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Get Ready for the End Times! - Part 2
Matthew 24:15-22

By Tal Davis

The late professor Howard Hendricks told the story of a Bible teacher who decided to hold a conference at a hotel ballroom in a city. He sent out brochures inviting pastors and laymen from the area to attend and ran some ads on the local Christian radio station. On the morning of the conference, he was all set with his notes, power points, etc. When the time to begin arrived he looked out over the room expecting a large crowd. Only two people were present sitting in the very back. He turned sadly to his wife sitting nearby and said, "Well, these are the last days."

In this five-part series, we are examining Jesus' teaching on the end times from Matthew Chapter 24. In the first installment we looked at verses 1-14. Jesus and His disciples had gone up to the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem. Jesus had told them that the temple would soon be destroyed, which prompted the alarmed disciples to ask questions: "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (vs. 3). Jesus does not answer their second question about what sign will there be of His coming and the final end of the age. Instead, in this next section, He continues addressing their first query about the destruction of the temple. Read Part one here: <https://www.marketfaith.org/2025/08/get-ready-for-the-end-times-part-1-tal-davis/>

The Abomination of Desolation - Matthew 24:15-16

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 - 16 then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. (NASB)

In verse fifteen, Jesus tells His disciples to watch for the *abomination of desolation*. That phrase may also be translated as the "abomination that causes desolation" or

"the desolating sacrilege." An abomination (*Bdehlygma*) is anything that that is detestable to God, particularly idolatry and moral depravity. Desolation (*eremoseos*) means to be appalled, ravaged, or astounded. These terms refer specifically to a desecration of the holy temple or altar in Jerusalem with pagan worship, as predicted by the prophet Daniel. "Abomination" is used in the Old Testament to translate several Hebrew words meaning "stink," "detested," "filthy," and "rotten." It most often describes idolatrous worship of false gods. It may also apply to certain morally offensive practices that are detestable to God. For example, in the Old Testament God declares that practices such as incest, homosexuality, bestiality (Lev. 18), making idols, human sacrifice, etc. are abominations in His sight.

The phrase "abomination of desolation" is used three times in the book of Daniel. (9:27; 11:31; 12:11) Most scholars agree that those passages foresaw an inter-testamental historical event. In 167 B.C., Palestine was ruled by the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes (215 B.C. - 164 B.C.). In order to humiliate the Jews in Judea and Samaria, he erected a statue of Zeus in the Jerusalem temple. He also sacrificed pigs on an altar in Jerusalem (the worse kind of desecration). He even made practicing Judaism a capital offense. In 164 B.C., the Jews, led by Judas ("the Hammer") Maccabeus (ca. 190 B.C. - 160 B.C.), liberated the city, destroyed the pagan idols, and re-consecrated the temple. (Note: This story is recorded in the Apocryphal books of 1 and 2 Maccabees and is the basis for the Jewish festival of *Hanukkah*.)

Some New Testament scholars believe Jesus was also applying those predictions of Daniel to what would occur in A.D. 70 by the Romans. As we discussed in Part One, in that year, the Roman General Titus sieged Jerusalem and desecrated and destroyed the temple. Other interpreters see this as being fulfilled ultimately in the last days in a

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then new temple to be built before the Great Tribulation and the return of Christ.

The way people interpret these passages is often related to their particular theological perspective on the end times, what theologians call eschatology. An important dimension of eschatology is one's view of the millennium. The English term millennium derives from the Latin word *mille*, meaning a thousand.

In the New Testament, the word millennium designates the one-thousand-year reign of Christ described in Revelation 20:4-7. In that passage, the Apostle John describes his vision of the resurrection of the Christian dead at Jesus' return. "They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years." (Rev. 20:4b) And, "...they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years." (Rev. 20:6b) "Thousand years" translates two Greek words, *chilia* and *ete*.

As we indicated in Part One, Bible believing Christians differ in how they interpret eschatological passages. Just how this thousand-year period is understood is the focus of a theological debate among evangelical scholars. Three diverse millennial views are held by evangelical Christians.

