

Sermon Title: I Have Told You Everything In Advance Speaker: Jim Harris
Scripture Text: Mark 13:15-23 Date: 10-20-19

In our Scripture reading earlier in the service, we were in Acts Chapter 13; so I'll ask you to turn backward in your Bible a few books, until you get to Mark Chapter 13. And remember that, in the sermon of the Apostle Paul during his First Missionary Journey that we were reading part of this morning, he spoke of what God had written beforehand concerning the coming of the Savior. Keep that in mind, because there's a lot more to come.

There is a time coming to the world that is called the Tribulation, or the "great tribulation" (Matt. 24:21; Rev. 7:14; NASB, and throughout, unless otherwise noted)—especially the last half of it is called "the great tribulation." It begins with an event known as "the abomination of desolation" (Mk. 13:14) that we studied last week. The focal point of the terrible things that are going to happen in that time in the world is going to be Israel. The judgments of God, to be sure, are going to be worldwide (Rev. 3:10), not just upon Israel. But because of the prophetic significance of Israel, that little Middle East piece of real estate is going to be center stage for what Jesus describes in our text for this morning. Even now, Israel is the target of much hatred and persecution. But a time is coming when it's going to be far worse—and not only for Israel, but for the whole world. And those who follow Christ during that time—Jews or not—will also be suffering intensely.

So we're going to look at the next portion in the Gospel According to Mark. We actually began with one verse of what is the second paragraph of this great discourse of Jesus, and this one we'll title: I Have Told You Everything in Advance. As I was going over this, this morning, and reviewing and praying about our time together, I realized that I could also have titled this: When To Get Out of Town; and you'll understand why as we look at the text. Very simple to outline: Number 1—Unprecedented Tribulation; Number 2—God's Mercy Shortens The Time. Let's dive in at Mark Chapter 13, and we will be looking, in a moment, starting at Verse 15.

This discourse is called the "Olivet Discourse" because Jesus sat down on the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem (see Zech. 14:4a); and right after He had told the Apostles that the temple and everything around it would be totally destroyed, they asked Him a very important question: it's in Mark Chapter 13, Verse 4. The fullest record of it is in the parallel passage in Matthew Chapter 24, Verse 3—They said: "Tell us, when will these things happen"—meaning, the reference to the destruction of the temple—"and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

Remember: they were expecting the kingdom of God to come "immediately" (Lk. 19:11). They believed, rightly, that Jesus is the King (Jn. 18:37); they believed that, as they made that trek up from Jericho to Jerusalem, they were going to an inauguration of the King—of the kingdom of heaven—and He was bringing that kingdom to Earth, and they expected it to be coming immediately. They were *thrilled* when everybody was shouting: "Hosanna!" (Jn. 12:13), and cutting the palm branches and laying them down; and Jesus came into town riding on the donkey, *exactly* as Zechariah 9:9 says. They thought: "This is *it!*"—but they went to bed that night without the kingdom. And so, they started to realize: "We're going to have to wait—maybe until *tomorrow*"; and it came and went, and the next day came and went. They had been waiting *three days* now! No kingdom, just yet. And now, He saying that the temple is going to be destroyed!

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"Well, wait a second—the day after tomorrow is the Passover...before *then*? When *will* these things happen? And *what is* going to be the sign of Your coming, and the end of *this* age, which brings in "the age to come" (Matt. 12:32), which is the kingdom?" They were thinking that this is going to be right now, and when they said, "What will be the sign of Your *coming*?"—they used a word that is appropriately translated "coming"; it's an interesting little Greek word: *parousia*—from *para*, which means "alongside," and *ousia* is a participle of the verb "to be"—it means "the being alongside," or "the being present." So, *parousia* could be used for the "arrival" of someone coming to you, and it could also be used for the time of their "presence" with you (see Matt. 16:28; 17:1-2; cf. 2 Pet. 1:16-17).

