

Matthew chapter 24 and chapter 25 go together as a unit, and here Christ is giving the most extensive answer that He ever gave to any question. He is answering the question of His disciples concerning the end of the age and the coming of the Messiah to establish the Kingdom. Christ has talked about the departure of the glory from the temple at Jerusalem. He talked about the fact that He will not be seen again until the nation is ready to receive Him as Messiah. He talked about the destruction of the temple. Now the disciples are concerned, "When are all these things going to transpire? How will we know when You're coming to establish the Kingdom?" As we've seen in our study already in chapter 24, Zechariah 14 links the destruction of the temple with the return of the Messiah, and there are really two destructions of the temple--one associated with the first coming of Christ and in 70 AD the temple was destroyed. Well, the temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem. We'll be talking about that in our study together. And that temple and Jerusalem will undergo another destruction, and that will immediately precede the Second Coming of Christ to earth.

Now Matthew chapters 24 and 25 in their entirety focus in the time period known as the Seventieth Week of Daniel often called the Tribulation Period. That 7-year period occurs after the Rapture of the Church. The next prophetic event is the Rapture of the Church, the bodily removal of all true believers in Jesus Christ to meet Christ in the air and be taken to glory. 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4 give the details of that event.

Following the Rapture of the Church, the 7-year Tribulation will begin. It begins, according to Daniel 9:27, when the representative of the western world nations signs a covenant or an agreement with the nation Israel. That event will mark the beginning of the 7-year Tribulation. That 7-year period is broken down into two equal portions of 3½ years each.

Jump back to Daniel 9. Now the focal point of the Scriptures that deal with the Tribulation is on the last half of that 7-year period because that's the time of great suffering, that's the time of great persecution for the nation Israel. And the 7-year Tribulation has the purpose of completing God's program for Israel. And the intense time in that 7-year period is the last half. But note in Daniel 9:27, "And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week"--and that is a week of years. Seven years, not seven days. "...in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering;"--something we're going to be talking about in our study of Matthew 24. The temple will be rebuilt and here you see sacrifices and offerings are again being practiced by the nation Israel when you are in the Tribulation. So during the first 3½ years of the Tribulation, Israel will have a sacrificial system again. In the middle of the 7-year period, he puts a stop to that "and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction."

Now look over in Daniel 12:11. You remember it was in the middle of the week that he puts an end to the sacrifice. Now read verse 11, "From the time that the regular sacrifice is abolished, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days." Now a prophetic month in Scripture and a prophetic year in Scripture were 30 days in a month, 360 days in a year.

This is 360 days to make a 3½-year period plus 30 days. We have 1290 days here, rather than 1260 days, which would be 3½ years. The extra 30 days evidently provide for the judgments, etc., with the return of Christ that will be talked about in Matthew 25. So there you see we're talking about the last half of that period, being approximately 3½ years, in fact, exactly 3½ years plus 30 days.

Turn over to Revelation chapter 11, verse 2. You remember Revelation 6-19 all takes place within the Seventieth Week of Daniel, that 7-year period called the Tribulation. Note verse 2, "And leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months." Forty-two months is how long? Three and one half years. So you see, for the last 3½ years, Jerusalem and the temple are desecrated by the Gentiles, particularly the Gentiles under the leadership of the Antichrist.

Verse 3, "And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." Twelve Hundred and sixty days is how long? Three and one half years.

Look over in Revelation 12, verse 6, picturing here Israel. The woman here pictures Israel, she has given birth to the child, the Messiah. "And the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she might be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days." Which is how long? Three and one half years.

Down in Revelation 13, verse 5, here you see the Antichrist, the political ruler of the Western World for the first 3½ years, of the entire world for the last 3½ years. "And there was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies; and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him." Forty-two months--3½ years--the last half of the Tribulation. I stress that because there are some who do not believe that the Seventieth Week of Daniel is a literal 7-year period, but you find God repeatedly saying half of it is 3½ years. Three and one half years, forty-two months, 1,260 days.

In chapter 12, verse 14, the last part of the verse, "a time and times and a half a time," literally a time, two times and a half time—3½ times. In that framework, what are we talking about? Three and one half years. So if you accept a literal or normal interpretation of Scripture, you have to say there is yet a future 7-year period for Israel divided into two equal halves of 3½ years each.