The first view is called Premillennialism. Premillennialists assert that Jesus' will return in the end times just before the literal millennium when Christ's earthly rule begins. It will be followed by the final judgment. There are actually two subgroups of Premillennialists. Some are "Historic Premillennialists" who hold to a general view that Jesus will suddenly return, the dead in Christ will be raised, and then the millennium will begin followed by the final judgment.

"Dispensational Premillennialists" see a more detailed, two-stage coming of Christ. First comes "the rapture" wherein Jesus snatches up all the saved people from earth to spare them from the coming tribulation. "Rapture" is an English word derived from the Latin *rapio* which translated a Greek word

meaning "caught up" or "snatched up" (1 Thess. 4:17). The rapture is followed by a seven-year period for those left behind on earth. Some dispensationalists see a division of two 3½ year stages. The first will be a time of peace followed by the second stage which will be the Great Tribulation in all its fury. Then, after the Tribulation, the Lord will come a second time accompanied by the raptured believers and those Christians already dead before it occurred. At that time, Jesus will institute His thousand-year reign followed by the final judgment.

The second millennial viewpoint is Postmillennialism. Theologians holding this view contend that Christ will not return until after the millennium. They maintain that the indeterminate post-resurrection period of the worldwide growth of Christianity will eventually bring about an extended time of peace and harmony on earth. It may not be literally a thousand years, but only after that time will Jesus return and institute the final judgment.

The third approach to this subject is Amillennialism. The prefix "A" (not) indicates that these theologians believe that no literal thousand-year period will occur before Jesus returns. They interpret the passages about an earthly kingdom before the judgment entirely in a spiritual or symbolic manner. They also usually interpret the various numbers, animals, and visions written about in the book of Revelation as having symbolic meanings. It is their belief that Revelation was written by the Apostle John in apocalyptic code in order to obscure its meaning from Roman persecutors in Asia Minor. He had resided there before his exile on the island of Patmos.

Though Bible believing Christians disagree about this doctrine, it should not be a basis for determining fellowship or cooperation among believers. All evangelicals who hold any of these positions are committed to the spreading of the gospel and accomplishing Jesus' Great Commission. (Matt. 20:19-20)

The *holy place*, in verse 15, refers to the chambers in the temple just outside

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the Holy of Holies. The High Priest entered the Holy of Holies annually on *Yom Kippur* (the day of Atonement) to sacrifice a perfect lamb to cover the sins of the nation.

At this point, Matthew adds a somewhat cryptic parenthetical comment to the narrative. He says, *let the reader understand*. It is not obvious why he added this aside. It may have been to encourage the reader to take seriously the meaning of Jesus' statement and those of Daniel.

The Lord then warns (verse 16) that when the people in Judea see the events highlighted in verse 15 occurring, they *must flee to the mountains*. *Judea* (or *Judaea*) is a place name meaning simply "Jewish." It was one of three geographical areas in the land of Israel, along with Samaria and Galilee. This was in the region generally called Palestine by the Romans. It was historically known as the southern kingdom of Judah (one of the ten tribes of Israel). After the return from the Babylonian captivity, the region acquired the name Judea. Though its boundaries varied over time because of changing political fortunes, it always included Jerusalem and its surrounding lands.

Jesus makes it clear that when these events occur they cannot hesitate to leave. The desolation will happen so quickly and unexpectedly that they can waste no time getting away from Jerusalem to a place where the invading armies cannot find them. It seems that Jesus was addressing the soon to occur events in A.D. 70 when the Romans would ravage the land. Some interpreters, however, believe that Jesus was also projecting far ahead to the events of the last days and the Great Tribulation.

