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October 4th: Zechariah 14 & Matthew 24:1-28

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The destruction and transformation of Jerusalem. The Olivet Discourse.

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Transcript

Zechariah chapter 14. Behold, a day is coming for the Lord, when the spoil taken from you will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken, and the houses plundered, and the women raped.

Half of the city shall go into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations, as when He fights on the day of battle. On that day His feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the mount shall move northward, and the other half southward.

And you shall flee to the valley of my mountains, for the valley of the mountain shall reach to Azel. And you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with Him.

On that day there shall be no light, cold, or frost. And there shall be a unique day, which is known to the Lord, neither day nor night. But at evening time there shall be light.

On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea, and half of them to the western sea. It shall continue in summer as in winter. And the Lord will be king over all the earth.

On that day the Lord will be one, and His name one. The whole land shall be turned into a plain from Geba to Rimon south of Jerusalem. But Jerusalem shall remain aloft on its site, from the gate of Benjamin to the place of the former gate, to the corner gate, and from the tower of Hananel to the king's winepresses.

And it shall be inhabited, for there shall never again be a decree of utter destruction. Jerusalem shall dwell in security. And this shall be the plague with which the Lord will strike all the peoples that wage war against Jerusalem.

Their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet. Their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths. On that day a great panic from the Lord shall fall on them, so that each will seize the hand of another, and the hand of the one will be raised against the hand of the other.

Even Judah will fight at Jerusalem, and the wealth of all the surrounding nations shall be collected, gold, silver, and garments in great abundance. And a plague like this plague shall fall on the horses, the mules, the camels, the donkeys, and whatever beasts may be in those camps. Then everyone who survives of all the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the king, the Lord of hosts, and keep the feast of booths.

And if any of the families of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the king, the Lord of hosts, there will be no rain on them. And if the family of Egypt does not go up and present themselves, then on them there shall be no rain. There shall be the plague with which the Lord afflicts the nations that do not go up to keep the feast of booths.

This shall be the punishment to Egypt, and the punishment to all the nations that do not go up to keep the feast of booths. And on that day there shall be inscribed on the bells of the horses, Holy to the Lord, and the pots in the house of the Lord shall be as the bowls before the altar. And every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holy to the Lord of hosts, so that all who sacrifice may come and take of them and boil the meat of the sacrifice in them.

And there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the Lord of hosts on that day. Zechariah chapter 14 concludes the second of the two oracles with which the book ends. The oracle which runs from chapter 12 to chapter 14 seems to prophesy two sieges of Jerusalem, the first from which the city is delivered, and in this chapter a second one that is successful, overthrowing the city.

The people had mourned over the struck shepherd like a firstborn, much as Egypt

mourned the death of their firstborn in the tenth plague at the time of the Passover. The striking of the shepherd and the scattering of the sheep was followed by a pouring out of the Spirit of Grace upon the house of David and upon Jerusalem, and the opening of a fountain cleansing the people from their sin and uncleanness. Chapter 14 is, once again, a challenging chapter to interpret, with many mysterious and apocalyptic images of the overthrowing of a world order.

However, as we look at these images more closely in the light of wider biblical symbolism, much of this chapter will come into focus. At the beginning of chapter 14 we begin the account of the second siege. Once again nations are gathered against Jerusalem, but this time the city is taken, plundered, and the women violated.

As Peter Lighthouse observes, the description of this in verse 2 is taken from Isaiah chapter 13 verse 16, a passage that concerns the overthrow of Babylon. Their infants will be dashed in pieces before their eyes, their houses will be plundered, and their wives ravished. The imagery and language of that chapter is prominent in other accounts of Jerusalem's overthrow, in Jesus' Olivet Discourse and in the Book of Revelation, where Jerusalem itself is spoken of as Babylon the Great.

The adoption of the language from Isaiah chapter 13 might suggest some implied association between the two. In the overthrow of the city, half are cut off, while the other half remain. Once again, this is similar to the prophecy in Jesus' Olivet Discourse concerning the events of AD 70.