Now come back to Matthew 24. That's where we are in Matthew 24--in that 7-year period. Now in verses 4-8 Christ gives an overview of the first 3½ years. He just summarizes some of the events that will be going on. As we've seen these parallels of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse in Revelation 6. Now beginning with verse 9 and down through verse 14, Christ will survey the last 3½ years of the Tribulation. That's the pattern. Then beginning with verse 15 of chapter 24, He is going to return to the middle of the Tribulation and give you some of the significant events that Israel ought to be aware of.

Look at verse 9 of Matthew 24. The first half of the Tribulation is characterized by false christs coming to lure Israel to follow them as Messiah, wars and rumors of wars, natural disasters, earthquakes and famines. All this will be going on during the first 3½ years. In fact, Revelation 6 says that through the judgments that will be poured out during those years, one quarter of the

earth's population will be destroyed and that's just the mild part. That's what verse 8 calls "the beginning of birth pangs."

Verse 9, "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation..." So there's a change here now. These things are going on during the first 3½ years but it's a time of relative tranquility for the nation Israel as a nation. They are established in their land in Palestine. They have the guaranteed protection of the Western World. They have channeled their resources into the development of the nation and to build the temple. Ezekiel 38 tells us they have dismantled their armies and have put themselves under the umbrella of protection of the Western World. But now, in verse 9, there's a change. "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name." So for the first 3½ years the Antichrist has been the false protector, the false messiah for the nation Israel. The one who has protected and secured the nation. Now there is a change. Now there are several reasons for the change. One may be that in Ezekiel 38 and 39 we are told that the Russian armies and the allied armies of Russia descend upon Israel, and in line with the agreement that the Western World has with Israel, the Western World under the Antichrist marshals the armies of the Western World and moves into Palestine. But God on the mountains surrounding Israel destroys the Russian armies and their allies supernaturally. So the balance of power is now upset in the world, and the Antichrist has moved his armies into the Middle East and the enemy he is going to battle has been destroyed, and he now establishes himself and his rule over the world.

There is a more basic reason, however. Look over in Revelation 12. One thing the Bible does is almost gives you glimpses, almost opens a little window from time to time so you can see what's going on behind world events. Now the world events in the Tribulation at this time will be the battle with Russia and her allies, and the upsetting the balance of power and the supremacy of the Western World. But something has been going on in the spirit world, and in Revelation 12:5,6 we have Israel giving birth to a male child. The child is caught up, in verse 5, to God and to His throne. That child--Christ--was born, was executed and ascended to the Father. The woman fled into the wilderness and there she has a place prepared for 1260 days. Now note what happens here, at this period of time. "And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. And the dragon and his angels waged war, and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him." Important to keep in mind--Satan has lost his position in heaven by virtue of his rebellion against God, but Satan has not yet lost his access into heaven. Satan is no longer the anointed cherub that covers the Throne of God and serves in the very presence of God. He has lost that position. But he still has access to go into the presence of God in glory. We see this laid out clearly in the opening chapters of the Book of Job where the sons of God come to present themselves before God, and Satan comes among them as a fallen being to accuse Job before God.

In the middle of the Tribulation, Michael and his angels will stand against Satan and his angels, and Satan and the demons will be cast from heaven. Access, then, to them will be closed off.

So we read in Revelation 12, verse 12, "For this reason, rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth

and the sea; because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time." When that event occurs and Satan is cast from the presence of God and is not allowed to return, he knows that the end is near. And now he begins to display the awful wrath of this supernatural being in a way that has never been seen before.

And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman (representing Israel in this chapter) who gave birth to the male child." And then the woman flees into the wilderness for a time, times and a half time. The dragon attempts to destroy her in verse 17, "And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus." Now Christ is going to talk more about this event in Matthew 24, beginning in verse 15, but you ought to note here. The change in attitude toward Israel on the part of the Antichrist, the persecution that develops all relate to the fact that a supernatural event has occurred in the heavens. Satan has been cast to the earth, and now he attempts to annihilate the people of God, the nation Israel.

Come back to Matthew 24. So persecution breaks out, again focusing on Israel. Israel will be hated by all nations "on account of My name." Israel is the foe of Satan, and so the foe of the followers of Satan because Israel is the select nation that belongs to God.

Verse 10, "And at that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another." At the time persecution breaks out many will fall away. Literally it says, "Many will be caused to stumble." During the first 3½ years, Israel has re-instituted its sacrificial worship system, has constructed the temple, and the nation as a whole is involved now in this superficial worship of God according to the Old Testament pattern. But now persecution breaks out, and what persecution does is to sift the genuine from the counterfeits. And now when persecution breaks out, the many are caused to stumble; they are offended. So they are driven away from God, even from the external, superficial matter of worship.

