

This particular message has a lot of references to number of years (i.e., seven, 49, 70). The usual format I use is spell out numbers one through nine and use the actual numbers for higher than nine; however, I didn't follow that pattern here, most are all spelled out - let's discuss what is preferred for future reference.

The Memoirs of Peter
The Future According To Jesus, Part 5

Mark 13:3-37

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At some point still in the future at the end of human history, Scripture tells us that there will be a period of seven years during which God will unleash His wrath against the earth and its people. That period of time, that seven year period, is called the tribulation. Jesus told His disciples that it would be a time unparalleled in human history. Of course, it raises an important question for us, and somebody came up last Sunday night (a couple actually) and asked me about: "What about us? What about us during that tribulation period that we've already begun to examine?" We've looked at the first three and a half years and the beginning of birth pangs. Where will we be? Will we be there during the tribulation period? Or another way to ask the same basic question is this: Is the rapture of the church mentioned in the Olivet Discourse? The answer is no, it's not. Why not? Well, remember the questions that they asked. They asked about the timing of the destruction of the temple. They asked about the signs of the establishment of the kingdom. And they asked about the signs of His second coming. None of those relate directly to the rapture of the church. But when you examine the same period of time that Jesus describes here in the Olivet Discourse in the book of Revelation, the evidence affirms that believers will not be on earth during the tribulation except for those believers who are actually saved during the tribulation period.

For example, if you look at the book of Revelation, it begins obviously with the letters to the seven churches. At that point, the church is on earth. The word 'church' occurs nineteen times in those chapters. When you get to chapters 4 and 5 of Revelation, you have a group of people called the elders who represent the church, and they are at that point already in heaven. You fast forward through the tribulation period to chapter 19, the first ten verses of chapter 19, you have the marriage supper of the Lamb in heaven. And then in the second half of chapter 19, you have the saints returning from heaven with Christ at the second coming. The church is not clearly represented as being on earth from the end of chapter 3 until the second coming in chapter 19. Again, there are individuals who will be saved during that period of time; they're discussed, but not the church. So as you contemplate and reflect on the approaching storm of the wrath of God and the Lamb, you need to thank God that our Lord Jesus Christ rescues us from the approaching storm of His wrath. We will not be a part of it. We will be raptured prior to that event or, if our Lord delays His coming, we will be taken (from) through death into His presence.

So that brings us back to Mark 13, what we commonly call the Olivet Discourse. Here Jesus explains the future. I've told you that the sermon is organized into four parts. You have in verses 5 through 13 the beginning of birth pangs. That describes the first three and a half years of that

seven year period we call the tribulation. The events that are described there transpire throughout time, throughout church history in a small sort of Braxton Hicks variety. But when you come to the end, when you come to the first three and a half years of that seven year tribulation, they will be incredible in their intensity. Then you have, beginning in verse 14, where we start tonight down through verse 23 the great tribulation. This is from the midpoint of that seven year tribulation period to the end. The whole thing is called the tribulation, the seven years. The second three and a half years are called the great tribulation because that's when God unleashes His full fury against the world. Then in verse 24 down through verse 27 you have the second coming. And in verse 28 down through verse 37, you have the exhortation from our Lord to be alert and to be ready for His coming.

Now last week we finished just the first part of this sermon found in verses 5 through 13 – the beginning of birth pangs. Notice the end of verse 8: “These things are merely the beginning of birth pangs.” And we discovered that there are really five birth pangs Jesus touches on here. There are false Christs in verses 5 and 6. There's war at the beginning of verse 7. There are natural disasters) in the second half of verse 8, intense persecution (verses 9 through 13) and in the middle of that, in verse 10, we're reminded that the gospel will go global before time ends.

Now from the first century through the rest of human history, these things routinely occur. But as we approach the end, they will occur with increasing frequency and intensity. And in the first half of that seven year period (the first three and a half years of the tribulation), these things will occur at their greatest intensity. We saw that in the first five seals in the book of Revelation, which really remarkably resemble what our Lord describes in these ‘beginning of birth pangs.’