In Luke chapter 17 verses 34-35, which also speak of a judgement that strikes half of the people. I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed. One will be taken and the other left.

There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left. Jesus is most likely purposefully alluding back to Zechariah chapter 14 in his words.

The city of Jerusalem is overthrown. However, in verse 3 the Lord also fights against the nations that overthrew the city. Verses 4-5 describe a miraculous splitting of the Mount of Olives in two.

We might recognise a theophanic motif here. As the Lord comes, the mountains shake and can be removed. Mountains are brought low and valleys raised up.

The Mount of Olives is rarely mentioned in the Old Testament. The Mount of Olives appears in David's departure from Jerusalem during the coup of Absalom in 2 Samuel chapter 15 verse 30. Another significant reference to the Mount of Olives, albeit not explicitly by name, is found in Ezekiel chapter 11.

In Ezekiel chapters 8-11, the prophet Ezekiel is brought in a vision to Jerusalem where he sees the abominations that are being committed in the temple area. In his vision, the

Lord's throne chariot rises up from the house and comes out to judge the idolaters and the wicked of the city before the Lord departs from the temple altogether. In chapter 11 verses 22-23 we read, This seems to indicate that what is happening here is a departure or an exodus from the city.

The Lord is leading an exodus from Jerusalem as he departs from it, much as he had once led the exodus out of Egypt. In the Gospels we also see the interplay between the Temple Mount and the Mount of Olives. In the events of Holy Week and the crucifixion and what follows, there is a sustained opposition between the Temple Mount and the Mount of Olives as Jesus symbolically moves out of the city and acts over against the city from the Mount of Olives.

In this we might see Christ enacting the departure of the Lord from Jerusalem. The imagery here is designed to recall the earlier exodus. Just as the waters of the Red Sea were divided in two to create a passage for the people to pass through on dry land, so the division of the Mount of Olives is the creation of a valley path between two great mountain sides enabling the people to flee.

In the story of Lot and Sodom there was a window of escape provided so that Lot could flee from the city prior to its destruction. The same thing is happening here as the faithful are given an avenue of flight. The earthquake in the reign of Uzziah that's referenced here was obviously an important event in the people's memory.

It's a key date in the prophecy of Amos for which it seemed to provide an initial confirmation. Even a few centuries later the people still seem to be speaking about it. In the Olivet Discourse Jesus foretells the existence of a small window of opportunity during which those who heeded his word might flee from the city in Matthew 24, verses 15-20.

So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel standing in the holy place, let the reader understand. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let the one who is on a housetop not go down to take what is in his house.

And let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. The early Christian writers Eusebius and Epiphanius both relate a tradition in which the Christians of Jerusalem forewarned about the destruction of the city, fled to Pella where they escaped its overthrow.

In Revelation chapter 18 verses 4-5 the Lord summoned his faithful people out of the condemned city. Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues, for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. Lighthouse makes the intriguing suggestion that we might think of the Mount of Olives as the veil of Jerusalem.

The Mount of Olives stands before Jerusalem obscuring the city. However that veil as it were is going to be torn in two and a passage provided through it with texts like Matthew chapter 24 and 25 and the book of Revelation. This chapter foretells the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70 while also portraying with the book of Revelation the two-sided character of that destruction as the old Jerusalem is being destroyed and new Jerusalem is being established.

The escapees from the old condemned Jerusalem will become a glorious transformed new Jerusalem. Although the siege against Jerusalem was successful and the city was devastated, the concluding half of the chapter speaks of a radical reversal and transformation. The formerly besieged Jerusalem will dwell in safety.

The city that was overthrown rises up anew and transformed. The plundered city will be a place to which the wealth of the nations will be gathered. The nations that came up against Jerusalem to war against it will gather there in order to worship the Lord in her.

