

Matthew 24:1-14: The Beginning of Sorrows Part 2

By Charles Feinberg

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The passage that we have just read dwells upon three areas of truth. The first sets forth vividly the time of trial. Verses 15-22 the sign of the approaching great distress will to the hour when the godly remnant of that day will witness the setting up of the abomination of desolation in the holy place. There are some who think that the abomination was the Roman ensigns and military banners. Others feel it is the man of sin, the embodiment of evil, and the masterpiece of Satan. But the expression evidently refers to an idol. For instance, 1 Kings chapter 11 verse 5 and 7, and 2 Kings 23:13 show that an idol is meant by the expression "abomination". Nothing is more abominable in the sight of God than idolatry which is a caricature and a terrible travesty on the reality and the personality of the living God himself. You need only to think of the parable in Matthew 12 verses 43 to 45 relative to the nation, to realize that in the end time there will be a resurgence, a revival of idolatry. And Revelation 13, verses 11 to 17 indicate that there will be an Idol which will be made to speak and it will be the means of drawing the unbelieving in Israel away from living God. That's the Idol spoken of by Daniel the prophet in Daniel 9 verse 27 and Daniel 12 verse 11. It will be set up in the temple in Jerusalem. The Lord makes special mention that they are to understand that there's an implied warning that the prediction might be misunderstood.

In the earlier section of this chapter, verses 4 to 14, in that earlier section, the signs have been of a general character. Now the details are given. This period is seen in Daniel 7:25, and chapter 12 verse 7, and revelation chapter 12 verse 14, where we find the period called Time

Times and a Half. In Revelation chapter 11:22 and 13:5, the period is indicated as 42 months. And then in Revelation 11:3 and 12:6, the period is called twelve hundred and sixty days. So important is this time, friends, that it's given as to days, as to number of months, and even as to number of years.

Now the setting up of the idol will be the signal for the flight of the godly. Notice the setting is in Judea, not elsewhere. At the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., it is a matter of history that the Christians in the city of Jerusalem fled to the mountain city of Pella where they were preserved. Now there are many students of this passage who believe the godly Jews in that day will flee across the Jordan and go south eastward to Petra. The believing remnant are clearly commanded to flee to the mountains without one bit of delay to take anything from their homes. They are to flee without any delay which would be occasioned by trying to salvage some of their possessions.

Now the house tops are flat in that part of the world. So they were convenient for relaxation and fellowship. They could be reached from the inside and the outside of the House. It would be the better part of wisdom not to go back into the house to carry away possessions which would just be hindrances to flight. Every instruction here is intended to convey the urgency and desperateness of the hour. If the hour of disaster strikes while the workmen are in the field, they are not to turn back to their cloaks. They are not to try to go back home and find that which would be a covering for them during the day or, more particularly, through the night, and not to turn back for their cloaks or their garments. Not a moment is to be lost. There'll be no time to spare. Haste will be called for in order to escape the flood of calamity. As with Lot and his wife, there should be no turning back.

Luke 17 verses 31 and 32, at the overthrow of the city of Pompeii in the year 79, among others who fled from the torrent of lava from Mount Vesuvius was a lady who tried, not only to save her own life, but also some valuable jewels she had with her hands full of rings and bracelets and necklace, chains, and other treasures. She made her way out of the city but was then overwhelmed by the rain of ashes from the volcano. She perished with her hands full of jewels and later in the course of building operations outside the area of the buried city, her petrified body was unearthed. Similarly, in that day of which our passage speaks, earthly goods will be of no avail but rather a hindrance.

One can well imagine how trying these times will be for mothers with little ones who need rest and quiet. Her mother love will not permit her to consider her own safety before that of her child. Thus they are both liable to be overcome and to perish. Prayer is to be offered that their flight be not in winter nor on the Sabbath. Christians are not in view here, but Jews. In winter the weather is stormy and inclement so this will be a natural hindrance or a hindrance from natural causes. Since our Lord is speaking to believing Jews, not Christians, they are to pray that the calamity does not strike them on the Sabbath. This is the end of the Jewish age which is under consideration. So the command is in point so that they don't bring down the wrath of their unbelieving neighbors. No Christian today is ordered to keep the Sabbath of the Jews. In fact the Apostle Paul forbids it distinctly. Not only does he say you are not to keep it but you're not to allow anyone to find fault with you because you don't keep it. No one is to judge you with reference to that. Colossians chapter 2, very important passage, Colossians chapter 2 verses 16 and 17, the Jewish custom with regard to travel on the Sabbath would make it hard for the Jewish remnant to make any journey on that day. They would bring down upon them the wrath of the mass of the nation as we've indicated.

