

GREAT TRIBULATION, GREAT REDEMPTION

Matthew 24:15-22

In our passage today, Jesus is still answering His disciples' questions about the signs of His coming and of the end of the age. We've already seen that life on earth will get progressively worse as the end of time approaches, but that the one who endures in faith through all of that will be saved.

In Matthew 24:15 Jesus puts His holy finger on perhaps the most significant sign of all. In fact, it's the last sign before His second coming and the end of the age. He says,

15 “Therefore when you see
the **ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION**
which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet,
standing in the holy place” (let the reader understand)
(**Matthew 24:15, 2022 LSB**)

“Let the reader understand” is Matthew's comment. What he means is that he is not going to explain the reference; it's up to us to understand Jesus' meaning.

Here's our plan for this morning.

We are going to turn to Daniel 9 to make sure we understand what the abomination of desolation is. Then we'll return to Matthew 24, where Jesus commands those who witness the abomination of desolation to flee for their lives.

We'll see that the abomination of desolation heralds the worst tribulation the world will ever know. But we'll also see that it precedes the greatest redemption ever seen in human history.

Are you ready? Let's pray!

LET THE READER UNDERSTAND

Matthew 24:15

15 “Therefore when you see the **ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION** which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand)...”
(Matthew 24:15, 2022 LSB)

Matthew urges us, “let the reader understand,” so let’s turn to Daniel 9 and try to understand.

I would outline Daniel 9 this way.

- Daniel 9:1-2 - The setting.
- Daniel 9:3-16 - Daniel’s confession on behalf of Israel.
- Daniel 9:17-19 - Daniel’s appeal to Yahweh for mercy.
- Daniel 9:20-23 - Gabriel arrives with Yahweh’s answer.
- Daniel 9:24-27 - Countdown to Redemption.

As the chapter opens, Daniel explains that, while reading the prophet Jeremiah, he realized that the 70 years appointed for Israel’s captivity in Babylon were complete. So he turns to Yahweh and offers up one of the richest prayers of confession to be found in Scripture. He closes his prayer with an appeal for mercy, and what an appeal it is:

19 “O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive!
O Lord, give heed and take action!
For Your own sake, O my God, do not delay,
because Your city and Your people are called by Your name.”
(Daniel 9:19, 2022 LSB)

Yahweh sent the angel Gabriel with Yahweh’s answer to Daniel’s plea. It was certainly an encouraging answer; Israel will be redeemed. But it might have also been disappointing; Israel’s redemption is not going to happen overnight. Instead, Gabriel reveals Yahweh’s countdown for Israel’s redemption.

We will look at Daniel 9:24-27, but I want to explain something first. Gabriel uses the word “weeks” several times. The Hebrew word “week” is closely related to the word “seven.” It was typically used to describe a usual week of seven days, but that depended on the context. In the verses before us, the sense is not seven *days* but seven *years*.

Let’s read Daniel 9:24-27.

24 “Seventy weeks [490 years] have been determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Holy of Holies.

25 So you are to know and have insight that from the going out of a word to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there will be seven weeks [49 years] and sixty-two weeks [434 years]; it will be restored and rebuilt, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress.

26 Then after the sixty-two weeks [434 years] the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary.

And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are decreed.

27 And he [**the prince who is to come**] will make a firm covenant with the many

for one week [seven years], but in the middle of the week [three and a half years] he will make sacrifice and grain offering cease;

and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, [this is the phrase referenced by Jesus in Matthew 24:15]

even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.” (Daniel 9:24–27, 2022 LSB)

So, God has set a period of 490 years in which He will accomplish six purposes. These will not be temporary fixes. By the time they are finished, Israel will be permanently redeemed and restored.

1. He will finish the transgression of Israel; that is, their rebellion.
2. He will make an end of sin; sin itself will be no more.
3. He will make atonement for iniquity; their sin will be gone for all time.
4. He will bring in everlasting righteousness; they will never sin again.
5. He will seal up (that is, complete) vision and prophecy; the Word of God will be completely fulfilled.
6. He will anoint the Holy of Holies; the glory of Yahweh left the Temple at the start of the captivity; it will one day return never to leave again.

Let's talk about God's countdown. The Lord doesn't place these events on a calendar but rather treats them as their own sequence of events. I think we can use a NASA countdown as a comparison.