As Lighthouse notes, the remnant that escapes the death and overthrow of the stricken city becomes living waters flowing out to give life to the world. This occurs as a new light comes at the evening time, a dawn breaking at the descent of the night. The final night vision of chapter 6 had described the chariots coming out from between the two bronze mountains which were associated with the bronze pillars of the temple, mountains being symbolically connected with pillars.

The chariots were coming out from between the mountains in order to bring the Lord's judgments out into the world. Here, with the division of the Mount of Olives, two mountain sides form a threshold to the city, much as Jacob and Boaz, the two bronze pillars of the temple, are for the house of the Lord. Out from the city flow living waters into the world.

This flow is not merely a wadi through which waters would flow only in the rainy season, but it's a continuing river. At the beginning of the preceding chapter, a fountain had been opened up for the house of David and for Jerusalem for cleansing from sin and uncleanness. Now, however, the waters of this fountain are flowing out into the wider land and world.

Ezekiel's visionary temple also had such a fountain, from which a great river of living water came to heal the land, something which Ezekiel describes in chapter 47 of his prophecy. In John's Gospel, we have several references to the opening of a fountain and the flowing out of living water in passages that are almost certainly purposefully alluding to this Old Testament background. Perhaps the greatest image of the flowing of living water out of the city is given to us in Revelation chapter 22 verses 1 to 2. Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city.

Also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month, the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. This description from Revelation should also remind us that the image of the river flowing out is an image from Eden. As at the end of Revelation, there are two closely associated portraits of Jerusalem, one of a wicked and condemned city being destroyed and the other of a renewed and transformed city being glorified.

Earlier in Zachariah's night visions, he saw visions both of a glorified Jerusalem that would be inhabited without walls and of a sort of perverted parody of the Ark of the Covenant, containing an image of a woman of wickedness that was being separated from the purified city and brought to Shinar, the place of Babylon, where a new temple was being formed for it. Here we see something similar. Even as Jerusalem is being engulfed by death, a glorious and transformed Jerusalem is being established and torrents of life are flowing out from it.

We should recognize that the two images belong closely together. The torrents of life flowing out from Jerusalem should be connected with the people fleeing from the condemned city between the mountains. From one perspective they may look like desperate escapees, refugees from a calamity.

However, we are granted a different perspective, from which it becomes apparent that they are really the chariots of the Lord proceeding to do battle against the nations, as in the final night vision of chapter 6, bringing the nations under the Lord's rule. They may look like they are just fleeing from death, but they are an outflow of life. What may look like the breaching of the city's defences that allow the enemies to flood in is the opening up of once damned life-giving waters now permitted to flow out.

The result of all of this will be the establishment of the Lord's kingdom as his throne is over all of the earth, his uniqueness as Lord recognized among all peoples who will all call upon the name of the Lord, the only name from which true deliverance will come. There is doubtless an allusion back to Israel's confession in the Shema from Deuteronomy chapter 6 verses 4-5 in verse 9. Here, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

Here, as at other points in the prophets, particularly in the prophet Isaiah, the expectation is that monotheism is a truth that will be eschatologically demonstrated as the sovereignty of the one creator God is manifest over all of the earth and against all other pretenders to his rule, every other name named among men being humbled before him. The radical recreation of Jerusalem described in this passage continues. The mountains were opened up, the night was turned into day, a river of living waters came forth from the city and in verse 10, Zechariah speaks of yet further transformation.

Formerly elevated parts of the land will be brought low while Jerusalem, here defined by

landmarks that functioned as some of its boundaries at its prime, will stand as a sentinel of divine blessing over the whole land, waters flowing out from it to water all of the region which is now entirely below it. The imagery here is closely related to that which we see in places like Isaiah chapter 2 or in Psalm 48 verses 1-2 which reads, Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our God. His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth.

Mount Zion in the far north, the city of the great king. This new Jerusalem will be inhabited and will dwell in security, never again to be destroyed in a like manner. In thinking about this new Jerusalem we should recall the description of the Jerusalem inhabited without walls, a description of a secure people but also a description that might suggest a city that exceeds any single location.

