

May 30, 2010

**THE GREAT TRIBULATION**  
**MATTHEW 24.15-28**

Context: fulfilled within a generation (24.34); answering questions concerning the destruction of the Temple, his coming and the end of the age (24.3). The initial troubles are the “birth pains” of the new world (24.8)

*In answer to the disciples questions, Jesus teaches them what will be happening within a generation concerning the passing away of the old creation and the birth of the new creation. This transition will require Jesus' followers suffer persecution and loss initially but will result in their ultimate deliverance.*

**1. FLEE TO THE MOUNTAINS (15-22)**

***The abomination of desolation (15):*** The *abomination of desolation* is a complex set of events that begins with God's people practicing that which is abominable in worship, progresses to God leaving his house, and ultimately ends with God's servants coming to destroy the house.

Pattern in history: Tabernacle destroyed by the Philistines; Temple destroyed by Babylonians; now rebuilt Temple will be destroyed by the Romans. All happen after worship abominations take place and God leaves the house.

They will only know that what they see is the abomination of desolation b/c Jesus told them.

***Escaping Sodom (16-20):*** Why flee? Jerusalem is coming under God's wrath. To be identified as God's loyal people, his true Temple, you must go where he is: outside the city.

Historical recapitulation: E.g. Ezek 8–10; God's throne chariot (glory cloud) leaves the Temple and goes east of the city.

This judgment is not general upon the whole earth (and, thus, can't be pushed to the future). The people in *Judea* are to flee to the mountains b/c that is where the punishment will take place.

Jerusalem = Sodom; cf. command in Gen 19.17; cf. also Lk 17.32; Rev 11.8

The old mountain of YHWH–Zion, Jerusalem–is passing away. They must go to the new mountain.

Don't go down to the house, don't return from the field: possible emphasis on suddenness and the necessity to make no delay. Recalls Lot and esp his wife. She turned back and became identified with Sodom and, thus, with its judgment.

Hardships in following Jesus: possessions will be left behind; pregnant and nursing mothers will need to flee even though it is difficult.

Sabbath: makes the Christians conspicuous and possible subjects of persecution. Bad weather (possibly “winter”): makes travel difficult. Nevertheless, they must obey and flee.

***The great tribulation (21-22):*** Some say deals with the Jews. Others say deals with the Christians. I believe it these are the birth pains in which the Jews are involved and suffer, but the Christians are really the ones focused upon who are receiving the “great tribulation” (cp. v. 9). v. 22 - it is for the sake of the elect that these days will be cut short.

“... and never ever will be again” - based upon the significance of the event on God's calendar and his plan for the world. It is the death of the old world and the beginning of the new. This is a once-for-all, unrepeatable event.

This pattern is lived out throughout the rest of history, but this was *the* decisive event. In this tribulation, these birth pains, the entire old creation begun in Genesis is dying and being re-born.

Cutting short of the days: Cp. 10.23; Also from AD 64-68 (42 months) Jerusalem was under siege by Vespasian. Disturbance in Rome made him pull back and give a break. This was probably the time when the Christians were to get out.

“no flesh would be saved” - “flesh” = old creation people in Adam who are corruptible and have been corrupted by sin and dominated by death.

The old creation is being spoiled. Flesh is being saved out of it through death and resurrection (in Jesus himself).

There will be remnants of the old creation flesh saved. Those days will be cut short for the sake of the elect; those chosen out of the old creation to be a part of this new creation.

Who are the elect, the chosen ones? Jews had this title originally (cf. e.g. Dt 7.6).

The elect are now those people who are identified with Jesus. He is the chosen one, the elect one, and we are elect or chosen in him as Paul says in Eph 1. God demonstrated the election of Jesus at his baptism (Mt 3). Now the elect are identified with Jesus.

## **2. WATCH OUT FOR FAKES (23-28)**

**Seeing is not believing (23-25):** Temptation in distress to look for saviors who will deliver immediately.

Emphasis on the word “see” (vv. 23, 24, 26). People will be tempted by their eyes to go against what they heard from Jesus.

“The Christ” = the king, the anointed one, the One who will come to deliver Israel. But at the time all this happens, you won’t be able to see Jesus. He will be seated at the right hand of the Father.

“Signs and wonders” - recalls Moses; signs and wonders were evident signs of God’s deliverance.

But all of these will be false christs and false prophets. Also seen in previous history of Israel in promising deliverance when God’s true prophets were promising destruction.

“lead astray, if possible, the elect” - God is preserving them, yes. Also, these are the ones who are being governed by Jesus’ words (v. 25): “See, I have *told* you beforehand.”

The word of God is always to take priority over sight. Many things that look right and feel right and seem to be ways of escape are not always what they appear to be. Jesus said, “Do not believe them.”

**Son of Man comes like lightning (27):** East to west: movement back to the Garden. Jesus has moved to the east of the Temple (24.1-3).

Lightning - Ps 18.14; 144.6 - God’s glory cloud and lightning as judgment.

Son of Man - title given to Ezekiel (used 90x +). Ezekiel is the prophet and high priest who operates in exile outside of the geographical Temple located in Jerusalem.

Ezekiel is also the destroyer of the Temple (cf. Ez 43.3). This is the event that also brings judgment upon the surrounding nations (Ez 24–32). The whole world changes when Jerusalem is judged, and the Son of Man brings that change.

The Son of Man is also the one who receives the vision of the new and more glorious Temple (Ez 40–48). Jesus is the “fulfilled” Son of Man, the true Ezekiel.

**A feast for birds (28):** “Eagles/Vultures” - probably some reference to the Roman standard (i.e. the eagle).

Primary reference is to covenant curse. Dt 28.26 (cf. Gen 15; cp. Jer 7.33; also Rev 19). Sign of God’s punishment.

Israel as it is is dying. Israel has rejected Jesus *the* Christ, their true deliverer. They have committed the abomination which brings about desolation. Within a generation their infidelities will reap from the horrible crop that they have planted.

They will come under the wrath and curse of God. All who wish to be saved from this must follow Jesus and flee the city and go join him on the mountain. It is a mountain in which you must follow Jesus in death, but the end is resurrection.

1. *We must obey Jesus no matter how inconvenient or troublesome it may seem at the time.*

2. *Don’t find false comfort by looking for immediate deliverance from stressful situations.*