Look back in Matthew chapter 11. Christ spoke of this using the same word "to fall away" or "be caused to stumble." Matthew 11:6, "Blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me." Now here the persecution will cause many in Israel to stumble. They will be moving back to believing their Scriptures, believing in the possibility of a coming Messiah, but when persecution breaks out they are willing to throw it all overboard. Because look, God is not doing anything; He is abandoning us. There's no hope in this, there's no reason to give your life for this.

While you're back there, look in Matthew 10:21, you see this period of time described. "And brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents, and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all on account of My name. . ." Luke 21:16 puts it this way, "You will be delivered up, even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends." You see what is going to happen? When this persecution breaks out, everyone turns against every one, even members of families are going to be turning in other members of families. A parent is going to tell the authorities that their child is worshiping someone other than the Antichrist. A brother is going to turn in a brother. A child is going to turn against the parent. So you see something of the awfulness of this. A person is not going to know what to do. We've had some of this today in certain

countries. Some of you who were traveling in other countries shared with me this past year an experience where when witnessing to a man and attempting to give him a Bible, but his big concern was that his wife would find out that he had a Bible and she would tell the authorities. That kind of breakdown, even in the natural family bonds and the fear of what would happen. That will characterize the Tribulation. No one to turn to.

He goes on in Matthew 24:11, "And many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many." You notice how many times it's emphasized--verse 5, verse 11, and again in verse 24--false prophets, false messiahs, those who will come and attempt to lead the nation Israel particularly into delusive hope. This has happened over Israel's history where when there was persecution there were always those who would rise up and say "I'm the Messiah come to deliver you," and a portion of Israel will follow. A warning, many will be misled but you are to be alert.

Verse 12, "And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold." In other words, Israel will even give up the pretense of loving and serving God. This persecution is going to be so overwhelming and so intense that they'll even abandon any pretense of loving God. During the first 3½ years of tranquility there has been a return to the externals of worship, but now under the intense pressure, there will be abandoning of even that.

I was interested in talking while in Israel on our last trip with one of the Jewish people there and their idea as it is now with the pressure they have that we can't depend upon God. If He's there fine; if He's not fine, but we've got to have the military might to do it on our own. It will be that attitude deepening under the pressure of Tribulation.

Verse 13, two verses that are often misunderstood because the context is not observed. "But the one who endures to the end, it is he who shall be saved." There is a promise given here that some will be saved. You might get the idea as you read of the Tribulation and these warnings that there's no hope for anyone. But there's a promise here to those who endure they will experience salvation. I take it the context here indicates that we are talking about spiritual salvation not physical salvation. In verses 10-12 He has talked about an apostasy, a departure from following God. False christs. But in contrast to that, those who endure, who are faithful through all of this, they will experience God's salvation. I think the point being made here is simply the perseverance of the saints. The true believers will persevere and will remain faithful even under the trials of the Tribulation. This is always true of believers. One of the marks of a true believer is perseverance--the doctrine is called The Perseverance of the Saints. True believers will persevere and will remain faithful.

Look at two passages with me--Colossians 1. We ought to note that it often takes certain kinds of situations, the coming together of certain circumstances, to reveal whether a person is truly a believer or not. In times of tranquility many people profess to have a relationship with God and His Son Jesus Christ. But when the pressure is applied--Christ talked about this in Matthew 13, those who respond immediately but when the sun comes out, persecution beings they wilt and they are revealed to have no root and belong to Him. In Colossians 1:23, the promise that we will be presented in the presence of God. "If indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which

was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister." It doesn't mean you can lose your salvation. That's contrary to the consistent teaching of Scripture. What it does mean is that if you really have salvation, you will remain faithful to God even under pressure and persecution.

Hebrews chapter 10, verse 39, speaks of this kind of faithfulness under persecution. Hebrews 10:39 we're told, "But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul." True saving faith means you will persevere. 1 John 2 puts it this way, "They went out from us because they were not really part of us. If they were part of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out from us that it might be manifested that they were really not part of us." So that means that if you're a true believer you will persevere. The promise here in Matthew 24 is that those who are truly believers, even under the intensity of the persecution, where multiplied millions will give their lives as martyrs, true believers will remain faithful. They will stand true.