Besides raising up this new Jerusalem, the Lord will judge all of the nations that wage war against it. A deathly plague will cause them to rot even while they are on their feet. The old Jerusalem was earlier described as a sort of Egypt, with the passage of escape from it being provided by the division of the Mount of Olives.

Here the nations that oppose Jerusalem suffer plagues much as Egypt once did. As they fight against the transformed new Jerusalem, they will die. The gathering together of the nations for judgment is a motif of a number of prophecies, perhaps most notably in Jesus' Olivet discourse in Matthew chapter 25.

While commentators more typically regard Christ's division of the nations like a shepherd separating sheep from goats, as an event belonging to the final day of judgment, it seems more likely to me that it refers primarily to the judgment that goes out to the nations as the new Jerusalem is established and the old Jerusalem destroyed. The ascended Jesus Christ is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and his rule goes out into all of the earth by means of his people. Those who bless his people will be blessed with the healing water of life by the powerful river of the Spirit that flows out in and through them, while those who wage war against them or mistreat them will suffer a living death, nations being overthrown by Christ and his might, the plague of the Lord afflicting the entirety of their nations.

As they left Egypt in the Exodus, the children of Israel plundered the Egyptians. The chapter began with the old Jerusalem being plundered by its enemies, but now the wealth of the nations is being gathered as they fight against the renewed Jerusalem. Reading this passage we should probably think of Psalm 46, with which much of its imagery resonates.

The nations rage, the kingdoms totter, he utters his voice, the earth melts. The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our fortress. Come behold the works of the Lord, how he has brought desolations on the earth.

He makes wars cease to the end of the earth, he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the chariots with fire. Be still and know that I am God, I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth. The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Whereas the nations had once come up to Jerusalem to attack her, now the nations will assemble to the new Jerusalem to worship the Lord of hosts, the Lord judging any who do not do so. Whereas holiness had once been narrowly focused in the old Jerusalem, holiness pervades the new Jerusalem. In Exodus chapter 28 verses 33 to 38 we read the following description of the garments of the high priest.

What had once been peculiar features of the high priest's garments, the bells and the engraved plate reading Holy to the Lord, would now be found even on the horses in the city. Given the way that horses are used as symbols of the Lord's army and people elsewhere in Zechariah, perhaps we should see the horses here as possibly being symbols of the people of the Lord from all nations, all of them now enjoying holy status. As God cleanses things, there will no longer be found that which is common.

Another image of this is seen in the vision of the new Jerusalem in Revelation which has the dimensions of a cube as a sort of magnified holy of holies, the whole city enjoying a holy status once exclusive to the Lord's throne room. The trader that is excluded from the house might bring to our minds Jesus' cleansing of the temple in the gospels. The merchant might be a reference to the Canaanites as the word is elsewhere used with that sense.

However it seems to me that we are to reason from the dramatic extension of holiness that the opportunistic merchant who formerly would have sold items for sacrifice to pilgrims is now unnecessary as holiness has spread such figures who could limit or extract money from people's access to God no longer have a reason to trade as holiness is so commonplace that they cannot create a market in it. Zechariah's oracle here is one with many resemblances to that of Isaiah chapter 2 verses 2 to 4. It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be lifted up above the hills and all the nations shall flow to it and many people shall come and say, Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

He shall judge between the nations and shall decide disputes for many peoples and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. Before we conclude the book of Zechariah we should ask why there is the reference to the feast of tabernacles here.

Lighthart suggests that the feast of tabernacles continues a sequence of festal allusions within the oracle of chapters 12-14. The oracle begins with Passover allusions, the opening feast of the festal calendar. From there it moves to Pentecost with the pouring out of the spirit of grace and the opening up of the fountain.

Then we have the day of atonement. Fittingly, the feast of tabernacles, the final feast of the calendar, concludes the book. We might think of the feast of tabernacles as the final feast of the festal calendar and as a feast of dwelling in assembly with the Lord, as the eschatological feast.