So, it could be your kids looking out the window on Christmas Eve afternoon: "When are Aunt Beth and Uncle Joe going to be here? When are they *coming*?" And then you could look back at it and you could say, "We had a great time at Joe and Beth's *coming* for Christmas," and you could be referring to the whole time. The disciples were using the term "coming" in the sense of a king coming to reign in glory. They genuinely expected it to happen any day. Luke 19:11, which I pointed you to almost every visit to Mark for weeks now: "They supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately." So when they were asking *when*, they were thinking of the next day or two or three.

The answer that Jesus gave them was quite thorough, actually, even if it *wasn't* completely understood at that time. He began by describing, in general, the times just preceding His second coming. The day before this, He had given them some parables about a king going away for a time and leaving his people in charge of things. He's been planting this idea in them that, "Yes, I'm here; and, yes, I am the King; but I came to die for your sins. There's going to be a *second* coming, when the kingdom will come." But they were still willing to grant maybe two, three, four days—possibly even a *week*—before that would happen. Why, as a matter of fact, *40 days* after Jesus's resurrection, when He ascent of the Father, they were talking to Him, and do you remember what they were saying, in Acts Chapter 1? "Is *now* the time? We've given You *over a month!*" And He said, "Nope! I'm out of here!" That's a loose translation of what He said as He ascended to the Father. They didn't understand what needed to come (see Lk. 24:26).

But, starting here in Mark Chapter 13—which is also recorded in Matthew 24 and 25—we saw, in Verses 5 through 13, the first paragraph of this long answer, describing things that are going to happen *just before* that second coming. He has introduced the idea of there being an interim; now, He's saying: "You're going to *know*—you're going to know *without a doubt*—that I'm coming again, when you see certain things happen." And so, in Verses 5 through 13, He described what He called "the beginning of birth pangs." Well, in that analogy, the baby would be the arrival of the kingdom. With the "birth pangs"—the contractions that come before, and they build in intensity—He's talking about a seven-year period leading up to His second coming; it was predicted in the Old Testament: Daniel Chapter 9—it's called the "70th Week of Daniel," or the 70th "seven." From the time Daniel received that prophecy, 69 "sevens"—or, 483 years—of prophetic significance happened in Israel. Now, there's the gap between Week 69 and Week 70; that's where *we* live.

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And Jesus said: "Just before I come, you're going to see some things really begin to ramp up—things you've been seeing *now*, like wars and rumors of wars and false Christ and things like that, but it's going to get a *lot more* intense."

And then, we began the second paragraph of His answer that question. The first paragraph is "the beginning" of the "birth pangs"; now, He began the second paragraph, and this is where we were last Sunday—we have to connect to it. Mark 13:14—He said: "But"—I mean, for all of those birth pangs—"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." Last time, we studied this event called "the abomination of desolation"; that's when this political leader of the one-world end times government is going to set himself up as God, right in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, and demand that he be worshipped as God (2 Thess. 2:3-4). There's a big deal about that in Daniel Chapter 9.

There's a *similar* event that took place in the second century B.C., *also* predicted by Daniel, which was a precursor to the ultimate "abomination of desolation"; that's when a man named Antiochus Euphianes disrupted the worship in the temple; he set up an idol to Zeus and he sacrificed a pig there, and the temple was spiritually out of commission for some time. It was eventually restored under the leadership of a priest named Judas Maccabaeus—hence those apocryphal books that are included in some versions of the Bible: the "Maccabees"; some accurate history in there, though they're not inspired. When the temple was restored, they had a *big* celebration; they called it "The Feast of Lights"—you know it as "Hanukkah." Jesus said, at a Feast of Lights—John Chapter 8—"I am the Light of the world" (vs. 12).

So there was that precursor, and Jesus says, "We know that's happened; but when you see the one, *the one*"—and He says: "Let the reader understand." Now, as I said last week, I could just see Peter looking around at the rest of the guys and saying, "Who's *reading*?" while Jesus is talking. He knew this was to be written down (see Jn. 14:26); He knew this was to be included in the Scriptures, and He *commands us*—we, the readers—"You need to understand this! You need to be able to put this together, because you need to know what's going to happen, and you need to know that I am *in control* of what's going to happen, so that you know you need not fear."

