

The Time of Jacob's Trouble

Anti-Semitism at its Worst

Matt. 24:15-28

Intro. Having lived a few years, I don't think many of us expect this new day to be much different than yesterday or the days before that. But I'd bet you didn't realize how unique this day is. Feb. 26 is *National Pistachio Day*. And you probably failed to acknowledge the fact that yesterday was *National Clam Chowder Day*. Actually, some special interest group has claimed each day on the calendar as their very own. In fact, tomorrow is *National Polar Bear Day* as well as *National Strawberry Day*. So get with it friends! Get a mug or a tee shirt. Celebrate this day...eat pistachios!

In **Matt. 24, 25** Jesus describes a day that belongs to God...a day when He will break silence and intervene directly in the course of human affairs. More than just a single 24 hour day, it's a seven year period called **the Day of the Lord**. It's a period of time when God punishes the world for its evil and resumes His plan and purposes for Israel. It's a day to be dreaded by the unbeliever.

The British journalist, William Ewer is quoted as saying, "*How odd of God to choose the Jews.*" Odd or not, the Jews are God's chosen people and **the apple of His eye. (Deut. 32:10)** Like no other nation, Israel is God ordained and God-protected. On top of that, they have a glorious God-promised destiny. Yet no people group has suffered more than the Jews. The Bible explains why that is. First, we have to acknowledge that much of their suffering has been self-inflicted and the result of divine chastisement. Israel has experienced both the blessings that accompany faith and obedience and the cursings that accompany unbelief and disobedience. **Deut. 28, 30** has come to pass.

But the most insidious source of Israel's suffering is Satanic. Ever since God first made an eternal covenant with Abraham, Satan has sought to destroy this people group. If Satan could succeed in destroying God's chosen people, he would have brought a hard stop to God's redemptive plan for mankind...Because, as Jesus said in **Jn. 4:22** - "**...salvation is from the Jews.**"

Having failed at every turn Satan has continued his attempts to destroy the Jewish people. Millions were slaughtered in the Roman invasion of 70 AD. The rest were taken captive as slaves or scattered among the nations. Hundreds of thousands more were put to death during the Crusades. In the 20th century, 150,000 Jews were killed in the pogroms of Russia and 6 million more were systematically exterminated by the Nazis. Since Satan failed to prevent the Messiah's first coming, his present ambition is to prevent His second coming. He is determined to prevent Israel's redemption and the divine rule King Jesus will establish when He returns. This is the Bible's explanation for Anti-Semitism and why we should expect international hostility to increase as we near the time of Christ's return.

This morning we come to a section of **Matt. 24** the OT refers to as **the Time of Jacob's Trouble**. Here Jesus prophesies a time when Anti-Semitism will come to a head. After Jesus prophesied the destruction of their Temple, the apostles asked Jesus **when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age? - 24:3** Rather than providing them with a date, (which would have precluded a life of faith) Jesus looked beyond the Temple's destruction to describe a future period of trouble when God's plan for Israel would resume and Christ will return.

Last time we considered **vs. 4-14** and the punishments poured out during the first half of the Tribulation. Jesus referred to these punishments as the **beginning of birth pains. (v. 8)** We saw how these prophecies coincide perfectly with other prophecies in both testaments and especially with the six seal judgments of **Rev. 6**. But as we've been saying, "*this is not our mail.*" The Church is not in view anywhere in **Matt. 24** or **25**, nor is the Church even mentioned in **Rev. 6-19**. According to Christ's promise, all who believe and are saved in the present Church Age will be resurrected or raptured before the Tribulation begins. Our destiny is not God's wrath, to be safe with Jesus.

