

April 17, 2005 by Steve Brandon



More Signs of the End

Matthew 24:15-22

1. The Abomination of Desolation (verses 15-20)

2. Mounting Tribulation (verses 21-22)

If you have done any travelling, you know what it is like to have directions to a place that you have never visited before. The entire time you are travelling, you are looking along the road for signs. Often you are first directed to the major highways that you will travel to get to the city to which you are going. But, once you are in the city, you have more directions, and more signs that you look for. At this point, the signs change a little bit. Rather than looking for major highways, you will often look for landmarks (like a McDonalds or a gas station).

Last week we were on the highway of eschatology, looking for the large highway signs. But this morning, we have approached the city, where we look for more specific signs. Last week, my message was entitled, "Signs of the End." In that message, we looked at the signs that Jesus said would signify the end of the age. They were ...

1. Deceivers (verses 4-5, 11).
2. Wars (Verses 6-7a).
3. Disasters (Verse 7b).
4. Persecution (Verse 9).
5. Defection (Verses 10, 12-13).
6. Evangelism (Verse 14).

this week we are going to be looking at more signs of the end. And so my sermon is appropriately entitled, "More Signs of the End."

The next sign that Jesus gives us is ...

1. The Abomination of Desolation (verses 15-20)

Of all of the signs that Jesus gives to us, this one is unique. The other signs were things that have taken place continually throughout all of history. Last week I went into much detail to demonstrate to you that history throughout all time has been filled with deceivers and wars and disasters and persecutions and defections. But this sign, the abomination of desolation, is such that it can't take place continually. It is more of a one-time event. As we shall see, it may happen a few times throughout the history of the world, but it cannot happen continuously, as all of the others have.

So, what is the abomination of desolation? From the words themselves, we might get a general sense of what it must be. The word, "abomination" carries the idea of something that is very detestable to God. It is used in the Bible to describe something that defiles God's perfect holiness. The word "desolation" signifies the utter destruction of something. So, the "abomination of desolation" refers to a terribly sinful act that ends in a destruction of some type.

Verse 15 reads, "Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand)." At this point, Jesus almost invites us to stop and think about these things, as He says, "let the reader understand." For years, this phrase has always confused me. In the Bible that I normally read, the words of Jesus are printed in red. When reading this passage, the phrase "(Let the reader understand)" is in black. I have always thought that it was a parenthetical remark made by Matthew for us to think about what we are reading. However, it became clear to me this week. I believe that Jesus was saying this about the one reading Daniel! "Let the reader [of the prophet, Daniel,] understand." So, we need to stop and understand what Daniel wrote. (Believe me, it is easier said than done). It is very difficult.

The phrase "Abomination of Desolation" (or something close to this) occurs four times in the book of Daniel." (8:13; 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). There is debate as to what exactly these references are referring to. Two of them appear to speak about the desecration that took place just after the rise of Greece to power, several hundred years before the coming of Christ (Dan. 8:13; 11:31). One of the references appears to speak about the events that would take place near the time of the Messiah Himself (Dan. 9:27). One of them is unclear as to when it will take place (Dan. 12:13). But, in every instance, they all speak about the sacrifices being stopped. I believe that this fact alone ought to give us a clue as to the meaning of the "Abomination of Desolation" (Matt. 24:15).

This morning, I would like for us to take some time to look at each of these references, to burn this into your mind. After all, Jesus says, "Let the reader understand." So, let's read and let us understand what we can. Certainly, there is much mystery in these words.

Daniel 8

First, let's look at the reference found in Daniel 8. The reference to the abomination of desolation is in verse 13. This reference is in the middle of vision in which a ram with two horns (Dan. 8:3) and a goat with one horn (Dan. 8:5). This goat

defeats the ram (Dan. 8:7), but loses his horn (Dan. 8:8). Out of this horn came four more horns (Dan. 8:8). In Dan. 8:9, a small horn "grew exceedingly great" (Dan. 8:9). In verse 11, we read how great it became. "It even magnified itself to be equal with the Commander of the host; and it **removed the regular sacrifice** from Him, and the place of His sanctuary was thrown down" (Dan. 8:11). In verse 13, we see exactly how bad this is. One holy creature is speaking to another, saying, "How long with the vision about the regular sacrifice apply, while the transgression causes horror, so as to allow both the holy place and the host to be trampled?" (Dan. 8:13). Most translations describe this time as a "transgression (or rebellion) of desolation" (NKJV, NIV, ESV).