Now, that verse begins the second great paragraph of this discourse; and today, we're going to finish that paragraph. When that 70th week of Daniel begins, things will change *rapidly* in the world. Why, it will be as if you are 39-plus weeks pregnant, and you start to feel these pains. Things are going to get really intense, and you can't stop it. There's going to be unprecedented worldwide turmoil.

Now, we believe and understand from the Scriptures that, what will precipitate all these things is the event called the Rapture of the Church; that's predicted in First Thessalonians Chapter 4, Verses 13 through 18; First Corinthians 15:51-52; Jesus alluded to it, without using such terms, in John Chapter 14, Verse 3, when He said: "I will come again and receive you to Myself." (cf. Rev. 3:10). That's the moment when all living believers in Jesus Christ will be snatched away from the earth, and all who have died as believers in Christ will be resurrected.

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Now, in the turmoil that's caused by the Rapture—I mean, just *imagine* the instantaneous, simultaneous disappearance of everybody on the planet who believes in Christ; that's going to disrupt some things. In the turmoil caused by that, the most deceptive, clever, smooth, and powerful deceiver of all times is going to swoop in and rise to power—*worldwide* power. He's the one we usually refer to by the title: "the antichrist" (1 Jn. 2:18); he has many other titles in the Bible, but we'll stick with "Antichrist" for today. His rise to power is going to be unprecedented and ingenious; and one of the things that he's going to do to seize power is: peace in the Middle East. Boy, if somebody could pull *that* off today, there'd be a lot of credibility, right? I mean, how have we done on that? There hasn't been a president in *my* life that hasn't promised efforts toward peace in the Middle East—and God bless them for trying! It's not going to work unless he's the Antichrist, and it's not time for him, just yet.

So, what he's going to do is, bring peace there; from the Israeli perspective, it'll be a treaty providing protection to Israel—a covenant that he will make with Israel in which he will promise Israel his protection for seven years. Now, you can speculate about why he would promise them seven years—the Bible doesn't answer that question. The temple is going to be very quickly rebuilt in Jerusalem; we know that because a whole lot of those 70th-week events happen in and around the temple, including the "abomination of desolation." We know that people around the world now are poised with everything they need to rebuild that temple; when the day comes, it's going to happen *really fast*. And for the first time since her modern existence began in 1948, Israel will have peace with her neighbors—but it's not going to last seven years. Halfway through that term of the seven years of promised peace, this wicked world ruler—the Antichrist—will commit that act described as "the abomination of desolation." He'll break his treaty with Israel, and *that event* will *literally* be the beginning of the end! Leading up to it is "the beginning of birth pangs" (Mk. 13:8). Boy, when "the abomination of desolation" comes, "Let the reader understand"—things are going to get crazy!

Now, these are important words of Jesus, and they are preserved in the Bible for several reasons (see Rom. 15:4). If you can read and you have a Bible, you have orders from God: "You need to understand this!"—hence, we've got to put the pieces together; it takes a little bit of thinking and study to come up with all this.

I see at least three levels of significance for this. For one thing, at the time that Jesus said this, it was *very significant* for those men who were with Him on the Mount of Olives that night. They needed to understand that the kingdom of God, that they supposed was going to happen any day, was yet future. They did not yet grasp—and we can't fault them for this—that, not only was the King *coming*, He's coming *twice*. He's going to come *once* to suffer and die for sins; He's going to come *again* to reign in glory. And there's going to be an interval between them; and, lo and behold, it's going to be *more than 40 days*! It's going to be—well, we know of about 2,000 years. But Jesus wanted them to know that certain things needed to happen before He would set up His kingdom.

Now, it isn't like they caught on that very day, but the message is clear that the end times events which would bring in the kingdom are yet to come (2 Thess. 2:2-3). I'm thinking about Matthew—he was there that night; Mark wasn't there that night, but he got his information from

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Peter. These guys wrote decades later, putting all this together, and we don't know for sure if *Jesus* said, "Let the reader understand," or if the Holy Spirit just inspired Matthew and Mark to say, "Let the reader understand"—but, can you imagine at least Matthew and Mark writing that down and saying, "Wow! We didn't get it back then! Let the reader understand!"