I want you to make a note of something that is very helpful in understanding this section of **Matt. 24**. Throughout this chapter the pronouns **you** and **your** appear 12x's. 3x's those addressed by these pronouns are called **the elect** or **His elect** and once they're referred to as **this generation**. This people group is the generation of God-fearing Jews who will be alive during this terrible period that leads to Christ's return. This is "their mail." In **v.15** Jesus said, **Let the reader understand**. In other words, these prophecies and special instructions were written for a future time when this people group would read and understand God's Word. To this same group Jesus said in **v. 25 - See, I have told you ahead of time**. Like a time capsule to be opened at a certain time / by a certain group / for a certain purpose...Jesus gave these instructions for His people living in the Tribulation. He did this as yet another evidence of His love for this believing remnant of elect or chosen people. It's fascinating to consider how important these chapters will be for those who find themselves in the midst of these terrible judgments. Among other things, they will read,...**Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. - v.4 / he who stands firm to the end will be saved - v.14 / Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. - v.35 / and you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. - v.44** **Matt. 24**, along with other Bible prophecies, will quite literally be their survival handbook!

So let's turn our attention to **vs. 15-28**. In these verses I've identified 5 sections. Each section has some relation to time. These time notations are indicated either by the word **time** or by the adverbs **when** and **then**. Now remember, Jesus is answering the disciple's question, **when will this happen and what will be the sign of the end of the age? - vs. 3**

1. **A time-marker: temple desolation – v. 15 - "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel--let the reader understand—** Here Jesus referred to a prophecy given to Daniel 600 years before Jesus was born. God spoke to Daniel by way of an angelic messenger. With remarkable precision, he was given an outline of things to come as they pertain to His people, Israel and their holy city, Jerusalem. Here in **Matt. 24:15**, Jesus referred to the key parts of this prophetic outline.

Let's read **Dan. 9:24-27** one verse at a time. **v. 24 - "Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy.** (Now if you're reading or hearing these verses for the first time you probably won't get it the first time and maybe not the second.) Remember we talked about Cliff Notes a few weeks ago? This morning I'm going to give you a *Cliff Notes Version* of these verses in **Dan. 9**. In **v. 27** Daniel was told that **seventy sevens** or **490 years** were decreed by God to bring Israel into God's promised blessing under the rule of their Messiah. Just as President Trump has a *100 day plan for America*, God has a *490 year plan for Israel*. And, we can be sure of this one thing...God's plan will come to pass!

In **v. 25**, Daniel was given a starting point for this **490 year** period. **v. 25 - "Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble.** The back story is this...because of unbelief and disobedience to God's commands the Jews were taken into captivity in Babylon. Daniel was among them. Their city and Solomon's temple lay in ruins. The **490 year plan** is said to begin when a decree was issued allowing the Jews to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. This date is fixed both biblically and historically. The decree was issued in 445 BC by King Artaxerxes. (**Neh. 2:5-6**) So the clock started.

Daniel was also told that from the issuing of the decree **until the Anointed One**, or the coming of Jesus, their Messiah...there would be **seven sevens and sixty-two sevens**. Now I'm no math guy, but **7 sevens plus 62 sevens equals 69 sevens** or **483 years**. And you'll never guess what!

Reliable sources have calculated that exactly 483 years to the day elapsed from the decree of Artaxerxes in 445 BC until Jesus made His Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Now remember, the prophecy given to Daniel was given and written down 600 years before Jesus came...and God, the author of prophecy, nailed it! Jesus came exactly when God said He would.

v. 26 says, **After the sixty-two 'sevens,'** (or after the 483 years) **the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing.** (This too is exactly what happened. Jesus was rejected and crucified...the **Anointed One** was **cut off**) The verse goes on...**The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary.** (This was fulfilled by the Roman conquest in 70 AD) The prophecy continues...**The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. The end** spoken of here is the culmination of God's plan for Israel. It's the end time prophesied in **v. 24** when God brings to pass the six accomplishments necessary to Israel's redemption and restoration under their Messiah. Since God gets it right every time, the Jews have suffered continuous hardship and war. This will continue **until the end** when the same Jesus they rejected returns. Now we come to the pivotal verse Jesus referred to in **Matt. 24:15.**

v. 27 - He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' **In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him."** The first question is this...WHO is this unnamed person referred to only as **He**? **He** is the same man called **the ruler who will come** in **v. 26**. The people who destroyed **the city and the sanctuary** were Romans...we know this from history. Since this coming ruler will be related to the people who destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple (the Romans) many believe this man is the coming AntiChrist who relates to Rome by rising out of Europe and territory once occupied by the Roman Empire.