Beginning in verse 20, the vision is interpreted. "The ram ... with the two horns represents the kings of Media and Persia" (Dan. 8:20). "The ... goat represents the kingdom of Greece" (Dan. 8:21). "The four horns that arose ... represent four kingdoms which will arise from [Greece]" (Dan. 8:22). So, obviously, this is representing something that took place just after Greece fell from power, a few centuries before the coming of Christ.

This took place exactly as predicted. In the year 175 B. C., a man named Antiochus Epiphanes rose to power in the region of Syria. In 170 B. C., he enacted a law that required all citizens to present themselves four times a year to pay formal homage to Antiochus Epiphanes as the senior god of the Seleucids. The Jews, of course, hated such a law and rebelled against it. To squash the rebellion, Antiochus Epiphanes entered Jerusalem in 186 B. C. and erected an altar to Zeus over the altar and sacrificed a pig on the altar, thereby defiling the temple. Soon afterwards, the sacrifices were stopped. This is exactly what Daniel 8 had predicted would take place, calling it a "transgression of horror!"

In fact, so accurate is this prediction of the future, that many liberal theologians believe that Daniel must have been written after this took place. But, Daniel clearly tells us that he lived before the Jewish return to Babylon, which took place near 600 B. C., several hundred years before the things about which Daniel wrote.

Daniel 9

Let's look at the next passage in which the abomination of desolation is mentioned. It comes in Daniel 9. In this passage, we find Daniel reading his Bible. He was reading in the prophet Jeremiah that the days of exile for Jerusalem were coming to an end (Dan. 9:2). Such reading causes him to confess the sinfulness of Israel. "While [he] was speaking and confessing [his] sin and the sin of ... Israel," (Dan. 9:20), Gabriel came to him with a vision, which begins in verse 24. This vision speaks of a time period before the Messiah would come.

Let's begin by looking 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." The word translated "weeks" is literally "sevens." Daniel is talking about "seventy sevens." All Bible interpreters that I know of would interpret these "seventy sevens" as "seventy weeks of years." In other words, when Daniel is speaking about a "week," he is not referring to 7 days, but to 7 years. And so, "Seventy weeks" represents "seventy [seven year periods]," which can be calculated out to 490 years. So, you might well read verse 24 as "490 years have been decreed for your people"

In verse 25, we continue on, "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." This verse tells us that there will be a decree to rebuild Jerusalem. Such a decree took place in 457 B. C., when Artaxerxes I issued a decree that would allow many worshipers to return to Jerusalem and perform sacrifices to God (Ezra 7:12-26). Ezra led a group of people back to Jerusalem to reestablish it, just as Daniel had predicted (Ezra 9:9). The timing works out perfectly. Daniel said, "From the issuing of a decree, there would be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks." Seven plus sixty-two is sixty-nine weeks (of years), which translates to 483 years. If you do the math, you realize that this takes us down to 27 A. D., which is when Jesus began His public ministry. ¹

Let's go on. In verse 26 we read, "Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, 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; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined." This verse doesn't give us a precise chronology of when Messiah will be cut off or of when the prince will destroy the city and the sanctuary. It just tells us of the things that will take place. Messiah will be cut off. The city and the sanctuary will be destroyed, which is exactly what happened.

In verse 27, we get a sense of a time-frame, "And 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." There is great difficulty in knowing exactly when or what this covenant was.

- Some will argue that this was a covenant that Jesus made with the Jews. But, half-way into that covenant (i.e. 3 ½ years), they killed their Messiah. And as we know now, that effectively put an end to sacrifices.
- Others will say that this was some covenant made with the Jews 3 ½ years prior to the destruction of Jerusalem when the sacrifices were stopped and the grain offerings were abolished.
- Others will put this entirely in the future, saying that this will be a covenant established between the Jewish people and the anti-Christ.