Second level of significance: These words are here for *us*; we are living in that significant era between the first and second comings of Christ. As I've described it earlier in this series on the Olivet Discourse: this portion—the Olivet Discourse—is the Grand Central Station of Bible prophecy; it's the nexus through which connect all of the threads of prophecy that flow from the Old Testament all the way through the New Testament and into the Book of Revelation; and this provides *us* with details and a certain sense of completeness of our understanding of Biblical prophecy. "Let the *reader* understand"—that's why it's here!

We have the luxury to compare the full complement of what the Bible teaches about end times. As I've said: it's not here so *that* you can draw charts and graphs of the end times events, *but* drawing charts and graphs of the end times events is a really interesting and edifying thing. Two people's charts might disagree on a detail here and there—that's not the problem; the point is: God has given us what we need to know, and He says: "I want you to understand this." (see Prov. 2:2-6)

The third level of significance of this is that, these words are preserved in God's Word for the edification and the instruction of those who will come to believe in Jesus Christ *during the time* of the fulfillment of these prophecies (see Rev. 13:18). Imagine if you have heard the gospel, withheld faith in Christ, and the Rapture happens! You think there's going to be some people will be *pretty interested* in dusting off grandma and grandpa's Bible, and going back to what they kept talking about? Imagine the fervor of the Bible study of those who will be believing in Christ at the eleventh hour of human history!

So, I want us to look at this warning from Jesus concerning the things that will be set in motion immediately by "the abomination of desolation." We've already read and studied Verse 14, but I want to back up to that and read from Verse 14 through Verse 17. Now, you've heard about "the *beginning* of birth pangs," *but* here's where it gets serious; here's where you check your go-bag; here's where you make sure you have a plan to get to the hospital, to use the analogy. "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!"

Those earlier difficulties—they're *really* significant. Read about them in Revelation, especially Chapters 5 and 6—that covers the first half of the 70th Week of Daniel, up until the time of "the abomination of desolation." Those are "the beginnings of birth pangs"—*very* significant things. But what comes *after* "the abomination of desolation" is the most severe of all things that will *ever happen* on this planet!

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Now, because of their proximity to the temple-headquarters of Antichrist—that *will be* his headquarters when he commits "the abomination desolation," and for the last half of the Tribulation, he will be operating out of Jerusalem (2 Thess. 2:4)—those who are in Judea, the area around Jerusalem, are going to be in the most immediate danger. So the warning is especially to them: "Flee to the mountains."

Now, we know that among of the Jews who are alive during that time—at least 144,002, if we count the 144,000 of Revelation (7:4; 14:1-2) and the "two witnesses" (11:3)...I think there's going to be many more than that, but those are the special servants of His—*many* will believe in Christ during those early months and first three and a half years of the Tribulation. So the warning is *especially* to them—but not *just* to Jews. According to Revelation 7, there will be an innumerable "multitude"—How many is that? More than you can count—of people who are saved "from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues" of the world (vs. 9).

He's saying: "Flee to the mountains." Now, "the mountains" that He mentions likely refers to the area to the south and the east of Jerusalem, near the Dead Sea. It might also include some of the area east of the Jordan River, in the hills and the regions known in the Bible as Moab and Edom. You can take trips today, and tour guides love to take people to the ancient city of Petra—have you ever seen the spectacular pictures? I've heard sermons about how *that's* the place God's going to take His people. Well, we don't know what that place exactly is, because God is going to have to prepare it. You can go to Petra right now, and I just *dare* you to take an extra two or three million people there—there's not one single Home Depot or McDonald's *anywhere* to be found around there. What are they going to do for the necessities of life? Well, God is going to provide for them, and it will be a miraculous provision, and we don't know exactly what that will be yet. But we *do* know: it'll be a *desperate* time.