The second question revolves around WHAT **he**, the coming **ruler** will do. First, **he will confirm a covenant with many for one seven.** In other words, **he** will establish some sort of multi-national treaty or peace accord that will be drawn up for **one seven** or a 7 year term. (not unusual...the US now has a 10 year deal with Iran.) Remember, the focus is **your people**...Daniel's people (**v. 24**) or Israel. Many believe this treaty will allow Israel to build their Temple and re-establish the sacrificial worship of Judaism, since both are clearly in existence and happening according to the rest of **v. 27.**

We identified the **483 years** as years fulfilled in history past. But Daniel was told that God's plan for His people involves a total of exactly **490 yrs.** Here in **v. 27** we find the missing 7 yrs. But here's the cool thing Daniel knew nothing about...Between the 483 years and the remaining 7 yrs. God would do something remarkable. Through the crucified and risen Jesus, He would build His Church. This gap represents the Church Age we're currently living in. Remember, the NT labels the Church a **mystery** or something not previously revealed to or known by God's people. The remaining **seven**, or seven year period is the Tribulation Jesus was talking about in **Matt. 24** and fleshed out in **Rev. 6-19.** It begins when some ruler out of territory once occupied by the Roman Empire makes a seven yr. peace accord with Israel. King Artaxerxes started the clock and the AntiChrist will restart it.

But this unnamed **ruler** will do something else. In the **middle of the seven** (or this seven yr. period) he will **put an end to sacrifice and offering.** What this ruler agreed to and Israel trusted him for 3 ½ years earlier, he now disallows. But **he** will do something even more detestable than that. The verse says **he will set up** (in the Jewish Temple) **an abomination that causes desolation.** This is the event and the sign Jesus referred to in **Matt. 24:15.** Adding further detail, Paul spoke of this in **II Thess. 2:3, 4 - Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.**

More details are given in **Rev.13**, but our clock says “no way Hosea.” As we piece together these prophecies...this is what we learn...In the middle of the 7 year Tribulation, the AntiChrist will break a peace accord he previously made. He will force Israel to discontinue their worship. In the place dedicated to God, he will set up an idol of himself up while making the bold claim that he is the God everyone must worship. By this act, he commits what Daniel and Jesus call, **abomination that causes desolation**. He desecrates the newly constructed Jewish Temple and its holy place.

Did you hang with me through that explanation? Nod “yes” or “no.” I’ve provided a chart on the back of the sermon notes to help you grasp it...but once again, very few get it the first time around. The point in **Matt. 24** is that this abominable act is a time-marker. It’s a signal for anyone in the Tribulation who reads and believes God’s Word. It’s applies especially to any God fearing Jew living in Israel at this time. To those who recognize this abomination, the following instructions are given: It is...

2. A time to flee without delay - vs. 16-20 - then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. Like the precautions Jesus gave regarding the coming invasion by the Roman army, Jesus tells those living in Judea in the time of the Tribulation to flee when they hear their Temple has been desecrated. This event is the signal...not to hide / not to hunker down / prepare to fight / or even aggressively evangelize. When this sign appears, they are to flee without a moment’s delay. Grab your loved ones but take nothing else with you!

Rev. 12 tells this whole traumatic story as though it already happened. **v. 6** says, **The woman** (identified as Israel in earlier verses) **fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.** (If you do the math, **1260 days** is precisely 3 ½ years. PS. a prophetic yr. has 360 days, not 365) Many believe the destination of these refugees is the region of Bozrah and the fortified city of Petra in southern Jordan. To get there, these refugees will have to cross mountains. The terrain will be extremely difficult for pregnant woman and nursing mothers. It will be extra hazardous if it happens in the winter. If that isn’t enough, Jewish law prohibits travel on the Sabbath. So Jesus told them how to pray in advance of this abomination. He said take nothing, because God will take care of you...perhaps the same way He took care of His people in the wilderness centuries earlier. Water, manna and quail may once again be the items on their menu.

