

## What Does Yeshua Say About the End Times - Part 5

In my last post, we began to look at the issue of the Abomination of Desolation. In this post we will conclude that topic as we continue to explore the Olivet Discourse.

### The Abomination of the Desolation (cont.)

***"For there will be trouble then [at the time of the abomination] worse than there has ever been from the beginning of the world until now, and there will be nothing like it again! Indeed, if the length of this time had not been limited, no one would survive; but for the sake of those who have been chosen, its length will be limited. At that time, if someone says to you, 'Look! Here's the Messiah!' or, 'There he is!' don't believe him. For there will appear false Messiahs and false prophets performing great miracles — amazing things! — so as to fool even the chosen, if possible. There! I have told you in advance! So if people say to you, 'Listen! He's out in the desert!' don't go; or, 'Look! He's hidden away in a secret room!' don't believe it. For when the Son of Man does come, it will be like lightning that flashes out of the east and fills the sky to the western horizon. Wherever there's a dead body, that's where you find the vultures."*** ~ Matthew 24:21-28 (CJB)

The prophet Daniel wrote, ***"When that time comes, Mikha'el, the great prince who champions your people, will stand up; and there will be a time of distress unparalleled between the time they became a nation and that moment. At that time, your people will be delivered, everyone whose name is found written in the book."*** (Daniel 12:1).

Great suffering is in store for God's people throughout the years ahead. This way of describing the future is also used by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 30:7). The time would be evil and filled with suffering. This language may sound like an exaggeration, but it is not unusual in Scripture when describing an impending disaster. The Jewish historian Josephus recorded that when the Romans sacked Yerushalayim and devastated Judea, one hundred thousand Jews were taken prisoner and another 1.1 million died by slaughter and starvation.

Yeshua's words could be taken as referring to the destruction of Yerushalayim by the Romans in 70 CE, but they are so emphatic and clear that they must point ultimately to the final period of tribulation at the end of the age because, as Yeshua stated, nothing like it had ever been seen or would ever be seen again. Yet the great suffering is tempered by a great promise of hope for true Believers.

Many interpreters conclude that Yeshua, talking about the end times, was telescoping near-future and far-future events, as the Tanakh prophets had done. Many of these persecutions have already occurred; more are yet to come. While a certain amount of persecution happened in the destruction of Yerushalayim, Yeshua may also have envisioned the tribulation of Believers throughout the subsequent years. The persecution will be so severe that ***the length of this time had to...be limited***. - that is, if they did not have a specific ending time, ***no one would survive***.

***For the sake of those who have been chosen, its length will be limited***. The shortening of the time will limit their duration so that the destruction will not wipe out God's people and thus their mission. God is ultimately in charge of history and will not allow evil to exceed the bounds he has set. Yeshua had predicted the execution stake for Himself; here He was predicting persecution, death, and resurrection for His talmidim.

There are three main views regarding the Tribulation, and each view interprets this verse differently:

1. **Pretribulationism** believes that the **chosen** will be Jews who will have returned to the Lord in a national revival and will join the Believers (who have been taken to heaven first) at the end of three and a half years. This is clearly Tim Lahaye's view in his "Left Behind" series.
2. **Midtribulationism** believes that the **chosen** refers to all true Believers, both Jews and Gentiles. Yeshua will return in the middle of the Tribulation (mid-Tribulation rapture), as recorded in Revelation 11:7-14, where the Tribulation seems to be interrupted after "three and a half days" or halfway through the

tribulation period.

3. **Posttribulationism** believes that the **chosen** will be all true Believers, both Jews and Gentiles who will persevere throughout the tribulation period, which will be ended by God for their sakes (their rapture would occur at the end, see Revelation 19).

As I stated in my first post in this mini-series, I'm a pre-trib Believer, but can find sufficient arguments for a mid-trib rapture as well.

Who are the **chosen**? In the Tanakh, **chosen** refers to Israel, particularly those who are faithful to God (see 1 Chronicles 16:13; Psalm 105:43; Isaiah 65:9, 15; Daniel 12:1). In the Brit Hadashah, **chosen** refers to all Believers (Romans 8:33; Colossians 3:12; 2 Timothy 2:10; 1 Peter 1:1-2). In this passage from Matthew, the word **chosen** refers not to Tanakh Jews but to all faithful Believers, whether Jews or Gentiles.

In Romans 8:29ff Sha'ul wrote, ***"those whom He knew in advance, He also determined in advance would be conformed to the pattern of his Son, so that He might be the firstborn among many brothers; and those whom He thus determined in advance, He also called; and those whom He called, He also caused to be considered righteous; and those whom He caused to be considered righteous He also glorified!"*** (Romans 8:29-30). Some believe that these verses mean that before the beginning of the world, God chose certain people to receive His gift of salvation. Others believe that God foreknew those who would respond to Him and upon those He set His mark or predestined. What is clear is that God's purpose for people was not an afterthought; it was settled before the foundation of the world. When the time of suffering comes, the important point for the talmidim and all Believers to remember is that God is in control. Persecution will occur, but God knows about it and controls how long it will take place. The main thrust of Yeshua's teaching is to show God's mercy toward the faithful and to show that God is loving and sovereign. He will not forget his people.

In times of persecution even strong Believers will find it difficult to be loyal. They will so much want the Messiah to come that they will grasp any rumor that He has arrived. Jehovah's Witnesses teach that Messiah has already returned. Religious groups in India teach that certain leaders have been reincarnations (avatars) of Yeshua. To keep Believers from being deceived by false messiahs, Yeshua explained that His return will be unmistakable (see Matthew 24:30); no one will doubt that it is He. If Believers have to be told that the Messiah has come, then he hasn't. Yeshua's coming will be obvious to everyone.

Most **false messiahs** build their following from faithful church attendees who have been led astray. Often the cult leader's appeal is based on *"I am the true way," "I will fulfill the expectations you have,"* or *"I will be the power you need."* Messianic leaders must be alert and prevent weak Believers from being drawn into such cults. These false leaders will be ***performing great miracles — amazing things! — so as to fool even the chosen***. Yeshua warned His talmidim, as He warns us, not to be swayed by whatever signs and miracles false leaders might produce.

Yeshua has ***told you in advance*** that **false messiahs** and **false prophets** will come and attempt to lead many astray (24:23-25). His coming would be as obvious and unmistakable as ***lightning that flashes out of the east and fills the sky to the western horizon***.

***Wherever there's a dead body, that's where you find the vultures.*** This verse, probably quoting a well-known proverb of the culture, looks to the Second Coming as a time of judgment. Yeshua was telling His audience that, just as you know a carcass must be nearby if you see vultures circling overhead, so His coming will be unmistakably marked by various signs. This illustration may also picture an invading the Lord's army in Revelation 19:17-19 swarming over its prey.

In my next post, we will continue our exploration of the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24.