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#1343

Unpacking The Future *Dark Days Are Coming!*

The end of the world and end time themes are really intriguing to most people. Do a book search in the "Religion & Spirituality" section of Amazon.com and you come up with results like this: "Armageddon" 4,000 titles, "Tribulation" 14,000 titles, "Apocalypse" 11,000 titles, and "End of the world" 22,000 titles. Add to that scores of movies made on doomsday themes and it becomes obvious we're obsessed with end times events.

It seems like the vast majority of what comes out of Hollywood, and even what's written by so called Bible students, is lots of speculation and little factual material.

What can we really know about the end times? Can we really be sure of anything?

This is week three of a series we're calling "Unpacking The Future." What we're doing is looking at the what the Bible clearly says about the end of the age. We're not setting dates or making our own predictions based on some of the more cryptic portions of Scripture. Instead we're looking at what we can know with certainty.

Last week we looked at what the Bible calls "Our blessed hope." We call it the rapture, or the catching away of believers at the end of this present age.

We took a look at this chart in which the end time events are laid out in what we believe, to the best of understanding, by studying the Bible, is chronological order.

We saw, reading from left to right, that we're in what we call the church age. That's the period of time that began with the day of Pentecost, 50 days after Jesus' crucifixion.

It was from that point on that all believers were placed into the universal church, or the body of Christ.

That extends on until the event we looked at last week. At the rapture the bodies of Christians who have died will be raised and those who are living will be glorified and we'll be caught up to be with Christ.

That marks the beginning of the next major event, the 7 year tribulation.

Down through the ages there have been unusual displays of human corruption; The Dark Ages, the Inquisition, Nazi Germany, Russia under Stalin, China under Chairman Mao, Cambodia under Pol Pot.

At any of these times if you were a target the ruling forces, you probably thought the world was coming to an end. You probably thought that nothing could be worse than what you were experiencing.

Well, as absolutely horrifying as each of those were, the Bible says there's coming an event that will make those pale in comparison.

Listen to these words of Jesus... *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. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved.* Matthew 24:21-22

The Jewish prophets described this time as one of wrath, judgment, indignation, trial, trouble, destruction, darkness, desolation, and punishment.

The prophet Zephaniah described it this way: *The noise of the day of the LORD is bitter; There the mighty men shall cry out. That day is a day of wrath, A day of trouble and distress, A day of devastation and desolation, A day of darkness and gloominess, A day of clouds and thick darkness.* Zephaniah 1:14-15

Jeremiah called it *the time of Jacob's trouble*. Jeremiah 30:7 Jacob was the father of 12 sons through whom came the Jewish people. So in one sense it's focused on Israel.

The prophet Daniel said, *And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time.* Daniel 12:1

In the book of Revelation it is *the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.* Revelation 3:10

There's no doubt that a time of unparalleled darkness and destruction is ahead.

While we can't say it will be next week, or next year, or 25 years from now we can know that God says it's coming.

So today we want to try to answer some questions about the character of the coming tribulation. What will it be like?

I. The Tribulation Will Be A Time Of Divine Judgment

Turn to Genesis 12 pg 11

Out of all the inhabitants of the world at this time God chooses one man, named Abram, and makes him some astounding promises.

Read vs 1 - 3

God's purpose was to create a special people for himself. He would give them His laws and send them His prophets. Abram, who was later known as Abraham, became the father of the Jewish people.

Ultimately all the families of earth would be blessed by his descendant Jesus Christ who would die for the sins of the world.

What I want us to notice this morning is God's promise in verse 3. *I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you.*

Israel is the most hated nation on earth and God will judge the nations for their anti-semitism.

The judgments that God will reign down on the earth will be many and varied. The book of Revelation lists famine, earth quakes, fire, hail, and darkness.

Along with the anti-semitism God will judge the nations for their rejection of Him.

It's interesting that somehow we all have a hard time believing that judgment is coming.

It's why so few people believe in hell, or at least believe that they might go there.

As things grow worse and worse in our world we just adjust. Somehow we get used to police officers in our schools and TSA restrictions at the airport because of terrorism. It all just becomes part of the landscape.

Well the Bible says that when the tribulation begins people will actually be positive about things. That's because of one the Bible calls the anti-Christ or the Beast.

With a name like that you wouldn't think he'd be well liked but apparently this one who is a charismatic, popular, world ruler appears to bring peace. And obviously doesn't go by the name of "beast."

John said he will have *a mouth speaking great things...* Revelation 13:5. Daniel said that his *appearance was greater than his fellows.* Daniel 7:20 He later called him one *Having fierce features, Who understands sinister schemes.* Daniel 8:23

And then Daniel says, *His power shall be mighty, but not by his own power...Through his cunning He shall cause deceit to prosper under his rule; And he shall exalt himself in his heart.* Daniel 8:24-25

Robert Gromacki, in his book, *Are These The Last Days?* writes, "This coming world leader will doubtless have a dynamic personality. He will have the ability to move television audiences and live crowds with his appearance, decorum, and eloquent speaking ability."