It is a feast associated with prayers for rain and the gift of living waters from the Lord, after covering has been made for the iniquities of the land on the day of atonement shortly beforehand. It is also known as the feast of ingathering, as the end and the climax of the agricultural year, as the fullness of the harvest is finally completed. As such, it is natural to connect it to the full and final gathering of the complete measure of the people of God.

Finally, the feast of tabernacles was, as James Jordan notes, a feast with subtle associations with the nations, as 70 sacrifices, corresponding to the number of the nations in the table of the nations in Genesis chapter 10, were sacrificed over the course of the feast. A question to consider, where can you see connections to this final chapter of Zechariah in the book of Revelation? Matthew chapter 24 verses 1 to 28 Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, You see all these, do you not? Truly I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.

As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age? And Jesus answered them, See that no one leads you astray, for many will come in my name, saying, I am the Christ, and they will lead many astray, and you will hear of wars and rumours of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places.

All these are but the beginning of the birth pangs. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another, and many false prophets will arise and lead many astray, and because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.

But the one who endures to the end will be saved, and this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place, let the reader understand. Then let those who are in Judea

flee to the mountains.

Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house. Let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. And alas for women who are pregnant, and for those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath, for then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.

And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, those days will be cut short. Then if anyone says to you, Look, here is the Christ, or there he is, do not believe it, for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

See, I have told you beforehand. So if they say to you, Look, he is in the wilderness, do not go out. If they say, Look, he is in the inner rooms, do not believe it.

For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather. A passage in Matthew 24 begins the Olivet Discourse.

Once again there is a change in locality. And in the story of the Passion Week there is common movement between the Temple Mount and the Mount of Olives. This happens regularly throughout the week, and the juxtaposition of the two mountains seems to be important.

The Mount of Olives stands over against the Temple Mount, and is the place from which judgment is cast upon the Temple Mount. There is a reference to the Mount of Olives in Old Testament prophecy, in Zechariah 14, verses 3 and following. Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations, as when he fights on a day of battle.

On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives, that lies before Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west, by a very wide valley, so that one half of the mountain shall move northward, and the other half southward. And you shall flee to the valley of my mountains.

For the valley of the mountain shall reach to Azel. And you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.

From such a passage we can see an association that already existed between the Mount of Olives and the day of the Lord. A further thing that is extremely important when reading this passage is to recognise the backdrop of the rest of the book of Matthew. Throughout the book of Matthew it is imperative that we recognise just how imminent judgement is presented as being throughout.

It is just on the horizon. In Matthew 10 verse 23 Christ declares that it will not have finished going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. In Matthew 16, 28 some standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

In Matthew 23 verse 36 all these things will come upon this generation. The parables are similar. They anticipate judgement that is very near at hand.

This is coming upon the people within that generation. They should be braced for it. And yet many Christians read these passages as if they were referring to some far distant event, the end of the world itself, rather than the end of the old covenant order.

And that is how I will be reading these passages and hopefully help you to understand how they can be read in such a way. Many do struggle to read them as referring to anything that has already happened in history, partly because they don't really grasp the way that biblical imagery works, but also because the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 just does not seem like a suitable contender for the events being spoken about by Christ in these chapters. It just seems so grand a description of what's about to happen that the fall of Jerusalem is just a minor event to a backwater nation in the very far distant past.

Why should we care about it? Yet as we understand it properly we'll see that it is an event of the most immense importance. It's something that stands as a turning point in the middle of human history. It represents a remarkable change and shift.

The chapter begins with the disciples showing Jesus the beauty of the temple and then Jesus declares its imminent fate, after which they come to him later on and ask what will be the sign of his coming and the end of the age. Jesus begins actually by not answering their question, rather by giving things that aren't signs of his coming to ensure that the disciples don't jump at false positives. So there will be a number of unsettling events that will occur before his coming, but none of those should be interpreted as a sign that his coming is just about to occur.