In order to impress his hearers with the gravity of the occasion, the Messiah tells his disciples, "Then shall be great tribulation such as have not been from the beginning of the world until now no, nor ever shall be". Is it not strange that in the light of these plain words some should still speak of the great tribulation period as though it could at all, in any sense, be compared to other times of general distress and catastrophe in the history of the world? No friends. It will be unique. The only one of its kind, just as our Lord said. So unbearable will be the time of trial that unless these days were mercifully shortened, no human life could escape physical death. But for the elect's sake, it will be shortened. Who are the elect? There's a chosen people for Earth Israel, just as there is a chosen people for heaven, the church. Here the Messiah is speaking of his earthly chosen people. For their sake, and because of his love for the remnant in Israel, he will sovereignly shorten the days.

After this detailed description of the Tribulation time, the Lord now gives them the warning against deceivers. Verses 23 to 26 because impostors and frauds always flourish in a time of stress and trouble. There will be many claiming to be the true messiah. 2 Thessalonians 2 verses 1-12, so cunning and crafty will be these false messiahs and prophets, that if it were possible, it's not possible, but if it were possible, they would lead astray even the believing. This passage does not say it is possible but just the opposite. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. The intent of the whole prophetic discourse is to warn them ahead of time and the Times will produce sensational features. There will be those pointing to a messiah in the wilderness or in the inner chambers. They are warned against a secret coming. Any report or sensational news that he is in one special place will be enough to show the word is false. The Messiah and Redeemer is to return from heaven not from these other places. How easily are the unbelieving led astray in our day. They will be even more susceptible in that day ahead of us. When a shepherd in Scotland

were told, was asked if his sheep would follow the voice of a stranger, he said yes, when they're sick, but never when they are well. A sick sheep will follow anybody. The believer's not willing to follow the false teachers and faddists of the age when he's fed on the word and on the Lord.

With this picture of events in mind we come in the next place to the truth of the sudden coming of the Lord, verses 27 and 28. Why would it not be safe to credit the reports of a secret coming of Messiah? Because when he comes again it will be the exact opposite of his first coming. Then it was in quietness, in comparative obscurity in a manger in Bethlehem. But in his coming again, it'll be as the lightning in its quick flashing from east to west. Two features of lightning are well known. First, its suddenness or unexpectedness, and secondly, it's universal or wide extent. There'll be no time for preparation, or of gradually making known his coming. No false messiah will be able to imitate this coming. And when he comes this time, it'll be to strike with judgment. Where the carcass is, the vultures will converge. Birds of Prey gather where dead bodies are found. So in a similar way, the Lord's judgments will fall suddenly when corruption has reached its height. The judgment will be first necessary because of the corruption. It will be sudden, as the vulture flies. Thirdly unpreventable, no hindrance possible. This summarizes the whole picture in verses 15-28 for us.

Some time ago a man died. He was a man against whom the whole city of New Orleans Louisiana rose up because as its sanitary inspector, he urged that special precautions be taken against yellow fever. The businessmen flouted him. The Chamber of Commerce said shut him up or he'll ruin our trade. The alderman did shut him up and the city foolishly said thank goodness until the yellow jack came and cost millions. Dear listener, the Lord has forewarned all, all of us of the coming judgment. How will you stand in the matter? How do you stand now? The only safe place is in the Rock of Ages, Christ Jesus, the messiah of Israel, and the savior of the world.

Have you made him yours? Only you know in a very real and personal transaction. If you've never done it, you can make him yours now by faith. But you remember, you must act now.