"*Flee to the mountains!*" The Greek were translated "flee" is the word *pheugō*; can you guess what English words come from that? "Fugitive." Running away—"Run for your life!"—just "flee"! And He uses word pictures from their culture. First-century houses of those days had what you would call the patio—or even, "the sleeping porch"—up on the roof of the house, for the hot-weather days. And Jesus says, "If you're there, when you hear of the abomination of desolation (let the reader understand), don't even stop in the house, on your way down from the roof, to take anything—*just run!*" That's when to leave town! "If you're working in the field, and your cloak isn't immediately nearby, don't even take time to get it—*just run!*" A holocaust of human slaughter, unprecedented, is about to begin.

Now, a couple of things are happening at once. This is talking about the ramifications of "the abomination of desolation"—what the *Antichrist* is going to do—and he's going to do *horrible* things; he's going to *especially* be going after Israel and Christians, both Jew and Gentle. But on the *other* hand, there is also the judgment of God going on. First Thessalonians Chapter 1, Verse 10, says: when you come and put your faith in Christ, *you will be spared* the wrath of God (cf. Jn. 5:24; Rom. 8:1)—and trust me, that's where you want to be; you *want* to be spared from the wrath of God! There is great detail about the wrath of God; it's going to be poured out in a specific sequence of events that is described in quite a bit of detail in the Book of Revelation.

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First, it's "the Lamb"—the one that was slain and now is alive—He takes "the scroll" from the hand of God the Father, and He begins to break open the seals on the scroll—which is like the title deed to the earth—and with the breaking of each seal, a judgment occurs on Earth. Breaking the first six of them takes you through the first three and a half years; and then, when He breaks the seventh seal, it reveals seven angels—each one with a trumpet—and when each angel blows his trumpet, another judgment takes place. And when you get to the seventh angel, the seventh angel blows his trumpet and *seven more* angels appear—each with a bowl of wrath that they pour out! So, the picture is that the judgments *start* with "the beginning of birth pangs," and there's *more* birth pangs and *more* birth pangs; and then, after "the abomination desolation," they get even *more* intense, and they come even *closer* together. Believers will be spared from that, *but* they will *not* be spared from what the Antichrist will do to them

Now, several places in our text, it describes unprecedented suffering, unprecedented persecution. Think about it this way: whatever the world's population is now, remove all the Christians—that's going to be a very significant number of people taken out of the world; that's going to pave the way, I think, for the Antichrist to come to power. Then, as you read through the sequence of the judgments from God, *from the judgments of God*—never mind what the Antichrist does—from the judgments of God, a "*fourth*" of the remaining population is going to *die* in a *very short* period of time, at one of those judgments (Rev. 6:8). So, a fourth of the world's population—that drops it to 75 percent, three-fourths of what it was. A later judgment in that sequence says "a third" will die (Rev. 9:15). Well, if you're down to 75 percent of what you started with, and a third of *those* die, that takes out another 25 percent; *half* of the people who are here after the Rapture *will be killed* during the Tribulation, in the outpouring of God's wrath. Just imagine if we had to schedule, in the next seven years, funerals for half the people on the planet. This is *awful*.

Well, alongside that is the persecution of this tremendously powerful Antichrist. And he has a religious sidekick called "the false prophet" (Rev. 16:13; cf. 13:11-12); his targets will be everyone who refuses to worship him—hence, Jews and believers in Christ. He is going to unleash *furious* persecution against those who belong to God.

So it only makes sense: those nearest Jerusalem—where this guy is going to set up his own image to be worshipped—they are going to be in the most immediate danger, the most severe danger; so the warning is: "Flee, and go hide."