Now when He talks about this "He who endures to the end shall be saved," the particular focal point here is to the nation Israel although there are people from all nations going to be saved. That's similar to a passage in Romans 11--perhaps you ought to take note of that passage, it's very important to the future of Israel. Israel does have a future, and the nation Israel is going to undergo salvation at the end of the Tribulation. There will be a mass turning of the Jews to Jesus Christ as their Messiah at the end of the 7-year Tribulation. So we read in Romans 11:25, "For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; . . ." Now the fullness of the Gentiles is that time when God is dealing with the Gentiles, and then he says "and thus all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, 'The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob. And this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.' From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers . . ." All Israel will be saved. Those who endure to the end shall be saved, talking about the same event. And the purpose of the Tribulation is to bring Israel to its knees before God so they will be ready to say, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." That doesn't mean every Jew will be saved nor every single individual. But, the Jews as a whole, there will be a mass turning to Jesus as Messiah as the Tribulation draws to a close and Christ will come to be their Deliverer, first spiritually and then physically.

Turn back to Matthew 24. Verse 14, "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then shall the end come." A verse that is sometimes taken out of context and applied to today, and that's why we've got to get the gospel out all over the world. And that's why radio is so important. But keep in mind; what is the timeframe of Matthew 24? It's yet future. It's after the Rapture of the Church. So it's not talking about events of today. It's talking about events that will take place during the 7-year Tribulation.

"This gospel of the kingdom,"--that's the message that John the Baptist preached. That's the message that Jesus preached and His disciples--"Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." It's the message that Jesus is the Messiah and the kingdom of

God is about to be established on the earth. So you need to repent and believe in Him as your Savior.

This message will be preached throughout the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then shall come the end. So verse 14, "then shall come the end," that's the climax. Then Christ will intervene. The climatic event that He points to here is the presentation of the gospel concerning Christ as the Messiah Savior and the establishing of His kingdom all through the world. Isn't it amazing in the Tribulation with the persecution going on, with the natural catastrophes as we would call them transpiring, one of the things that is going to happen is that the world is going to be saturated with the message of Jesus Christ the Messiah and the kingdom that He will establish.

Look over in Revelation 14 where John, verse 6, brings this out. "And I saw another angel flying in mid-heaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people . . ." And note what he says--you get an idea of what this eternal gospel is. "And he said with a loud voice, 'Fear God, and give Him glory; because the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters.'" That's the eternal gospel. You say, "Wait a minute, I thought the gospel was 1 Corinthians 15, the death, burial and resurrection of Christ." Now He says the eternal gospel that he preaches is fear God, give Him glory, judgment is coming, worship Him. Where's the death, burial and resurrection of Christ? Well, can you worship God apart from faith in the death, burial and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ? No you cannot, the whole Book of Hebrews develops that. There is no true worship of God apart from faith in Jesus Christ. Can you give God glory apart from glorifying Jesus Christ? "He who honors the Son honors the Father." If you don't honor the Son, you don't honor the Father. So that's all wrapped up in this eternal gospel. "Worship Him," the purpose that God has for all creation. Now does that mean an angel will be the preacher in the 7-year Tribulation?

That's possible. God could supernaturally send an angel through the heavens, and as he travels through the heavens he could be proclaiming so that all on earth understand in their own dialect and their own languages this eternal gospel. Most probably in light of the way God works and the way we see Him working in the Book of Revelation, the angels in the Book of Revelation are messengers who see that God's program is accomplished on the earth. So here this messenger, this angel, with the eternal gospel, has the responsibility to see that this program of preaching the gospel to every creature and every nation is carried out. But the most natural way to understand it would be it's carried out through the individuals on the earth. We have a couple indications of that. Back in Revelation 7 there are certain servants of God who are sealed by God at the beginning of the Tribulation. The seal of God means they are marked out as belonging to Him and preserved by Him. These are the 144,000 and great and wonderful things have been done with that number! But all you have to do is read Revelation 7 and beginning with verse 4, "And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand. Who are they? "From every tribe of the sons of Israel." They are Jews! In case you don't know what the every tribe of the sons of Israel is. From the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Judah twelve thousand, on down through verse 8. I can see no reason for anyone to misunderstand who the 144,000 are except those who have a twisted and perverted mind and want to twist the Scripture. The

144,000 are said to be Jews, and there are 12,000 from each tribe. Now God sealed these, marked out as belonging to Him, and evidently supernaturally preserved by Him during the Tribulation. It may be that they will be the messengers of Christ to carry the gospel throughout the world during that 7-year period. It doesn't specifically say that but it's a possibility. Marked out as His bondservants and identified in this special way.

