity is bound up with the accuracy of every prophecy so it will be the way You said it will be, exactly as You said. And just as Your Word has always been proven to be true and stood the test of all the assaults of all the skeptics at every level, it will continue to and we will spend forever and ever in Your presence in the glory of heaven, saying that the end was exactly what You said it would be. Since it is sure and true, because You know it and You know it because this is how You designed it, how important it is, Lord, that we escape wrath and escape judgment and come to Christ and to salvation and forgiveness and blessing and heaven. May that be the experience of those who are here now who have not yet come to Christ, not by works, as we read earlier, but by trusting in Jesus Christ and His cross and resurrection. May we believe that our salvation is by faith in Him alone and not by any works of our own and then we can be at peace and spotless and blameless before You because we are forgiven for Christ has paid

the penalty for our sins. May sinners put their trust in Him, we pray. Amen.

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