

STUDY ON THE TEACHING OF JESUS

END TIMES – THE TRIBULATION!

Read Matthew 24:15-25

Introduction:

Christ's left the temple, and his public work there. He had said, in the close of the previous chapter (chapter 23), "See! Your house is left to you desolate;" and here he made his words good; He went out and departed from the temple. The manner of expression is observable; he not only went out of the temple, but departed from it, took his final farewell of it; he departed from it, never to return to it anymore; and then immediately follows a prophesy of its ruin.

Note, that house is left desolate indeed, which Christ leaves. It was now time to groan out their Ichabod, "the glory is departed", their defence is departed. Few days after this, the veil of the temple was rent; when Christ left it, all became common and unclean; but Christ did not depart till they drove him away; He did not reject them, till they first rejected him.

In our last study, we learnt of how Jesus spoke of the utter ruin of the temple in Jerusalem. The temple shall not only be stripped, and plundered, and defaced, but utterly demolished and laid waste; Not one stone shall be left upon another. Jesus then went on to speak about events that will lead to the Rapture of His church.

In this study, we will continue on the same chapter (Matthew 24) from where we left it in verse 14 and here, Jesus speaks about the great tribulation that will come on the earth before His final coming.

Abomination of Desolation

"Therefore, when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand) ..." (v15)

The sign of the future tribulation is identified with what Christ calls the sign of "the abomination of desolation" (v. 15). The event is so specific that it will be a signal to the Jews living in Judea at the time to flee to the mountains. What did Christ mean by the expression "the abomination of desolation"?

This term is found three times in the book of Daniel (Dan 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). Its definition is found in Daniel 11:31 in the prophecy written by Daniel concerning a Syrian ruler, Antiochus Epiphanes, who reigned over Syria 175-164 B.C., about four hundred years after Daniel.

In his prophecy, Daniel said, *"And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the abomination of desolation."* (11:31). As this was fulfilled in history, it is comparatively easy to understand what Daniel meant. Antiochus Epiphanes was a great persecutor of the people of Israel, as recorded in the apocryphal books of Maccabees. He did set up an idol image in the temple in Jerusalem and persecuted the Jews.

This future abomination is described in Daniel 9:27 AMP:

"And he will enter into a binding and irrevocable covenant with the many for one week (seven years), but in the middle of the week he will stop the sacrifice and grain offering [for the remaining three and one-half years]; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until the complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who causes the horror."

The prophesy is that a future prince will do just what Antiochus did in the second century B.C.

Further light is cast on this in Daniel 12:11 AMP, where it states, “From the time that the regular sacrifice [that is, the daily burnt offering] is taken away and the abomination of desolation is set up [ruining the temple for worship of the true God], there will be 1,290 days.” or approximately three-and-a-half-years preceding the second coming of Christ. Our Lord tells us definitely here that His second coming is to follow at once upon the close of that time of trouble; so it is evident that this day of trial is yet in the future.

The New Testament, in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, describes the same period, with the ruler setting himself up as God in the temple.

“Let no one in any way deceive or entrap you, for that day will not come unless the apostasy comes first [that is, the great rebellion, the abandonment of the faith by professed Christians], and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction [the Antichrist, the one who is destined to be destroyed], who opposes and exalts himself [so proudly and so insolently] above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he [actually enters and] takes his seat in the temple of God, publicly proclaiming that he himself is God.” (AMP)

Revelation 13:14-15 also records that an image of the ruler will be set up in the temple and will be an object of worship.

“And he deceives those [unconverted ones] who inhabit the earth [into believing him] because of the signs which he is given [by Satan] to perform in the presence of the [first] beast, telling those who inhabit the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded [fatally] by the sword and has come back to life. And he is given power to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast will even [appear to] speak, and cause those who do not bow down and worship the image of the beast to be put to death.” (AMP)

Matthew 24:15 will be a confirmation to everyone on earth that they are in the great tribulation. Remember, the church is already raptured. There will be those who believe in Christ on earth who missed the rapture, and they will be able to tell when these are happening.

Taking this verse in the most plain meaning, the abomination of desolation cannot be the Roman armies or the ensigns they marched under; it cannot be totalitarian governments or any other conjecture. The abomination of desolation must be some kind of image of the Antichrist set in an actual temple and is the decisive sign for the end. This means that for the most part, Jesus’ predictions in Matthew 24 have not been fulfilled.

Whoever reads, let him understand: Here Jesus (assuming He said these words, and that they were not added by Matthew) directed us again to the central place of understanding, the abomination of desolation. It was almost as if Jesus said, **“Don’t miss this. If you don’t understand this, you won’t understand many other things.”**

The Great Tribulation

Matthew 24:16-20. They were to flee immediately to the mountains of Judea, not return to take clothes or other provisions, and pray that their flight will not be in the winter, when it would be most uncomfortable, or on the Sabbath, when their flight would be noticeable and no helpers. Especially difficult would be the lot of those with small children. Christ summarizes these predictions in 24:21, “For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.”

Jesus said that this will be the most awful time in all history. When we think of the terrible wars, plagues, famines, and genocide history has seen, this is a sobering statement. When God pours out His wrath on a God rejecting world, it will be truly great tribulation.

The great tribulation, accordingly, is a specific “period of time” beginning with the abomination of desolation and closing with the second coming of Christ, in the light of Daniel’s prophecies and confirmed by reference to forty-two months. In Revelation 11:2 and 13:5, the great tribulation is a specific three-and-a-half-year period leading up to the second coming and should not be confused with a general time of trouble, such as was predicted earlier in Matthew 24:4-14.

Jesus also predicted that the period would be “shortened” (v. 22), literally, terminated or cut off (Gr. *ekolobothesan*). This does not mean that the period will be less than three-and-a-half years, but that it will definitely be terminated suddenly by the second coming of Christ.

That the period would be a time of unprecedented trouble is brought out clearly in Revelation 6-19. One of the various judgments, the fourth seal (6:7-8), predicts a fourth part of the earth perishing. In Revelation 9:13-21, the sixth trumpet refers to a third part of the world’s population being killed. These are only part of the great catastrophes which fall one after another upon the world and which will climax in a great world war (16:12-16). The final judgment just before the second coming, described as the seventh bowl of the wrath of God (vv. 17-21), consists in a great earthquake, which apparently destroys cities of the world, and a hailstorm, with hailstones weighing a talent, or as much as eighty pounds. Putting all these Scriptures together, it indicates that the great tribulation will mark the death of hundreds of millions (or billions) of people in a comparatively short period of time.

Having introduced the specific sign of the second coming, which is the great tribulation, Jesus then described other details of the period. Just as there have been false Christs throughout the age, so there will be an intensification of this at the end of the age. Jesus stated, “*For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.*” (Mt 24:24).

He went on, in verse 25, to state, “*See, I have told you beforehand.*” Here, He was referring to His frequent mention of false prophets (v11). While false Christs and false prophets have always been in evidence, they will be especially prominent at the end of the age in Satan’s final attempt to turn people from faith in Christ.