The point we need to remember, is that Daniel connects this abomination of desolation with the stoppage of sacrifices.

Daniel 11

The next chapter in which the abominations of desolation occurs is found in Daniel, chapter 11. In this chapter, Daniel predicts what will take place in Persia and in Greece in the years to come. It says that three kings will come along after Darius (Dan. 11:2). And then, they will be defeated by a mighty king, which was fulfilled exactly in Alexander the Great (Dan. 11:3). After his death, his kingdom will be broken up into four parts (Dan. 11:4). The chapter describes the conflicts that the king of the South, the Ptolomites will have with the king of the North, the Seleucids (Dan. 11:5-35). At one point, the king of the North, who was Antiochus Epiphanes, would come into the south (Dan. 11:29). And then, we read in verse 31, "And forces from him will arise, desecrate the sanctuary fortress, and **do away with the regular sacrifice**. And they will set up the abomination of desolation."

I told you earlier of how this was fulfilled exactly in 168 A. D.

Daniel 12

The final reference to the abomination of desolation comes in Daniel, chapter 12. When exactly this will take place (or already took place), is very difficult to understand. Beginning in verse 5 of this chapter, we have two men (or angels) speaking with one another about when these terrible things will end (verse 6). When Daniel heard them talking about it, he confessed that "he could not understand" (verse 8). He was told, ...

Go your way Daniel, for these words are concealed and sealed up until the end time. Many will be purged, purified and refined; but the wicked will act wickedly, and none of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand. And from the time that the **regular sacrifice is abolished**, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. (Daniel 12:9-11).

Regarding these verses, I feel like Daniel. I don't know exactly what these days are. But, it is clear that this verse speaks about the abomination of desolation as taking place at the same time that the "regular sacrifice is abolished" (verse 11). It is also clear that there will be a period of time after the abomination of desolation. So, the abomination of desolation isn't the end of all things.

So, now, do you understand? You have read the passages in Daniel, just as Jesus told us to. I know that I gave you a bunch of material, but here is the point: **The abomination of desolation is closely associated with the abolishing of sacrifices**. Apparently, whatever the abomination of desolation exactly is, it appears to have something to do with some activity surrounding the most holy place where the Lord had established that sacrifices be offered. As a result of all of this, I believe that the "abomination of desolation" of which Jesus spoke took place near the time in which the altar of God in Jerusalem would be destroyed, which would ultimately prevent sacrifices from being offered.

One of the most troubling questions that you might ask to a Jewish man or woman is this, "Why don't you sacrifice anymore?" They can't give you an answer! I remember speaking with a Jewish girl who had become a disciple of Christ about these things. She went home to ask her mother this question. Her mother said that we no longer sacrifice because of God's lovingkindness to us today. There is certainly a sense where this is correct. But, you need to connect God's lovingkindness with the cross of Christ, where God was just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Rom. 3:26). It's at the cross where lovingkindness and truth have met together (Ps. 85:10), but only at the cross. But to the Jew who rejects Jesus, there is no reason why they have stopped sacrifices. Ultimately, it comes back to this: they have no altar! The Romans destroyed it. You can't sacrifice on an altar that isn't there. It is the Romans who stopped their sacrifices. But, the destroying of the altar, by itself, isn't the "abomination of desolation."

I believe that the abomination of desolation took place shortly before the altar was destroyed. Josephus tells us of the wicked men who came and elected for themselves a high priest, named Phannias, the son of Samuel, of the village Aphtha. Josephus said that "He was a man not only unworthy of the high priesthood, but that did not well know what the high priesthood was." They adorned this man with sacred garments and hailed him as the high priest. Such "wickedness was sport and pastime with" these evil men (Josephus, Wars of the Jews 4:3:8). At one point, they even killed a man in "the middle of the temple" for trying to stop the wickedness that was taking place (Josephus, Wars of the Jews 4:5:4). The other priests, who beheld the mockery of these things shed tears and lamented the things that took place.