"He will combine the logic of a Churchill, the emotion of a Hitler, and the wit of a Kennedy into a Hollywood type image."

The anti-Christ will gain world power by two diverse methods. One will be militarily. That's spelled out in Daniel 7 and 8. He'll gain control through power and then enforce peace.

The second will be with a peace treaty in the Middle East. Anyone who can seem to solve the Middle East crisis will be instantly hailed as a hero.

There's a problem though, and here's where Israel comes in again.

Turn to Daniel 9 pg 791

I know this is kind of a technical passage but I'll try to simplify it. Just follow along with me.

The prophet Daniel was taken captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar in the 6th century BC. He's praying and asking God for an understanding of the future of Israel, and here's what God shows him.

Read vs 24

The "weeks" turn out to be weeks of years. So 70 weeks, or 490 years, are determined for Israel.

Read 25-26a

From the time the command would be given to rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah would be 7 weeks plus 62 weeks. That would be 69 sevens or 483 years.

That brings us right to the time that Jesus died on the cross.

But now notice, **Read vs 26b-27**

Seventy weeks of years were determined upon Israel. The first 69 bring us up to the cross. The 70th week or the last 7 years hasn't happened yet.

Right now God isn't dealing with Israel nationally. He's dealing with the church which is made up of Jews and non-Jews who believe in Jesus.

But in the 7 year tribulation God will again deal with Israel, and notice what happens. There's one coming who will make a covenant with Israel. It will be a covenant of peace.

But right in the middle he'll break that covenant. This is the anti-Christ and what he does is unleash a deluge of persecution against the Jewish people.

This is what Jesus is warning about in Matthew 24 when He says, *Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 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.*
Matthew 24:15 & 21

This is a distinctively Jewish time. The church has been raptured and God is judging the world, but now that judgment even spills over to Israel.

Because of unbelief many Jews will die during the tribulation and won't enter into the blessings of the Millennial Kingdom.

I. The Tribulation Will Be A Time Of Divine Judgment

II. The Tribulation Will Be A Time OF Unparalleled Revival

According to the Bible, more people will come to faith in Jesus during this seven year period than at any other equivalent time in history.

For Israel it will be a time of Jacob's trouble but it will be a time of salvation too.

Turn to Zechariah 12 pg 840

The prophet Zechariah spoke of the battle of Armageddon when the nations of the world will come against Jerusalem and God Himself will destroy them.

Look what happens as Jesus Christ returns. **Read vs 10**
Chapter 13 read vs 6-9

So one third of the people of Israel will survive the tribulation as believers.

But there's other Jews too. **Turn to Revelation 7 pg 1092**

Read vs 1-4 Here's 144,000 Jewish believers in Christ who spread the good news during the tribulation time.

But now read vs 9-10 13-14

Isn't that exciting! There's all this chaos with the anti-Christ, cataclysmic divine judgments, wars and fighting, and in the middle of it all God redeems so many people from all over the globe John couldn't number them.

How will God get His message out? I can think of at least three ways. In Revelation 11 there are two prophet-like characters who are called the two witnesses. They'll do miracles and proclaim God's truth.

There's the 144,00 Jews who are called the servants of our God.

And then God will use angels. **Turn to Revelation 14 Read verses 6-7**

Along with all of that there will be multitudes of people trying to figure out what's going on who will turn to the Bible and read it for themselves.

Now you might be listening to this and say, "I have an idea. I'll just wait until the tribulation starts and then I'll trust Jesus Christ as my Savior. It will all be clear then and I'm already hearing the truth now so when the time comes I'll believe.

We'll you may, or you may not. **Turn to II Thessalonians 2 page 1051**

II Thessalonians 2 deals with the tribulation and the revealing of the anti-Christ.

Because Roman persecution under Nero was so horrendous some of the early Christians figured they must be in the tribulation.

Read vs 3 The anti-Christ must be revealed. But notice his character. He's the man of sin, the son of perdition and look what he does. **Read vs 4**

The Jewish temple will be rebuilt. Organizations like The Temple Institute in Jerusalem are dedicated to the rebuilding. They have painstakingly replicated all the temple vessels and vestments. They're ready.

They say in their Statement of Principles *Every prophet of Israel, without exception, prophesied that the Temple would be rebuilt, ushering in a new era of universal harmony and peace unparalleled in the history of man.*

The Jewish people will be deceived into thinking the anti-Christ is part of this new era of peace until he shows his true character.

This is the abomination of desolation that Daniel wrote about. The anti-Christ sets himself up as God in the temple and demands that the world worship him.

You might wonder how he's going to get the people who followed him as a world leader to worship him. Here's how. **Read vs 9-12**

There's three words that stand out in verse 9; power, signs, and wonders. Those same three words in the Greek text *dunamis*, *semeion*, and *teras* are the words used to describe the miracles of Jesus Christ and the miracles of the apostles.

Why will the world worship him? Because he and his cohort called "the false prophet" will do spectacular miracles that will be broadcast worldwide.