Now tonight, we come to the second part of Jesus' sermon about the future, and we come to the part that describes the great tribulation – that period of time that begins at the midpoint of the seven years of tribulation and runs to the end and to the second coming. The tribulation (again, the ‘tribulation’) as I use that term describes the entire seven year period. The tribulation begins shortly after the rapture. I say “shortly” because we don't really know exactly how long the interval will be between the rapture and the beginning of the tribulation. Scripture nowhere says that the tribulation is initiated by the rapture. There may even be a short time between them. But Scripture is clear what initiates the tribulation period. It is a person. Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 that “the day of the Lord will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed...” There will be a person, the man of lawlessness, who will be revealed. And with his revelation, the tribulation period begins.

Now what we discover in several places in Scripture is that the midpoint of that seven year period is punctuated with a catastrophic event. At exactly three and a half years, a catastrophic event will occur. And tonight, we discover what that event is. Look with me at Mark 13 and let me begin reading for us in verse 14. And I'll read the paragraph – let me just warn you. We're

not going to get any further than the first verse tonight; two weeks from tonight we'll finish up the rest of this paragraph. But let's begin in verse 14:

But when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION standing where it should not be (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. The one who is on the housetop must not go down, or go in to get anything out of his house; and the one who is in the field must not turn back to get his coat. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! Pray that it may not happen in the winter. For those days will be a time of tribulation such has not occurred since the beginning of creation which God created until now, and never will. Unless the Lord had shortened those days, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom He chose, He shortened the days. And then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ'; or, 'Behold, He is there'; do not believe him; for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But take heed; behold, I have told you everything in advance.

Here we are introduced to the second half of that seven year period. What we read about in verse 14 is a catastrophic event that occurs at the midpoint of those seven years (as we'll see in a moment) and initiates the great tribulation. Now because the events described in verses 5 to 13 occur throughout history, this really marks the first real sign that the end is near that Jesus has given to His disciples. They ask about when is the sign of Your coming, when is the end. And Jesus really is giving them here the very first clearly recognizable sign.

So what exactly is Jesus describing in verse 14, this initiating event? Well, there are clues here in Mark. Notice that part of verse 14 is quoted from the Old Testament. You'll notice in our New American Standard Bible when a passage or a part of a passage is in all caps, that means it's quoted from the Old Testament. So we know this is from the Old Testament. And if you're familiar with the Old Testament, you recognize that expression. But Matthew makes this even clearer. Keep your finger here in Mark and go back to Matthew 24. Look at Matthew 24:15. Here's Matthew's version of it: "Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place..." You see how he gives us more information here. So the abomination of desolation is describing a specific event that the prophet Daniel prophesied. It's something that is made to stand (according to Mark) where it should not be, but Matthew makes that much more explicit. He says it'll be standing in the holy place; that is, in the temple. There will be an event that comes at the midpoint of the tribulation that for those living at that time will be an obvious sign. When this event occurs, Jesus says, you will know that the events that just happened described in verses 5 through 13 were not Braxton Hicks contractions that time, but were really the beginning of the real birth pangs.

So what is this catastrophic event that really marks the end? Notice He says it's the one "spoken of through Daniel the prophet." So we need to go back. We need to go back to Daniel the prophet, and that's where we're going to spend a lot of our time tonight because we need to understand what Jesus is alluding to here. Go back with me to Daniel chapter 9. Let's start in verse 1 to get the context here:

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of Median descent, who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans – in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was revealed as the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.