Rev. 12:13-15 says, **When the dragon (Satan) saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman (Israel) who had given birth to the male child. (Jesus) The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach.** (again, 3 ½ years) **Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent.** (Here Satan again attempts to destroy God’s people and frustrate God’s kingdom plan) **But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.** (sounds like the great earthquake of **Rev. 6:12**.) **Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring--those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.** (the rest of **her offspring** are believing Jews and Gentiles who don’t flee). But Satan is foiled again. Israel’s God wins and a remnant of His elect people are spared.

3. A time of unequalled distress – vs. 21, 22 - For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now--and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.

Not only will the AntiChrist Israel trusted turn against them...not only will Satan try to destroy those who flee...but at this same time the nations of the world will surround Jerusalem to destroy it.

Zech. 14:1-5 - A day of the LORD is coming when your plunder will be divided among you. I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city. By the Bible's definition this is **the Time of Jacob's trouble** ...a time of unequalled **distress** for the Jewish people. Mark's Gospel has it this way...**those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now--and never to be equaled again.** - **Mk.13:19** Jeremiah spoke of this day in **Jer.30:7 - How awful that day will be! None will be like it. It will be a time of trouble for Jacob, but he will be saved out of it.** Daniel was also given to see this terrible day. **Dan.12:1 - "At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people--everyone whose name is found written in the book--will be delivered.** Notice that these prophecies end with deliverance.

In **v. 22** Jesus said, **If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.** The fact that these days are **cut short** doesn't mean that at that time God will change His plan from a 3 1/2 year / 1260 day duration to something shorter. It means that God has already predetermined that this period of time would not last indefinitely. He has limited and shortened it to prevent total annihilation. He has done this **for the sake of the elect.** This is the first time the phrase **for the elect** appears in the NT. It appears a total of 6 other times in Matthew, Mark, Romans and Paul's letters to Timothy. Even though our finite minds can't fully grasp or explain the apparent contradiction between the sovereignty of God and the freewill of man, the Bible teaches both. Here it seems clear that just as God chose and called Abraham, the Hebrews, the land, and Jerusalem, God has chosen a remnant to be saved in the Tribulation. I know this sounds terribly Calvinistic to some who lean the other way. But I'm just repeating what the Bible says. **Eph. 1:4 - For He (God) chose us in Him (Christ) before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.** And to take this a step further, I believe this...*If God hadn't chosen some, none would have chosen Him.* You see **Rom. 3:10, 11** says, **As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.**

The point of what Jesus said in **vs. 21, 22** is this...When the AntiChrist breaks his covenant and commits **the abomination of desolation**...it's time to believe Jesus and run...it's time to turn to the Lord who is the only One who can protect them. The ruler Israel trusted will let them down and turn against them. Listen to what Isaiah wrote about that day. **In that day the remnant of Israel, the survivors of the house of Jacob, will no longer rely on him who struck them down but will truly rely on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel. A remnant will return, a remnant of Jacob will return to the Mighty God. Though your people, O Israel, be like the sand by the sea, only a remnant will return. Destruction has been decreed, overwhelming and righteous. The Lord, the LORD Almighty, will carry out the destruction decreed upon the whole land.** - **Isa.10:20-23**

4. A time for careful discernment – vs. 23-26 - At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect--if that were possible. See, I have told you ahead of time. "So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. The phrase **at that time** shows that Jesus was still talking about the second half of the Tribulation...the second 3 1/2 years. The **birth pains** are now eclipsed by hard labor. Again, Jesus warns this group of God-fearing people to beware of **false Christs** and **false prophets**. This blitzkrieg of deception will be Satan's final attempt to prevent people from turning to Christ so they might be saved. Like the seductive voice of Tokyo Rose during WW II, Satan will try his best to lure people away from the truth.