And now in Matthew 24, verses 29 to 35, we have the glorious coming of the Messiah. Up to this point in the prophetic dress of the messiah, he's been dealing with a background of events that led up to his return in glory and power. He's answering the question of the disciples as to the nature of the sign of his coming and at the end of the age. Now we come to one of the important climaxes in this important section of scripture. It follows immediately upon the events of the Great Tribulation which have just been described by the Lord Jesus, the Messiah. We read the following account. And it's as beautiful as it is simple. "But immediately after", notice how precise the chronological notation, "but immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the star shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heaven shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Sun a man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send forth his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. Now from the fig tree learn her parable: when her branch is now become tender, and putting forth its leaves, you know that the summer is nigh; even so ye also, when ye see all these things, know ye that he is nigh, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

The significant events spoken of by our Lord, are in the first place, the return of the Son of man, verses 29 and 30. When the Lord says immediately after the tribulation of those days I indicate to you that we have a notation of time as clear as it is definite and precise. The visible,

glorious coming of the Messiah is placed, without dispute, immediately after the great tribulation. At that time, the sun, moon, and stars will no longer give their light. What need have them when he comes, who out shines them all? The prophet Joel, in speaking of these same events centuries long past, had written, "The sun and the moon are darkened and the stars withdraw the shining", Joel 3:15. The shaking of the powers of heaven probably has reference to the heavenly hosts or angels, as in 1 Kings 22:19 and Psalm 103: 21, Psalm 148:2. There will be movements among them as those of a ship caused by the action of the mighty waves of the sea. Then, in exact sequence, will take place that for which the Church, all Israel, and the world have waited. The personal, visible glories appearing of messiah to the earth. Only the Church will be waiting for that coming in heaven because they've already been taken to be with the Lord when he comes to gather them in mid-air., 1 Corinthians 15:50-58, and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

Now the sign of the Son of man in heaven has been understood by some interpreters as the sign of the cross in heaven. Some think it will be the Shekinah cloud and this has much to commend it in view of the prophecy of Ezekiel. That that Shekinah glory will return at the visible appearing of the Messiah. Yet others explain it as the shining glory of the appearance of Messiah as distinct from his personal manifestations. With many others, we believe that the sign is going to be messiah himself, unmistakable, glorious, indescribable, beyond all description. This coming will be the signal for the spontaneous outburst of mourning on the part of all the tribes of the earth. The reference is probably not to the nations still unbelieving, but the national mourning of Israel for the tribes will be able to see him from all continents. The greater Joseph and his brethren are now face to face. It will be a time of fear and terror to the unbelieving. He comes to judge the disobedient. It's the Son of Man judicially. In John 5:27 we're told that God has committed all judgment into the hands of the Son of man, to his own beloved son. Because

as the Son of Man, the divine human one, he knows the claims and demands of righteousness of the living God. And at the same time, he knows the weaknesses, and failures, and inabilities of man. And they will see him when he left Earth centuries ago, he said he would return in like manner as they had seen him go into heaven, Acts 1:11. Daniel 7:14 tells us he's going to come with clouds. Zechariah 12:10 says, "They've gone to look upon him who appears to mourn for him as one mourns for an only son. Be in bitterness for him as one is embittered. As for the first born". Revelation 1:7 tells us all eyes shall see him, every eye shall behold him. And Revelation 19:11-16, he comes, king of kings, Lord of Lords. This coming will not be characterized, mark you, by weakness. No, not by humiliation, not by scorn. It will be attended with power, majesty, great glory. Oh how august will be that coming. The second coming, I repeat, is as different as possible from the first coming.

A Christian lady was once speaking to a Christian worker about the assurance of her safety and the Savior and said, "I've taken the single ticket to glory. And I don't intend to come back". To that the man said, "You're going to miss a lot. I've taken a return ticket for I'm not only going to meet Christ in glory, but I'm going back with him in power and great glory to the earth". What coming that will be? When Zachariah heard it, and he said, "And then Lord is going to come and all thy Holy Ones with thee", Zechariah 14:5.

Now next in the order of events will be the regathering of Israel. In verse 31 it is eminently true that before our very eyes, the long scattered nation of Israel is being regathered to the land of their fathers from so many lands, some have counted over a hundred and some lands. This is in fulfillment of other prophecy and distinct from what we read now. There will also be a divine side to this regathering. The Lord will send forth his angels with a great sound of a trumpet to regather them, his chosen from the four winds of heaven. It's the angels, not human

agency, that gather human Israel, burdened Israel, that are going to gather Israel home, finally displaying what boundless love of God. "I will stretch forth my hand a second time and gather them from all the countries where they have been scattered", Isaiah 11 verses 11 and 12.