In other words, at a particular point in his history there in Babylon, under Darius (or Darius), he discovers in Jeremiah that God had said how long His people would remain in captivity. And so, verse 3: "I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes." So he prays in light of what he's discovered in the Scripture – that Jeremiah said there would be seventy years' captivity, and Daniel begins to pray in light of that. In response to his prayer, a response comes from God. Verse 20:

Now while I was speaking and praying, and confessing my sin (and by the way, if you've never read Daniel's prayer in Daniel chapter 9, it is an amazing prayer and a great example of pouring out your heart in repentance before God.) But while I was praying and speaking, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, presenting my supplication before the Lord my God in behalf of the holy mountain of my God, while I was still speaking in prayer, then the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision previously, came to me in my extreme weariness about the time of the evening offering. And he gave me instruction and talked with me and said, 'O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you insight and understanding. At the beginning of your supplications the command was issued, and I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed; so give heed to the message and gain understanding of the vision.

In response to Daniel's prayer about the time of the captivity – remember, Daniel is captive in Babylon. The people of Israel have been carried away captive. They're in the middle of this period. Daniel discovers it's a seventy year period prophesied by Jeremiah, and he prays for insight.

And in response to that prayer, here's the prophecy received. Look at verse 24:

Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most

holy place. So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and then the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. And he (that is, back in verse 20, the prince who is to come, he) will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.

That is an amazing prophecy. By Jerome's time (who translated the Latin Vulgate), there were already nine different interpretations of this passage, but it is one of the grandest, most majestic prophetic passages that exists on all the pages of Scripture. Now I want us to walk through this. It's important to understand to be able to go back to Mark's gospel and understand what our Lord is saying. So notice what he says here. Notice first of all that it is a prophecy about a period of time that lasts for seventy weeks. In reality, the word 'week' is not in the Hebrew text. Literally, it reads in Hebrew 'seventy sevens.' What kind of sevens? Is he talking about sevens of days, of months, of years or indefinite periods of time? Well, the word is used twenty times in the Old Testament and context always determines what it means. The context here demands seventy units of seven years – seventy weeks composed of seven years each. You do the math on that (seventy times seven), you have 490 years. This is a prophecy about a 490 year period in Israel's history.

Now how do we know he's talking about seventy weeks of seven years each? Well, first of all, notice back up in verses 1 and 2 that Daniel has been thinking about years. And specifically, he's been thinking about why seventy years of captivity. Why did the Babylonian captivity last for seventy years? Why did that happen? Well, Leviticus 25:4 demanded that every seventh year was to be treated like a sabbath in the land of Israel. And that seventh year, the land was to lie dormant, but Israel ignored that command. And so God, part of the reason God took them into captivity was because they refused to obey that command. Listen to 2 Chronicles 36:20:

Those who had escaped from the sword Nebuchadnezzar carried away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia (and listen to this, 2 Chronicles 36:21), to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath until seventy years were complete.

God punished Israel for not observing those sabbath years every seventh year. Therefore He put them into captivity for the 490 years they had failed to observe the sabbath year. If (they) for 490

years' time, they had failed to observe every seventh year as a sabbath year, that means seventy times they had failed to observe the sabbath year. And so He sent them into captivity for seventy years, so there's this pattern. There was a period of 490 years when Israel did not observe the sabbatical year. That was followed by seventy years of exile to make up for those years they had not. That was followed, according to Daniel here by another 490 years or seventy weeks of seven years pertaining to Israel's history. So clearly in context, you have to be dealing with seventy weeks of seven years. In addition, if you try to use 490 days or 490 weeks, it's impossible to fit the events that are described in this passage into that context, so years is the only thing that makes sense.