I want to show you two Scriptures that relate to this. It's hard to know what to include and what not to include when you're putting together the *whole story* of everything that God plans to do in the Bible, but two key passages will let us know that, not every believer—whether Jew or Gentile—is going to be successful in escaping. Antichrist is going to take out a whole bunch of them. The Old Testament reference I want to point you to is in Zechariah Chapter 13, Verse 8 and the beginning of Verse 9. And trust me: it's talking about this time. If you don't trust me, okay—go study Zechariah; and while you're at it, toss in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Zechariah, Malachi, the Olivet Discourse, everything Jesus said about prophecy, everything that David

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said about the covenant that God made with him, everything that God told Moses about "the Prophet who is to come" (Jn. 6:14; cf. Deut. 18:15, 18-19)—this *fits*, okay? Trust me—and go verify it; I would be glad to have you do that (Acts 17:11). Zechariah 13:8-9 says this: " 'It will come about in all the land,' declares the Lord"—now, this is through Zechariah, so "all the land" would refer to Israel. " 'It will come about in all the land,' declares the Lord, 'that two parts in it will be cut off and perish; but the third will be left in it. And I will bring the third part through the fire, refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested.' "

What that's saying is: two thirds of those who are alive in Israel will *die* in that time; the rest will be refined. This is going to be the work of the Antichrist, slaughtering two thirds of Jews—both believers and unbelievers alike. His motives are as wicked as can be. He is *pure evil*. As you read through Revelation, you see he is actually *possessed* by Satan, when he gets to that point of the "abomination of desolation." But understand: in the sovereignty of God, his evil fury is going to accomplish God's purpose of purging the "rebel" Jews (Ezek. 20:38), leaving only those who turn to the Lord. The rest of Verse 9 in Zechariah 13 says: "They"—the ones who are "refined"—"will call on My name, and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are My people,' and they will say, 'The Lord is my God.' " That's where Romans Chapter 11, Verse 26 is fulfilled: "All Israel will be saved." All Israel alive right now? No, but there *will be* a time when all in Israel who *are* alive will turn to the Lord. The Antichrist is going to help accomplish that, by killing off the rest.

The Jews will not be the only targets of the hateful, murderous persecution of the Antichrist. The New Testament passage is this one: Revelation Chapter 6, Verses 9 through 11. Remember: this is the breaking of the "seals"—this is that context. "When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar"—John is having a vision of what is in heaven, so this is a heavenly altar—"I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God." What does a "soul" look like, under the altar? Well, nobody has ever seen the altar except John, and he didn't describe it; and I don't know what a soul looks like without a body, but you can see it when God wants you to. Souls will be there—they are disembodied, they're dead *physically* (Jas. 2:26; cf. Lk. 8:54-55; 16:22-25), but they are very much alive spiritually. "I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also."

We know that those have to be people who are killed during the first half of the Tribulation. How do we know that? All "who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord"—when He takes the Church out—"will be caught up together" with Him (1 Thess. 4:15, 17), but *before that*, "the dead in Christ will rise first" (vs. 16)—they will already be resurrected. So these are a massive group of Tribulation-era martyrs; and that's only *a third* of the way through the sequence of judgments in Revelation. The number of martyrs is going to be *staggering*; and God *does* avenge their blood, in His time (see Rev. 16:19; 18:5-8; 19:2).

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So, when "the abomination desolation" takes place, the Jews in Judea better leave town: "Flee to the mountains." There is going to be a place of refuge provided by God for them to go (Rev. 12:6). The fleeing is described in a cryptic passage in Revelation Chapter 12, Verses 14 through 17. But God will provide *something* for them; it's not clear *how* it's going to be accomplished. But it will be a *terrible* time on Earth.

Read on with me in Mark Chapter 13, Verses 17 through 19—"But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! But pray that it may not happen in the winter. For 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." Worse than the Holocaust...Worse than anything going on in North Korea...Worse than anything the Soviet Union has ever done...Worse than any ethnic purging that has ever happened...*the worst ever!*

And by the way, there's sort of a little back-door insight here for you: He says, "Pray that it may not happen in the winter." Who said that? Jesus did. "Are you telling me that Jesus doesn't know what time of year this is going to happen?" Yes—because He said so. "Of that day or hour no one knows," He says, "not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone" (Mk. 13:32). It's interesting: when you get to Revelation, it doesn't say "nor the Son"—He *does* know now (cf. Rev. 22:12), but He veiled His omniscience during His first coming (see Phil. 2:6-8; cf. Lk. 2:52). So if somebody comes along and tells you they know when it's going to take place—*they don't*. A lot of people love to say: "Well, it's all connected to the cycle of the feasts of Israel, and its going to happen during the Feast of"—fill in the blank; most go for Pentecost, or Tabernacles. But, you know what? *We don't know!* So if anybody thinks they know, they're woofing! They just don't know!