Over in Revelation 14 you'll note that the first five verses deal with the 144,000. And then you switch in verse 6 to the scene of the angel flying in the heavens with the eternal gospel. And it may be that that angel's ministry is carried out through these 144,000 who will saturate the world with the gospel.

Now also in Revelation 11 God will rise up two supernatural individuals--by that I mean that they are two human beings raised up and supernaturally empowered by God to carry out a ministry for one half of the Tribulation. It will either be the first half or the second half, we're not going to get into which half, but it is for only one half of the Tribulation because verse 3 says their ministry is for 1260 days. They have a dynamic, supernatural ministry.

Verse 5 "And if any one desires to harm them, fire proceeds out of their mouth and devours their enemies; and if any one would desire to harm them, in this manner he must be killed." So you see they will be supernaturally protected. You get charbroiled if you try to harm them in the Tribulation.

Verse 6, "These have the power to shut up the sky, in order that rain may not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with every plague, as often as they desire." At the end of their 3½-year ministry they are going to be executed. At the end of 3½ days when their bodies have been laying on the streets of Jerusalem and the news reels from around the world have been focusing on them, and we're told here that people all over the world are going to look at their dead bodies in the street. Don't you wonder how John thought that was going to happen? But we do that today--we look at people who have been slain in other parts of the world and people all over the world look at their bodies on television. So it's not so hard now. The whole world will view their bodies lying on the streets of Jerusalem. They'll be there for 3½ days. They won't allow them to be buried. People of the world are going to be so excited they'll give gifts to one another. "We're sure glad those two guys are gone." After 3½ days, on the evening news as everyone's sitting down watching there's those two bodies again, and all of a sudden those bodies are going to stand up! Can you imagine what that's going to do to weak hearts in the world?

Then we're told there will be a great earthquake, and many people will die. So you have the two witnesses who are going to be used, and their supernatural ministry is going to draw the attention of the world to that ministry. So people all over the world--again, perhaps through satellite television or whatever--they are going to be viewing these men preaching the message of the eternal gospel over that 3½-year period. So however it is accomplished, Christ says this message of the gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the world to all the nations, and then the end shall come.

Come back to Matthew 24. Isn't it amazing the grace of God? What's happening in the 7-year Tribulation? The awful



wrath of Almighty God is being dumped out upon the earth and the world is being judged for its rebellion. 2 Thessalonians 2 says, "Because they refused the knowledge of the truth that they might be saved." But the grace of God is even seen there. While this judgment is being poured out upon the earth, the gracious gospel of God is being proclaimed throughout the world. While Israel is undergoing the most intense persecution that has ever been experienced by any people at any time, God in His grace is proclaiming to them Jesus is the Messiah. He is the Savior and you must believe in Him.

So it's a remarkable time. Now in Matthew 24:15 Jesus is going to return now to the middle of the Tribulation, and we won't get into this study now. But in our next study we'll note verse 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), then let those who are in Judea flee..." For, verse 21, "For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall."

So in verse 9 He said, "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation," and He overviews that last 3½-year period. Then in verse 15 He goes back to when that persecution will begin. How do you know when persecution is going to start? When the really great persecution for Israel begins to unfold? Here is the key identifying sign, and when you see this occur you better run and hide and don't even go back to get a coat because that's how quickly the persecution is going to break out. And the designs of the Antichrist that he has formulated are ready to be implemented, and in almost an instant of time he is ready to overwhelm the nation with persecution and destruction. So here, Israel, in this period of time will be what to look for, and when you see that you better run and hide. And now Christ will unfold the truth concerning the abomination of desolation and the ministry of the Antichrist in the 7-year Tribulation.

Amazing this program of God. Judgment is sure; judgment is settled; judgment is real. But the love and mercy and grace of God are also real. You know why Israel is going into the 7-year Tribulation? Why they are going to suffer to a depth and a degree that no nation has ever suffered? Because they were unwilling to have the grace of God. They were unwilling to have Jesus as their Savior.

We face the same situation today. God speaks to us concerning judgment. Jesus said, "If you do not believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins." Yet people continue to reject the marvelous grace of God, and they say, "I don't believe in judgment." Judgment is sure, but the grace of God is real. Those who believe in Him experience His salvation. Where do you stand in that? If the Rapture occurred today would you be taken to meet Jesus Christ in the air, or would you be left to go into this 7-year period of time? How have you responded to the grace of God? How have you taken advantage of this time of tranquility and peace and opportunity to hear the gospel? Have you come to believe in Him as your Savior, the One who died that you might be spared the judgment and brought to glory?