Flee and Don't Turn Back - Matthew 24:17-20

17 Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get things out of his house. 18 And whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. 19 But woe to those women who are pregnant, and to those who are nursing babies in those days! 20 More-

over, pray that when you flee, it will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath.
NASB

Jesus says that people will be in the midst of their everyday activities when the day of reckoning arrives. Jesus and his disciples were sitting on the Mount of Olives overlooking the city and the territory nearby. They may have seen people engaged in these mundane pursuits which He conveniently uses to illustrate His teaching. The point of these short vignettes is to accentuate the importance of people heeding Jesus' warnings. To bring it home, He offers several hypothetical illustrations.

The first (verse 17) involves a man on his *housetop*. In those days common people lived in small wooden or earthen homes. They normally had several small enclosed rooms and an open-air courtyard for cooking and keeping small animals. The roofs were usually flat and built over several heavy cross beams covered over by brick and mud. An outdoor set of steps allowed the homeowners to easily walk up to the roof. There they would do chores or simply relax and enjoy the breezes in the heat of the day or at evening time. In the summer, families often slept together on the cool rooftop.

Luke, in Acts, tells of when the Apostle Peter went up on the roof of Simon the Tanner in Joppa to pray. There he had a vision of clean and unclean animals lowered down in a sheet, all of which God told him to eat (Acts 10:9-16). Also, Jesus healed a paralyzed man in the city of Capernaum when his friends lowered him through a hole they cut in the roof above where Jesus was speaking. (Mark 2:3-5; Luke 5:18-20)

In Jesus' illustration, the hypothetical man on the roof may have been sleeping, working, eating, or praying. Whatever he was doing, he could waste no time coming down when things turned bad. In fact, Jesus says he should not even try to get his things together before fleeing. It was that desperate a situation for everyone!

Next (verse 18), Jesus uses the example of *whoever is in the field*. In this hypothetical case, the man may have been plowing, planting, or herding his animals. He explains that when the trouble comes, the farmer must drop his work and cannot even take the time to run home to get his coat. He would need immediately to escape with just his work clothes and what he had with him. The danger was imminent!

Jesus now shifts to a female illustration (verse 19). He says, *But woe to those women who are pregnant, and to those who are nursing babies*. Could there be any more vulnerable victim than a young pregnant woman or one carrying a newborn in her arms? Her escape would be greatly hindered by her maternal situation. A pregnant woman would find it difficult to travel. A woman with an infant would be inexorably burdened by the child's need for care and nourishment. The fate of such a woman and her offspring, if captured, is almost too horrible to imagine. Yet, Jesus knows they must find some way of escape. Remember, He Himself had barely escaped being murdered as a small child. (Matt. 2:16-18)

In verse 20, He highlights another difficult situation for escape if the event occurred *in the winter*. Frequent rains often made the muddy roads of Palestine impassable in that season. Also the days would be short making travel dangerous.

Another time Jesus says the refugees would struggle is if it was on *a Sabbath*. The Sabbath was the day of rest made holy by God because He rested on the seventh day of creation. It started at sundown of the sixth day (Friday) and ended at sundown of the seventh day. In the inter-testamental period, the Jewish rabbis (religious teachers), interpreting the Old Testament law, had formulated thirty-nine normal activities they considered work and thus were banned or limited on that day. They included many mundane tasks. Even tying knots was prohibited. Often loop-holes were devised to evade some of the requirements.

Jesus observed the Sabbath as a day of worship at the synagogue. Nonetheless, He ignored what He regarded as arbitrary restrictions if they prevented Him from healing or ministering to a needy person. This stirred Jewish religious leaders' criticism. (Mark 2:23-28; 3:1-6; Luke 13:10-17; John 5:1-18) Jesus, however, laid out a clear moral principle, "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath." (Mark 2:27)

But more to Jesus' point, in those days of strict Sabbath observance, the city gates were usually shut to prevent people from going further than the rabbinical law allowed. "A Sabbath day's journey" was the distance Jews considered legal to walk on the seventh-day. The rabbis calculated that it could only be 2,000 cubits, or about 5/8 of a mile, or one kilometer. (Acts 1:12) Also, all the city's shops were closed so obtaining provisions was impossible. Given their desperate situation there was no time to wait for them to open. To accentuate the problem, Jesus tells them to pray that their flight would not happen at either of those times.