For instance, the Space Shuttle had a 43-hour countdown. Several days before the scheduled launch, the flight director would announce "T minus 43 hours and counting," and the clock would begin running. Now, several hours later there would be an automatic hold, and the flight director would announce, "T minus 27 hours and holding." That hold typically lasted for four hours. When those four hours had passed, how much time remained on the countdown clock? That's right - 27 hours. The flight director would announce, "T minus 27 hours and counting," and the clock would resume. More holds would take place. In the end, the Space Shuttle launch had a 43-hour countdown but took at least 65 hours to accomplish, and sometimes much more.

I believe Gabriel gave Daniel God's countdown for Israel. The clock would begin running when the order came to restore and rebuild Israel. When Artaxerxes gave that order God announced, "T minus 490 years and counting." 483 years went by without stopping. But then Messiah the Prince, Jesus Christ, entered Jerusalem and was crucified, and the Lord announced, "T minus seven years and *holding*."

God's countdown for Israel is still holding. There are still seven years on that clock. When "the prince who is to come" arrives – the New Testament calls him the Antichrist – and makes a firm covenant with many, the clock will resume: "T minus seven years and counting." Those final seven years are what we know as the tribulation. Halfway through those seven years, the Antichrist will break his covenant with Israel and put an end to the sacrifices that Israel had resumed. "On the wing of abominations" – the idea is being covered with or overshadowed by abominations – would come one who will make the holy place desolate. He will put in place for the second half of the tribulation, which we call the *great* tribulation. He will continue for three-and-a-half years until complete destruction is poured out upon him, which will take place at the Second Coming of Christ.

Those final three-and-a-half years will be the great tribulation, the darkest time ever known in human history. They will be inaugurated by the abomination of desolation. And that brings us back to Matthew 24:15.

ACTION POINT: FLEE!

Matthew 24:15-20

Now, back to Matthew 24. Jesus says,

15 "Therefore when you see the **ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION** which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), [**And we have a better understanding now**]

16 then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.

17 Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house.

18 And whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his garment.

19 But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!

20 But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath."

(Matthew 24:15–20, 2022 LSB)

When those in Judea and Jerusalem witness the Antichrist defiling the Temple, they are to run for their lives! They must not stop for any reason. It will be utterly horrific for pregnant women and nursing mothers. The people should pray that it doesn't occur in the winter or on the Sabbath.

What's the rush? Why the woes? Why such a prayer?

Remember, God's countdown is on hold right now. We are at T minus 7 years and holding. Sure, there are wars and rumors of wars, turmoil of all kinds, and natural disasters of all kinds. They ebb and flow. Some years are better and some are worse. There's plenty of time. As the old song says, "The sun will come out tomorrow; bet your bottom dollar that tomorrow there'll be sun."

But when the Antichrist makes his firm covenant with many, the countdown will resume, and it won't stop until Jesus Christ returns. When the man clothed with abomination makes the Temple desolate, a persecution of Israel will begin that will make the holocaust look like a drop in the ocean. Time will not pause. God will not pause the countdown to allow someone to return home or to give pregnant and nursing women time to get away. He won't pause the countdown until the Sabbath is over or the weather is better.

THE GREATEST TRIBULATION

Matthew 24:21-22

21 "For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will.

22 And unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short."

(Matthew 24:21–22, 2022 LSB)

Now, as far as I believe from Scripture, the church will be removed from the earth by the Lord before the tribulation begins. Yahweh's focus will be on the redemption and restoration of Israel. He will accomplish that by Himself, without the help of anyone. His wrath will be poured out on the wicked, and His mercy will be poured out on Israel, but Israel will face the rage of Satan. The devil will try to destroy the nation of Israel before God's redemption is accomplished.

In Scripture, we often see the suffering of God's people intensify before their deliverance. The Egyptians didn't relieve the pressure on Israel as Moses appealed to Pharaoh; they increased the pressures tremendously, doubling what was required of the Hebrews but cutting their materials in half.

Now, don't think that God would like to stop that persecution but will be powerless. Nothing is impossible for God. All things are firmly in His control. He never struggles to accomplish anything. He created all things in six days so that we would be able to see it take place in Scripture, not because He couldn't do it faster. Even during the worst of the great tribulation, the devil himself will be nothing more than an instrument in God's hands.

No, Yahweh will allow Israel to stand alone and friendless in the world so that He alone receives the glory for their redemption and deliverance. Not a single nation will stand with them, not even the United States if the United States even exists at that point. Israel will stand by herself against the wall, on the gallows, on the funeral pyre, and the Antichrist will control the firing squad, the hangman's noose, the flaming torch. And at the very moment the trigger begins to be squeezed, the trap door begins to open, and the pyre begins to burn, Jesus Christ will return!