John MacArthur writes, “*Those who heed Jesus’ advice to flee into the mountains and are protected by God...will also be especially vulnerable to false teaching and promises. Having left their homes with only the clothes on their backs, they will not have the least security of material possessions. Many of them will have left families and friends behind and will be strangers to each other.*” As it was at the time of the Exodus, false prophets will infiltrate the ranks of those who flee. Satan will stage many fakers. He will give them powers to replicate the signs and miracles Jesus performed. The refugees and all who read these words are urged to beware and to practice careful discernment. In that day the only reliable source of truth will be the Word of God. Come to think of it...the same is true today! But these particular instructions from Jesus will be invaluable and essential to survival and salvation. Christian friend, do you still believe that every word from God is true, pure and right?

Here’s that phrase again...**the elect**. Notice what Jesus said about a false Christ deceiving **the elect** ...He said, **if that were possible**. Here’s the take away from **v. 24**...It’s not possible to deceive **the elect!** Abraham Lincoln said, “*You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time.*” But the fact is...when it comes to knowing who the true Christ is, **the elect** cannot be fooled. In **Jn. 10:4, 5** Jesus said, **When He** (that is, Jesus the good shepherd) **has brought out all His own, He goes on ahead of them, and His sheep follow Him because they know His voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.**”

5. A time-marker: visual distinction – vs. 27-28 - For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather. In this section, Jesus provides His readers with two visual analogies that help distinguish His second coming from anyone who might deceive them. They asked what will be **the sign of your coming and end of the age**. Here Jesus continues to answer their question. He tells them His coming will be like a flash of lightning. In other words, unlike His first coming, His second coming won’t be obscure and witnessed only by a few. The Bible says every eye will see Him. **Rev. 1:7 - Look, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.** Nor will Christ’s coming stretch over a long period of time. Instead, His coming will be sudden, universally witnessed and unmistakably glorious...like a flash of lightning. That’s how it will be.

Now interpreters go crazy spiritualizing **v.28**. But, I submit to you, though it’s not easy, it’s not as hard as they’re making it. Jesus said, **Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.** I think the best interpretation is the simplest one. **v.28** was an ancient saying. Just think about it... what do you expect to find in the middle of a wake of vultures? Answer...some dead creature. Vultures are scavengers. They feed on the carcasses of other dead animals. The meaning of the analogy is this... *when you see the one, you expect the other*. With the same intended meaning Jesus could have said, *Wherever there’s a lollipop on a sidewalk, there ants will gather*. His meaning was, when you see the signs, expect My return. He used the same logic in the parable of the fig tree in **v. 32**. *When the leaves appear, summer is near*. When taken together, the signs Jesus listed in this chapter point to only one thing...His return. These words that sound strange to us were given to remind His readers His return will be unmistakable. If somebody says, “*He’s over here or out in the desert*”...don’t believe it. If someone says, “*He’s here in the inner rooms,*” forget about it. There will be fake news and probably reports of a fake return. But Jesus urges His people to not be deceived. Instead, they are to believe His words, look for the signs He prophesied, and be ready!

And so, here we are at the same conclusion we reached last Sunday. Though this isn’t our mail, Jesus said, watch and be ready. Having lived a while, we naturally tend to think tomorrow will be exactly like today. But that isn’t necessarily true. The Day of the Lord is coming. Because these signs seem so near and we know the rapture comes first...are you ready?

Do you know your sins are forgiven? Don't worry about whether you're elect or not...that's God's business. Just trust Jesus and live for Him. Sometime along your spiritual journey you'll discover that God in love and grace God chose you. Though times are perilous and the Day of the Lord is coming, be thankful this isn't it. We are living in a time Jesus described as **the year of the Lord's favor**. Now is the season when His grace is outpoured, so celebrate. Get a mug, wear a tee shirt...tell those around you that God loves them and gave His Son to save them.