The main point of Jesus' illustrations was to emphasize the suddenness and unexpectedness of the terrible events that were soon to occur. The people of Jerusalem had to be ready at any moment to make their getaway from the attacks to come. The escape to the mountains was their only hope for survival. History tells us that in A.D. 70, thousands of Jews were indeed captured, enslaved, and killed by the Roman invaders. If, as some interpreters believe, these warnings are for the future time before the Lord's return, then the Christians living then would need to heed them just as much as those in first century.

The Great 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 again. 22 And if those days had not been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. NASB

Jesus begins verse 21 with *For then* ("At that moment"). It underscores the immediacy of the terrible *tribulation* or distress to come and the need to escape. He says, the trouble will be unlike any time in the history of mankind or at any period to come in the future. Jesus' statement is rooted in the prophecy of Daniel 12:1b, "There will be a time of distress such as never has occurred since nations came into being until that time." It foretells a period of unparalleled destruction, death, disease, and famine. The Lord, borrowing Daniels' phraseology, may have had in mind the soon coming destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Romans in A.D. 70. But He also seems to be looking ahead to a time in the distant future when the persecutions put upon believers will greatly intensify as the end time draws closer (Rev. 7-19). Again, the way scholars interpret these passages is often reflective of their particular millennial view as described above. After His warning of calamitous things to come, in verse 22, the Lord injects a substantial degree of hope into the situation. *Those days* obviously refer to the terrible period of which verses 15-21 portend. It may include the entire historical period from A.D. 70 until the return of Christ. Some scholars, however, place it during the Great Tribulation at the end times. Either way, Jesus indicates that God will not allow a total annihilation, but says they will be cut short, or cut off. He declares that if were not so, then *no life would have been saved*. "No life" is literally "not any flesh." Thus, the "life"

to "be saved," in this instance, means rescued in a physical sense, not spiritual. Jesus already promised eternal life to all those who gave their lives for His sake. (vs. 13).

The point is, God will not allow all His people to be exterminated from the earth. For the sake of *the elect* (all Christians still living at that time), the evil days will be interrupted (*cut short*) by His divine intervention. "The elect" is literally, "the chosen." It refers generally to those chosen by God for rendering special service to Him. In the New Testament it specifically denotes people of all races and nations who, by God's grace, through faith, have made Jesus Christ their Lord and Savior. That cutting short may mean the return of Christ Himself in glory to establish His kingdom. Or, as some presume, all Christians will be raptured before the Great Tribulation prior to Christ coming (see the commentary above on verse 15).

However one may interpret the details of these prophetic passages, it is clear that Jesus wants His people to be spiritually and physically ready for the difficult times to come. Persecution, and even martyrdom, await Christians now and in the future. Even as we read these words, thousands of our brothers and sisters in Christ are enduring hardships and even death for His sake. Nonetheless, in the face of it all, believers must stand faithful to the truth of the gospel. When things get bad, God will see His people through and, in His good time, bring history to its final victorious conclusion.

Writer's note: You may want to read more on the various millennial positions and come to your own conclusions. One book that takes an even-handed comparative approach with chapters and responses written by scholarly advocates of each of the four positions is: *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, edited by Robert Clouse (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 1997).

In conclusion, Jesus warned that difficult times and persecutions will precede His second coming. So we must stand strong in our faith against any opposition, physical or spiritual, that we may encounter. We do not know when the Lord will return but it could be at a time. For that reason, we must not be caught off guard, but be spiritually ready for His coming at all times. Remember, God promises to be with us in good times and in bad. But whatever happens, as His children, we will be saved and inherit eternal life. Ultimately God's victory over all enemies will be final when Christ returns.

In the next installment, Part Three, we will analyze Jesus' statements in Matthew 24:23-41.

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