Now let me go back to verse 24: "Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city..." This is specifically for Israel and for Jerusalem. And of course, Daniel had just prayed for both back in verse 19. So notice, in light of this prophecy, six results are to be accomplished during this seventy week period. This is in verse 24. He mentions six different results that God is seeking to accomplish during this 490 year period – first of all to finish the transgression; that is, to end Israel's long apostasy. This 490 years was going to bring their long apostasy to an end. Verse 24: "to make an end of sin (to judge sin once and for all)..." The idea here is to, to seal something as you would put it in a package so that you can't see its contents – to judge it once and for all. Verse 24 says a third result of this 490 year period is "to make atonement for iniquity." The word 'atonement' here is the normal Old Testament word for atone; it, it means to cover. The result is forgiveness, to accomplish forgiveness for iniquity. Now notice the first three of those results all deal with sin. The next three all deal with righteousness. Look at the fourth in verse 24: "to bring in everlasting righteousness"; literally 'to cause righteousness to come.' Messiah will bring in that which will cause Israel to become righteous with an eternal righteousness. A fifth result of this prophecy in the period of time that it describes is "to seal up vision and prophecy." It's like our phrase 'to wrap it up.' God will fulfill all He has prophesied regarding Daniel's people and the holy city. It will be closed. It will be consummated like a book that is finished and sealed up because it's done. And then the sixth result is "to anoint the most holy place." To consecrate is the idea – to consecrate the most holy place. This expression is used forty times in the Old Testament, and thirty-nine of those times it refers to the Holy of Holies in the temple. So there will be, at some point in the future, a temple.

Now the first three of these results in verse 24 were fulfilled in principle at Christ's first coming, but they really wait until the second coming for complete fulfillment – when sin is ultimately, finally dealt with. The last three will be accomplished at the second coming. Righteousness will be truly, ultimately and eternally established.

So this is an amazing prophecy. These things are all going to take place as a result of these 490 years. The question is, 'when do these 490 years occur?' Notice verse 25: "So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks..." In other words, there are going to be

sixty-nine of those seventy weeks will take place from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince. So 483 years that are described in this prophecy are going to happen between a decree to rebuild Jerusalem and Messiah the Prince.

Now the problem here is that there were three different edicts to rebuild Jerusalem [or dealing with Jerusalem] and it's challenging to know which one Daniel is referring to. Let me give you the three just so you can think with me. The first decree that it could be referring to is the decree of Cyrus in 538 B.C. The second decree it could be referring to is the decree of Artaxerxes to Ezra in 458 B.C. That's in Ezra 7. The first one was in Ezra 1. The third decree it could be referring to is the decree of Artaxerxes to Nehemiah, you remember, when Nehemiah goes back to rebuild the city. That occurred in 444 B.C. That's recorded in Nehemiah chapter 2. So which is it? Well, the first one is impossible (the decree of Cyrus that happened in 538) because if you add 483 years to that, you run out fifty years before Messiah the Prince. So that one's not a good solution.

The second decree is possible in 458 B.C. because that would have it ending around 26 A.D. Now if your math doesn't exactly match my math, here's the reason -- they calculated years in those days with 360 days. So if you want to read more about this, you really want to get into this, get a book like a Harold Hoehner's 'Chronological Aspects in the Life of Christ' and you can get into it a lot more deeply, but you just have to trust me here that the, in the ancient world, they counted years by 360 years. So in each of those cases, that's what I'm giving you is the result. So this second possibility is possible. It has essentially the 483 years running out at about the time of the baptism of Jesus in 26 A.D. (26/27 A.D.).

The third is, I think, the most likely; it's also the most prevalent view among premillennialists, and that is that it has to do (when you look at verse 25 and he says "the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem," that this has to do) with the decree given to Nehemiah. Specifically, you remember, Nehemiah was to rebuild the city and its walls. And the rest of verse 25 talks about what happens: "...it'll be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress." That sounds exactly like what happens in the life and ministry of Nehemiah.

Now notice how he structures this verse. First of all, he has sixty-nine weeks but he separates the sixty-nine weeks into seven weeks and sixty-two weeks. That's because the first seven weeks (or 49 years) has to do with the ministry of Nehemiah when he was rebuilding the city. So that 49 year period takes us to the end of Nehemiah's life and ministry to the end of Malachi to the end of Old Testament history, and then you have sixty-two weeks (or 430 more years) – a total then of 483 years from the decree to rebuild the city of Jerusalem in 444 B.C. to Messiah the Prince. And again, because they used 360 days for a year, you have this ending (are you ready for this?) in 30 A.D. Amazing – amazing the accuracy of this prophecy.