Women expecting children, and those with infants, are going to be especially vulnerable. Anybody not able to move fast is going to be at greater risk of being captured and killed. And that's not a surprise; we know that Satan's emissaries didn't mind killing Hebrew children in the time of Moses. His dupe named Herod didn't mind ordering the slaughter of all the infants in and around Bethlehem, at the time the birth of Jesus. No surprise that the most wicked man who will ever live won't flinch at killing women and children. Jesus goes on to warn us: it's even going to be tough in the winter. Even the mild winters in Israel can make travel more difficult. It's literally going to be the *worst time ever* on Earth; it is Unprecedented Tribulation.

Ah, but there's always good news: God never judges without extending mercy and grace. Look at Verses 19 and 20—"Unless the Lord had shortened those days"—now, don't misunderstand; that's just a figure of speech; it doesn't mean God says, "Well I *planned* for this to be 17 years, but I'm going to cut it down to *seven*, and back it off a little." No, it means it's going to be *shortened* to exactly the time that He ordained. If you extrapolate if from how things are going, you'll say: "There's going to be *nobody left on this planet!*"—because that's the way things will be headed. But—"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." As I mentioned, this is one of the reasons we know for sure that this is *yet future*: because the final three and a half years of the Tribulation are going to be worse than any time in history; so while we're still going through history, if it could get any worse, we're not to that time, just yet.

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"Shortened" is a word that is used only here in the Bible—here in Mark's version, and in Matthew's version at Matthew 24:22. Literally, the word means "cut off" or "amputate," so when you put it in a sense of time, it means: "to cut short the time"—God is going to *stop* this carnage; He's going to *stop* the Antichrist; He's going to *stop* His wrath, because He will have poured it all out (Rev. 15:1). And it's going to be exactly the time allotted by God.

And notice: it is "for the sake of *the elect*." Every time you read that word, some people start curdling on the inside. "The elect, *whom He chose*"—"What! Are you trying to tell me that God chooses who is going to be saved?" I'm not telling you that—*God* said that: "He chose"! (cf. Matt. 11:25-27; Jn. 15:16, 19; 2 Thess. 2:13) You say, "Well, that's not fair! Are you telling me I can't be saved?" No, I'm not saying that, because I'm saying *Jesus* said, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). *Anybody* can come to Christ (Ps. 145:18; Is. 45:22; Jn. 3:16; Rev. 22:17); and anybody who comes, He will *never* "cast out" (Jn. 6:37b; cf. 10:27-29). He chose who *will* come, because, left to themselves, *no one would* (Jn. 6:44, 65; cf. Deut. 29:4; Jn. 5:40; Acts 13:48; 16:14).

"For the sake of the elect, whom He chose, He shortened the days." He is going to allow the nation of Israel to be purged; He's going to be *using* the Antichrist to accomplish His purpose within Israel. Only God can use sin *sinlessly* (e.g., Gen. 50:20; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28), and He does; He's going to get to *exactly* the point of the number of people in Israel who are going to turn to the Lord and welcome Him at His second coming. Similarly, the persecution of the saints around the world is going to be just right for there to be exactly the right number of a living remnant left on Earth at the second coming, to enter the kingdom and populate the earth during that thousand years of the kingdom (Matt. 25:34).

It seems, from what Jesus said, that even among those who heed His advice and flee to safety, there is *still* going to be people who are going to infiltrate *that* group and deceive! How do we know that? Well, the last three verses of our section: Mark 13:21 through 23—"And then"—"Then"? "Then," when you're fleeing—"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"—we've already *had* false Christs and false prophets, but *in that day* they're going to arise—"and will show signs and wonders"—even miraculous tricks—"in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But take heed; behold, I have told you everything in advance." Right until *the very end*, there will be deception going on (see 2 Tim. 3:13).