There will be false prophets and false Christ's within and without the church, famines, earthquakes and other natural disasters. But these are just the beginning of birth pangs. The birth of a new world order still isn't taking place.

There will be a major covenantal upheaval in the order of the world, but that still waits the future. There will be persecution and widespread falling away among self-declared disciples. The disciples will be brought into the most extreme tribulation and that tribulation, that time of testing, will reveal men's hearts and cause many to wither.

We pray that we will be delivered from temptation because when we're put into that time of testing, we really have to be proved. We have to have wisdom as serpents and

we have to have courage and faith that is of a greater scale than that which we usually need. This time will also be disorienting in other ways.

There will be treachery and betrayal within the church. People will sell their neighbours out. They will sell out fellow Christians to the authorities.

And there will also be apostasy and falling away. Many people who crumble under pressure. The gospel will be spread throughout the whole world.

Now the world in question is the Roman world. It's not the globe as such. It's the Roman world.

Every single part of the empire, that world order, will receive the message. And it's at this point that the stage is set for the climactic act. Christ's judgement carries while the Gentiles are being brought in and then it falls.

After this an actual sign of Christ's coming will occur. And that sign is the abomination of desolation that Daniel foretold in Daniel chapter 9 verses 24 to 27. 70 weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet and to anoint a most holy place.

Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat but in a troubled time. And after the sixty-two weeks an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing.

And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed and he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering.

And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator. The abomination of desolation is the abomination that provokes the desolation of the temple. Not desolation itself as an abomination.

Abominations are typically performed by Israel itself. It's the perversion of the bride, the sin of the bride, not just the sin of the nations. In the Old Testament we can see this in the sin of the sons of Eli or the idolatry of the nation in Ezekiel's day or the action with the golden calf.

The abomination of the temple is caused by flagrant sin and or apostasy. And the temple is the marital chamber, the place where God meets with his bride. And now that bed is defiled as it were.

I think a clue here is found in reflecting upon the words of the previous chapter. In verses 34-36 and verse 38. All these things will come upon this generation.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it, how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing. See, your house is left to you desolate. Reflecting upon the abomination of desolation it seems to me that it's the filling up of the blood of the saints.

Once that time has come, once they recognise that that condition has been met, they should flee to the mountains if they are in Judea. The one who was on the housetop should not go down and take what's in his house. They should flee.

And this is because the city is about to be destroyed. And if they don't flee, they will be destroyed with it. This is a reminder of the story of Sodom.

Jerusalem is about to face a similar fate. And there's going to be this time of great testing and tribulation. They're going to be pushed to the absolute limit.

It's only because of the elect that God spares them, that he does not push them beyond that limit. He preserves the elect and cuts the days short. And at that time there will be all sorts of people leading others astray, false Christs, false prophets, even performing great signs and wonders.

And they are to be prepared for this. They're to recognise the dangers in advance and to take action without hesitation. The coming of Christ and judgement will be like a lightning bolt.

It won't be something that comes in gradual stages. It will be sudden and swift and devastating. And they must be prepared.

They must take that action when they have that window of opportunity. Indeed, this is something that we read that the church did do. The church did escape.

And it was saved from suffering the full devastating force of the destruction of Jerusalem. Where the corpse is, there the vultures or perhaps the eagles will gather. Some have suggested that this might be a reference to the corpse of the rebellion of Israel and the eagles of Rome preying upon the corpse of Israel.

I think that's a fairly likely interpretation of these words. A question to consider. Within this chapter we have descriptions of tribulation that's going to come upon the disciples of Christ.

Tribulation that's going to test them to their very limits. And if it were not for God cutting that time short, they would be tested beyond their limits and they would fall too. How

does the time of testing work? We have a number of references to it within the book of Matthew, a number of examples of it.

How can we think about the time of testing and its purpose for the church? What are the purposes for which God might bring us into a time of testing? And what might be worked out through it?