Now notice what he says: "from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince..." At the end of the, the seven weeks and the sixty-two weeks (or add those

together, at the end of the sixty-nine weeks or 483 years) comes Messiah. The Hebrew word is 'Ha-Mashiach.' The Greek equivalent is 'Christ' or 'Christos.' It means the anointed one, the one described in other parts of Old Testament history. Now notice verse 26: "After the sixty-two weeks (so now we're, we're at the end of those sixty-nine weeks, the, the, the seven weeks, the sixty-two weeks; at the end of that) the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing..." The Messiah will be killed. By the way, it doesn't say immediately after. Any timeline that causes the sixty-nine weeks to end any time during the life of Christ satisfies the demands of Daniel's prophecy. But as we saw, remarkably, it really ends in 30 A.D., which I believe was the very year our Lord was crucified. Messiah will be cut off (in other words, killed or slain) and He will have nothing. At the time of His death, He wouldn't have a kingdom or authority. The fulfillment of the Messianic kingdom would not occur during His first coming.

But now he turns. Notice how he turns in verse 26. He takes us to another event. He's described the Messiah coming, the Messiah being killed. And then he adds this: "and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood..." What's that a reference to? Notice the prince is not the Messiah, but a prince who comes (as we'll learn in verse 27) for the purpose of destruction. Verse 27 explains what that future prince will do. But back in verse 26, we're not talking about the prince yet. We're talking about the people group from which that future prince will come. Who destroyed the city and the sanctuary? The Romans in 70 A.D. This is a prophecy that after the Messiah is cut off, there will come a time when a people group, from whom an eventual prince will come, will destroy the city and the sanctuary. "And its end will come with a flood" – that flood image pictures the overwhelming numbers of Roman soldiers descending upon the city of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

So this is an incredible prophecy. It takes us from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem under Nehemiah. It takes us through the end of Old Testament history. It fast forwards us at the end of the sixty-nine weeks to Messiah coming, Messiah being killed. And then it fast forwards a little further in their history to the destruction of the city and the sanctuary in 70 A.D. And then he says at the end of verse 26: "even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined." That may be speaking of the Roman wars around 70 A.D., or it may be speaking prophetically to the period from the destruction of Jerusalem to the end. Just like we saw in Mark chapter 13, there are to be wars and rumors of wars – could be either.

Now look at verse 27. Here we get to the passage from which our Lord draws in the Olivet Discourse: "And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week..." Stop there. Here's where the threefold division that the angel Gabriel shared with Daniel becomes important. Remember how he broke it up? There were seven weeks and then there were sixty-two weeks. What does that make? This isn't a trick question. Sixty-nine weeks. What does that leave? One week. Where did that week go? So far we have sixty-nine weeks of seven years (or 483 years) ending with Messiah being here and being cut off. So what happened to the seventieth week? There's one final week left or seven years left in this prophecy – the famous seventieth week.

We only have two choices. The first choice is that that seventieth week began immediately following the sixty-ninth week. Now think about that for a moment. That makes no sense because that would mean that whatever the seventieth week is predicting here (and we're going to look at in verse 27), it has already been fulfilled. If you take this approach, what Daniel describes in verse 27 cannot be connected to any great event. In fact, it just means the seventieth week kind of fizzles out seven years after the ministry of Christ in about 37 A.D. with nothing.

The other approach (and this is the one that I think by the time we're done you'll embrace as I do) is that this seventieth week is still in the future. There are a number of arguments for this seventieth week being in the future. Let me just give you a few. These are taken and adapted from Harold Hoehner's book that I mentioned to you, 'Chronological Aspects in the Life of Christ.' First of all, the promises back in verse 24? Those could not have all been fulfilled when Christ came the first time. Righteousness has not come in like a flood and been settled into eternal righteousness. Israel has not experienced everlasting righteousness. We already know there was some kind of gap (right?) because notice that verse 26 says: "after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off..." He wasn't cut off during that period of time, but after it. So there already is a gap between week sixty-nine and seventy. And of course such gaps aren't uncommon in prophecy. We've seen that already.