THE GREATEST REDEMPTION

Deuteronomy 30:1-10

11 Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse,
and He who sits on it is called Faithful and True,
and in righteousness He judges and wages war.

12 His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems;

having a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself,
13 and being clothed with a garment dipped in blood,
His name is also called The Word of God.

14 And the armies which are in heaven,
clothed in fine linen, white and clean,
were following Him on white horses.

15 And from His mouth comes a sharp sword,
so that with it He may **STRIKE DOWN THE NATIONS**,
and He will **RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON**;
and **HE TREADS THE WINE PRESS**
OF THE WRATH OF THE RAGE OF GOD, THE ALMIGHTY.

16 And He has on His garment and on His thigh a name written,
“**KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.**”

(Revelation 19:11–16, 2022 LSB)

God’s purposes, announced by Gabriel to Daniel, will be achieved. Israel’s transgression will be finished. Sin will be ended. Her iniquity will be atoned for. Everlasting righteousness will enter in. Scripture will be fulfilled. And the Lord will anoint the Holy of Holies with His own presence, taking His throne there in Jerusalem.

There will never be a greater tribulation than that at the end of the age. But there will never be a greater redemption than that which takes place at Christ’s return. No revival in human history will even compare. God promises in Deuteronomy 30 that EVERYTHING that He has promised will come to pass.

Turn there with me. As a reminder, Deuteronomy 30 is still the Old Covenant, but it strongly hints at the New Covenant. In Deuteronomy 28-29 Yahweh promises Israel blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience.

Deuteronomy 30:1 says that everything God promised in those previous chapters will come to pass:

1 “So it will be, when all of these things have come upon you,
the blessing and the curse which I have set before you ...”

(Deuteronomy 30:1, 2022 LSB)

“When all of these things have come upon you” is where Israel is right now. She has already received every blessing of the Old Covenant; there aren't any left. Every curse of the Old Covenant has been poured out on her, and she remains under those curses today.

But there are Scriptures yet to be fulfilled, promises which are not dependent upon Israel's obedience to the Old Covenant but the promises God made in the new Covenant. He hints at them in Deuteronomy 30.

Yahweh will return them from their captivity and return compassion to them. He speaks of them being captive “in all the nations,” and “all the peoples,” and “to the ends of the sky.” This isn't a single captivity in a single place, but a massive dispersion of the people of Israel around the world.

He will gather them again and bring them back to the land of their fathers. They will possess it, and prosper, and multiply as never before. But more, Yahweh is going to circumcise their heart and the heart of their children, so that they love Yahweh their God with all their heart and with all their soul, so that they may LIVE!

This is not casual living, every-day living, mundane living. This is living with a capital L, eternal life. It is the New Covenant promised in the Old Covenant. All the curses inflicted on Israel will be inflicted on their enemies, and every blessing of God for the nation will be fulfilled to the uttermost. The greatest tribulation ever will, with the return of Jesus Christ, become the greatest redemption ever!

BRINGING IT HOME

We certainly see the darkness in Matthew 24, don't we? The abomination of desolation begins the worst time of tribulation and hardship Israel and the rest of the world have ever seen. It will build, Jesus says, until no one would be left alive, except that God will cut those days short. These are not the days of His judgment; that will be fully poured out with exact justice. No, these are the days of Satan's hatred of Israel being poured out through the Antichrist and his followers.

And just when the darkness has reached its peak, when no one will survive, when no glimmer of light can even be imagined, Jesus Christ will return in glory, and the world will enter the most glorious time in the history of mortal man. Israel will look on Him whom they have pierced and mourn for Him. They will say, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” Every living Jew will be converted, mourning for their sins and rejoicing in the Messiah.

Now, why does this matter to us? As far as I know, none of us are Jews. We are part of the church, the bride of Christ. As I understand it, we will not be on the earth during any of this terrible time. So why should we care?

Because, beloved ones, God keeps His promises.

The God who revealed His plan to redeem Israel to Daniel 2,600 years ago will keep His promise. The Savior who says, “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will never cast out” (John 6:37) will keep His promise.

Philippians 3:20-21 says,

20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, **21** who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by His working [by the exercise of His power] through which He is able to even subject all things to Himself.
(Philippians 3:20–21, 2022 LSB)

God keeps His promises, beloved. He will keep His promises to Israel. He will keep His promises to you.

Let's pray!