Jesus did amazing miracles but nobody outside a radius of a very few miles ever saw them. The anti-Christ will be on every news channel and internet outlet around the globe.

And notice what happens. God sends people strong delusion that they should believe the lie.

There's going to be many, many people come to faith at this time but it won't be easy. Many more will buy into Satan's deception.

That's why the Bible contains these sobering words: *Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.* II Corinthians 6:2

I. The Tribulation Will Be A Time Of Divine Judgment

II. The Tribulation Will Be A Time OF Unparalleled Revival

III. The Tribulation Will Be A Time Of Unprecedented Persecution

When the anti-Christ breaks the treaty with Israel and sets himself up as God and demands world-wide worship he inaugurates a brutal wave of persecution against the Jews.

Turn to Matthew 24 page 874

We call this section of scripture the Olivet Discourse because Jesus answers questions about the end of the age while sitting on the Mount of Olives, the very place Zechariah says He will step His foot when He returns.

Read verses 1-2

The first temple was built in Jerusalem by Solomon in 957 BC. It was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. Under Cyrus the Jews returned and built a smaller structure. In about 20 BC Herod the Great rebuilt the temple into a massive structure.

Now Jesus tells his disciples that it would be flattened. Not one stone would be left upon another.

Of course that's exactly what happened in 70 AD under the Roman General Titus. He sacked and burned the city. It's said that his men even pried apart some of the stones in the temple to get the gold that had melted.

The disciples must have been amazed.

I'm sure many of you had visited the World Trade Center in New York before 911.

Standing before those 2 massive structures that were over 1350 feet tall none of us could have imagined them being destroyed in a matter of minutes.

That's the way the disciples must have felt. So they had some questions for Jesus. **Read verse 3**

First Jesus tells them about the time leading up to and beginning the tribulation.

There'll be wars, earthquakes, famines, false prophets, lawlessness and persecution.

But then in the middle of the tribulation it really breaks loose. **Read 15-22**

Why does the anti-Christ hate the Jews so much? Because he's really empowered by Satan and he hates God and He hates Jesus Christ. Daniel says, *He shall speak great words against the Most High.* Daniel 7:25

John wrote, *Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven.* Revelation 13:6

But now listen to this, *The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority.* Revelation 13:2

The anti-Christ is empowered by Satan and Satan hates Israel. Israel was established by God. Jesus was a Jew from Israel.

Over the centuries people have made a lot of guesses as to who the anti-Christ might be. People have claimed he's everone from the Pope to Barac Obama. I'm not making that up! Let me add my guess to the mix.

I don't know who the individual is but I know where he comes from. He's called "the Assyrian." Micah 5:5 His headquarters are in Babylon according to Revelation 17-18.

I believe the anti-Christ will be Middle Eastern and his power center will be in Iraq where Babylon's located. There's a whole lot more to transpire in the Middle East in the next few years.

By the way, as I side note, I don't read anything in the Bible that I can identify with the USA. Some people have tried to read America into Bible prophecy. I don't see it. For all I know there won't be an America when all this takes place. I just don't know.

What I do know is that the Jewish people suffer intense persecution.

But so do non Jews. The anti-Christ is going to persecute Gentiles who have assisted the Jews. He's going to persecute those who have accepted the gospel message. He's going to persecute those who refuse to take his mark and worship him.

Revelation 13 explains, *He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.*

Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is six hundred and sixty-six. Revelation 13:16-18

This is complete and total control. And he'll hunt down and destroy anyone who defies his orders.

It will be a bloody time. **Turn to Revelation 6 Page 1092 Read verses 9-11**

Look at Revelation Chapter 20:4

No wonder God says *now is the day of salvation!*

How does this seven year period of tribulation end? Jesus said in Luke 21:20 *But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near.*

The armies of the nations will band together under the leadership of the anti-Christ to come against Jerusalem. They'll gather in the plain of Megiddo. We know it as Armageddon.

It's going to look pretty bleak for Israel. Many will die in battle until this final conclusion.

Revelation 19:11-20:3

The theme of the Bible from beginning to end is that God is our Savior. In the end he defeats the anti-Christ and his armies and establishes a kingdom of peace that will last for 1000 years.

Today, if you're a believer in Jesus Christ you can thank God that you won't experience all the horrors of the tribulation. Our blessed hope is Jesus Christ coming for us in the rapture and taking us to heaven before the tribulation begins.

But we still need to remember that that doesn't mean there won't be suffering and trials before the rapture.

The New Testament gives this warning: *But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. II Timothy 3:1-5*

God wanted us to know something very important. Everything wasn't just going to go along fine in our world and one day the rapture happens, the tribulation starts and it all gets bad.

There's an incremental move towards evil in our world that just culminates in the tribulation.

We shouldn't be shocked that there's brutality and wickedness in our world. Those things should just make us get on our knees and pray the prayer that John prayed at the end of the book of Revelation. *Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*

Are you ready for that day? Jesus Christ gave His very life's blood so that you could be forgiven and made a part of God's eternal family.

Have you trusted Him today? Have you received Him as your personal Savior?

Jesus said, *Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.* John 6:47