The person we're going to meet in verse 27 cannot be Christ. Christ didn't confirm a covenant during His first coming. He didn't break a covenant during His first coming. And the nearest antecedent to 'he' in verse 27 is the 'prince who is to come' back in verse 26. Christ's death didn't immediately cause the sacrificial system to cease which verse 27 says happens. And the abomination of desolation mentioned in verse 27 – that has not yet occurred because in Matthew 24 Jesus said it would come after His earthly ministry and immediately before His second coming. If Jesus hasn't come, then this verse hasn't been fulfilled.

So that means Daniel's seventieth week is still in the future. After (listen carefully, after) 483 years or 69 weeks around A.D. 30 in the ministry of Jesus, this prophetic clock stopped ticking. It stopped at the end of sixty-nine weeks, and there is still one seven-year period yet in the future when the events of this verse (verse 27) will unfold. Now look at verse 27. Here's Daniel's description of the one week that's yet to come. It says: "He will make a firm covenant with the many for one week..." 'He' cannot refer to Christ; it doesn't make any sense in the context. Going back to verse 26, it has to be the prince who is a part of the people who destroyed the city and the sanctuary. This prince, in other places in Daniel, is described as 'the little horn' of Daniel 7. He is 'the man of sin' of 2 Thessalonians 2. He is 'the beast' of Revelation 13. This man is the antichrist. This prince will make a covenant with Israel supposedly for seven years. Notice that: "He will make a firm covenant with the many for one week (for a seven year period)..." And that exactly fits what we learned from Revelation, that there will be in the time of antichrist a time of false worldwide peace that he will initiate – a seven-year treaty. But verse 27 goes on to say: "in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and the grain offering..." At that

time, Israel will have a rebuilt temple according to this text. And at the midpoint of that seven-year period, at the end of three and a half years, he will terminate the agreement, the covenant that he made, and that will be demonstrated by causing temple worship to cease.

Now notice how the verse goes on: “and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate...” Here we arrive at the event Jesus mentions in the Olivet Discourse. ‘Abominations that cause desolations’ is exactly what it says – abominations that cause desolations. A similar phrase is used in chapter 11 of Daniel to refer to what Antiochus Epiphanes did in 168 B.C. Antiochus Epiphanes (some of you will remember) desecrated the temple in Jerusalem in 168 B.C. by erecting a statue of Zeus and slaughtering a pig on the altar. This same language is used of what he did. But here, Christ is saying that in His time it was still in the future. So this isn’t about Antiochus Epiphanes. This is about somebody, in the future, during that future seven-week period – the antichrist who will do something very similar to what Antiochus Epiphanes did. He will do something that will be an abomination against what the Jews regard as sacred. He will so violate the holy place (remember what we saw in Matthew 24? He will so violate the holy place) in the temple that he will completely desolate it or ruin it for further use. In all likelihood, he will not only pollute the temple but, like Antiochus Epiphanes, he will place a statue or altar probably to himself -a And that will increase the abomination. And this happens, notice the end of verse 27: “even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.” God says all that has been determined will be poured out upon Jerusalem during this three and a half year period of this violated covenant. The tribulation begins with the revelation of the antichrist and his covenant with Israel. At the midpoint of that seven year period, antichrist will break that covenant that he made at the beginning, cause the sacrificial system to cease, do something that desolates the temple (probably very similar to what Antiochus Epiphanes did). And then God will pour out His full fury – a destruction that has been determined. And then comes the end – Christ returns. God will take back this earth from the usurper. He will keep all of the promises He made to Israel and to you, and He will pour out His wrath on all those who have set themselves against Him.