Now Jeremiah had expressed it in this way beautifully, chapter 16 verses 14 to 16, "Therefore, behold, the days come, declares the Lord, when it shall no longer be said, As the Lord liveth that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt but as the Lord liveth that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the countries whither he had driven them. And I'll bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers". And then, "Behold, I will send for many fishers saith the Lord, and they shall fish them up; and afterward I will send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain, and from every hill, and out of the cliffs of the rocks". "His coming will be with his mighty angels", 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8. They will perform this important service at the command of the Lord. The greater part of Israel will still be scattered in that day throughout the world as they are now. The elector, undoubtedly the chosen nation Israel, as already stated in this chapter and verse is 22 and 24. What an hour of deliverance and victory for the believing remnant that will be. Just as the events of Sinai were heralded by the trumpet, Exodus 19:16, and the removal of the church from the earth in the rapture will be heralded by a trumpet, 1 Thessalonians 4:16. Or 1 Corinthians 15:52, so it will be at the visible coming of Messiah to Israel. Isaiah 27 verse 13, it's been put in this beautiful way, East and West and South and North speeds each glorious Angel for gathering in with glittering wing. Zion's saints to Zion's king. What a contrast with a gathering in verse 28 where judgment falls on corruption.

Finally the Lord sets forth this wonderful word, the parable of the fig tree, verses 32-35, in order to indicate what these things are about to occur. What they are, there is just about to

occur, the Lord uses the figure of a fig tree. All the trees are mentioned in Luke 21:31. The parallel passage I wrote is saying that the signs just pointed out will as clearly warn of the approach of the Lord as the budding of the fig tree in spring indicates that the summer is at hand. The peculiarity of the fig tree is this: that the blossom comes before the leaf. The fruit leads on the leaves. The development is sudden. It's a figure from the realm of nature like the almond tree in Jeremiah 1, which is the first to blossom in Palestine. When the sap has risen in the fig tree, then that branch that's been dry and hard in winter becomes soft and moist, just as these signs are unmistakable in the natural realm, so those just mentioned in this passage of Scripture are certain in the spiritual sphere. They point to one fact: the Lord is nigh, even at the doors.

In order to show the shortness of the time required for all these events to transpire, the Lord says that the people of Israel living at the end of the Jewish age will see the completion of these things. In other words, the same generation that sees the beginning of these events will see the end. The emphasis is on the suddenness of the end. How short can they be? How certain can they be? And we of the occurrence of these events? If these predictions be compared with Heaven and Earth which appear to be the most stable and lasting of the things about us, these words will excel them in stability, and assurance, and permanence. His words will not pass away though heaven and earth may and will do so. This is the strongest possible statement, friends, of the divine authority by which the Messiah spoke to them. His words were not spoken just to terrify, but warn of real and awful coming events. That passing away a present creation is in Psalm 102 verses 25 and 26, Isaiah 51:6, and 2 Peter 3 verses 10 and 12. No mere man could make such a claim, how lasting and eternal are his words.

A woman whose husband was a confirmed drunkard led the most miserable life until one day a Cole Porter came to her poor home, gave her a Bible. She found much comfort in reading

it and soon came to value it above everything. Her husband sneered and rail at her about it. One day when he came home half drunk, found her sitting reading the Bible, he snatched it from her, threw it into the stove, and set fire to it. "Now we'll see", he said, "what will become, what will be left of your new religion". The next day he opened the door to the stove, took the fire tongs, stirred up the cinders. He thought that's all there'd be left of the book. His eyes fell on these words, "Heaven and earth shall pass away but my words shall not pass away". Having been thrown in closed, some pages of the book were partly preserved. These words stood out clear and distinct. They were like a thunderbolt to the man; he stood convicted, awe-stricken. Soon after he was converted and lived for God. Dear friend, the better part of wisdom is to hear the everlasting words of Messiah. Turn to him now for refuge; then a place will be assured you among the throng who come with him when he returns with the angels in power, great glory, and majesty unspeakable. To put it off is to court disaster and certain doom. Now is that day of salvation. Believe and be saved. God bless you.