The two little words "if possible"—that's very important. "The elect" *will not*, ultimately, be deceived. They might be temporarily confused (Matt. 26:31; Lk. 24:21; Acts 15:39-40; 23:3-5; Gal. 2:11-14); they might be the targets of powerful persuasion; but true believers will always remain faithful to the end (see Ps. 37:24; Jer. 32:40; Lk. 22:32; Jn. 8:31; 10:1-5, 14, 27; Phil. 1:6; Heb. 3:14; 1 Jn. 2:19; Rev. 14:12). Remember, during "the beginning of birth pangs," we saw that Jesus said: "The one who endures to the end, he will be saved" (Mk. 13:13). Well, what He's saying is: "Let the reader understand." And notice His closing words here: "I have told you everything in advance." That is meant to cross *many* centuries, and to serve those who will be alive in those days. *And*, it's also meant to teach *us*: we don't need to fear; we don't need to doubt; we don't need to waiver in our faith. He told us all this so that we can

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know that He is trustworthy—*just like* He told us everything that was going to happen to Jesus in His first coming, which the Apostle Paul preached about in Acts Chapter 13, He has told us everything leading up to the second coming.

There will be "false Christ and false prophets" saying, "Here He is!" "No, there He is!" "He's over there!" *How will* the believers in that time distinguish the *real* coming of the *true* Messiah, Jesus Christ? Well, you ought to read about it. We're going to—next time. The coming of Jesus Christ to judge and to reign on Earth will be *unmistakable!* Come next week—if He hasn't taken us before then—and, Lord willing, we will come together and we will see what I think of as "The Biblical Trailer" that describes the coming events; it's going to be the most spectacular event this planet will ever see.

But, did you catch the command there, at the end? "But take heed." That's an idiomatic translation of the command-form of the Greek word for "seeing." It's the Present Imperative form, so it means: "Never take your eyes off of this! Don't let anybody shake you from your understanding of this." Jesus says: "I have told you *everything* in advance." How much more do you need to know about what's going to happen in the end times, than what's in the Bible? Nothing! Everything you need is here. Does it answer your every question? No, but it's everything you *need* to know. "I have told you everything in advance"—He put that in the Perfect tense, meaning: "It's all there is *ever* to know; I've given it all to you; I have not held back anything" (see Jn. 15:15b).

So the command to us here—it's really two things: "Let the reader understand," and, "Take heed." Put your faith in God. The only way you can be spared from that outpouring of the wrath of God is to be in Christ (Jn. 3:36; Rom. 5:9; 1 Thess. 1:10), who died that He could take on all the penalty for our sins (Is. 53:5-6, 8, 10; Rom. 6:23). Trust in the veracity of His Word. Trust His promises (Num. 23:19; 2 Chr. 20:20; Acts 25:27)—He will do *exactly* what He says He will do, just as He *has* done exactly what He said He *would* do, in the first coming of Christ.

And between now and the moment that you see the Lord in person, how do you go about taking heed? Well, how about some famous words from Proverbs Chapter 3: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight" (vss. 5-6). That's an idiom for: "He will guide you." Doesn't mean it'll be easy! Oh, yeah—there's persecution, even now. But you will know that you are safe in His care, in His "arms" (Deut. 33:27; cf. 2 Tim. 4:18). "I have told you everything in advance," He says (see Jn. 13:19).

Let's pray:

Father, how we thank You for sending Your Son—in every sense of that, but especially today, as we focus on His words, that He has told us everything we need to know, in advance, about Your plan for us. As we live in between those comings, help us "take heed"; help us read carefully, that we might understand. Put the message of Your gospel of Your Son, Jesus Christ, and His death and burial and resurrection and coming again—help us spread that good news, wherever You give us breath and opportunity. For we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.