Now with that in mind, go back to Mark, Mark 13, and let’s wrap up our study tonight. Look at Mark 13:14. Jesus says: “But when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION standing where it should not be (as Matthew says, in the holy place), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.” When antichrist desecrates the temple at the midpoint of the seven-year period we call the tribulation, you know that he’s about to violate the covenant he’s made. ‘If you’re in Israel then, you better run’ is what Jesus says. The great tribulation is about to begin. Notice down in verse 19: “But those days will be a time of tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will.” Here’s how Matthew puts it: “For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will.”

How do you and I respond to this incredible reality that this is coming? You say, 'We're not going to be here.' So how do we respond to this truth? Look at how Jesus applies it to His disciples living in the first century. Look to the end of this chapter. We're going to come back to this section, but I just want you to look at what Jesus warns His disciples about. Verse 33:

Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time will come. It's like a man away on a journey, who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, assigning to each one his task, also committed the doorkeeper to stay on the alert. Therefore, be on the alert – for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning – in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep. What I say to you I say to all, 'Be on the alert!'

Listen. For us who are in Christ, we are to realize that the end is coming. Christ is going to fulfill His word. Don't get so caught up in the daily affairs of life that you lose the reality that this will happen – that the end is coming, that Christ will return, that the world we live in will be destroyed, that God will pour out His wrath upon it. That should keep us sober. That should keep us alert. That should keep us loving the people around us enough to share the gospel with them. And it should keep us on our knees before Him.

I want you to turn to one last passage with me. Look at Matthew 24. Matthew 24 is of course Matthew's version of the Olivet Discourse. And I want you to notice verse 36. Here is a warning to those who may not really be in Christ:

But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be. There will be two men in the field; one will be taken (away in judgment) and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken (away in judgment) and the other left.

You know what Jesus is saying, He's saying to you if you're not in Christ? It's very easy for you to get complacent, to be just like the people of Noah's time. They knew by Noah's preaching the flood was coming. They were warned because there was an ark for goodness sake sitting right there for them to see that what Noah was saying he believed very much so and, at God's direction, had built the ark. And yet what did they do? Notice what He says: 'They just lived their lives. They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage.' They were just caught up in the daily affairs of life, acting as if it would never come. They just disregarded the warning and they kept about their normal lives, and the judgment came suddenly. Jesus says that's exactly what will happen in the end. This is a warning to you. Don't become complacent.

Don't think you can live your life and act like everything's going to be fine and God's not going to interrupt this world like He's promised He's going to interrupt it. It will come. And when it comes, it will come suddenly. And you, if you have not put your confidence in Christ, you will be swept away in judgment just as surely as those outside the ark were swept away in Noah's time. The only place of safety for you for the future is the ark that we have – the Lord Jesus Christ. He's the only place of safety from the coming judgment. My plea to you is don't be uncertain. Be alert. Be ready. Be in the ark. Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for revealing to us beforehand through Your prophet, Daniel, and through our Lord Jesus Christ the things that are coming. Lord, help us to be alert. Help us to realize that all of these things could begin to happen very soon, that we could, even before our heads hit the pillow tonight, be raptured and caught away and all of these events soon take place. Help us to live like we believe that. And Father, remind us that we have a glorious future ahead of us in Your presence forever with You.

But Father, I pray for the people even here tonight who are just living life complacent about spiritual things, ignoring the warnings that Scripture gives again and again. Father, remind them that Your judgment is coming just as surely as it came in the flood in Noah's day. And those who lived their lives and ignored and disregarded the warning were swept away in judgment. Father, remind them that that could ultimately be true of them. And may this be the night when they put their trust and confidence in the only place of safety from Your coming wrath – our Lord Jesus Christ, the One who saves us from the wrath that's coming. Father, help us as well as believers to see that reality and to love the people around us enough to keep sharing the gospel. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.