Listen to the testimony of Ananus, a former high priest. He said, "Certainly it had been good for me to die before I had seen the house of God full of so many abominations, or these sacred places, that ought not to be trodden upon at random, filled with the feet of these blood-shedding villains" (Josephus, Wars of the Jews 4:3:10). Ananus went on to speak about how the Romans came broke in upon the sacred customs of the Jews in the temple (Josephus, Wars of the Jews 4:3:10). In Acts 21:28 we saw how stirred up the Jews in Jerusalem could become if they thought that a Greek had come into the temple! They were ready to kill Paul for doing this (though, in fact, he didn't). As the Romans came in and out of the temple area, it would have been a tremendous sacrilege from the perspective of the Jews. So, I believe that the abomination of desolation took place shortly before the altar was destroyed.

Luke helps us to see that this is a reliable interpretation. In his version of the Olivet discourse, when Jesus approached this point in His message, He said, "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is at hand" (Luke 21:20). This is what

Luke records Jesus saying in the same location of His Olivet Discourse where He speaks of the abomination of desolation. It is not a contradiction that Jesus didn't use the exact words, "the abomination of desolation" in Luke. The texts we have of the message of Jesus is shorter than what He actually said. I'm sure that when Jesus actually spoke these words, He spoke about the armies that surrounded Jerusalem and would make her desolate (as recorded in Luke 21), He tied it to the abomination of desolation (as recorded in Matthew 24).

And so, when the armies surrounded Jerusalem and when they saw the wickedness taking place in the temple, I'm sure that these disciples understood that the "abomination of desolation" (Matt. 24:15) was at hand and it was time to flee. Soon afterwards, the city was sacked and the temple destroyed. When these things took place, Jesus told them exactly what to do.

Matthew 24:15-20

Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains; let him who is on the housetop not go down to get the things out that are in his house; and let him who is in the field not turn back to get his cloak. But woe to those who are with child and to those who nurse babes in those days! But pray that your flight may not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath;

These verses present a sense of urgency for their own safety. Jesus said, "Head for the hills!" As the Romans surrounded Jerusalem (and would soon abominate the temple), there would be only a small window of opportunity to escape. Jesus instructed His disciples to flee into the mountains and away from the cities, where they might be found (verse 16). Even if you are on the roof of your house, don't even take the time to pack (verse 17). If you are in the field working, just leave. Don't even bother about your coat (verse 18). Survival is more important than warmth.

The ever compassionate Jesus said that it will be a difficult trek for those who are pregnant or have little babies in those days (verse 19). In our congregation this past month, two babies have been born. Even getting to church with a newborn is a difficulty (as I'm sure they can tell you). It's difficult to imagine the difficulties that travel across the wilderness and up the mountain would be like for those with small children in those days, much less being pregnant! Jesus further shows His compassion is saying that a winter-time escape is difficult because of the cold (verse 20). A departure on the Sabbath would be difficult because people wouldn't be nearly as willing to help travelers (verse 20).

Notice how all of this points to a specific fulfillment of this in the days of the disciples. In verse 16, we have a specific reference to "Judea," where the disciples lived. Jesus made specific reference to the types of houses in which they lived (where you frequently use the roof) (in verse 17). Jesus spoke of the Sabbath as a major hindrance for travel, which wouldn't be true today. Traveling in the hills isn't too difficult today either. We simply drive in our cars.

I believe that this all points clearly to the fact that the abomination of desolation took place in the days of the disciples, shortly before the most holy place was destroyed by Gentile people! Jesus instructed His disciples to flee when they saw these things take place.

History tells us that "the Jews in general rushed into Jerusalem, resulting in a horrible blood bath." ² But, history is silent with respect to what the Christians did. We simply don't know whether or not they fled as they were told, which leads us to a clear point of application in my message this morning.

When you see things taking place that God hates, how do you respond? Do you flee? Do you stay in the city? God had established the temple upon the mount in Jerusalem as the most sacred location on the planet. In many locations in the Bible, we read that God set His name there and has chosen to dwell there (1 Kings 11:36; 14:21; 2 Kings 21:7; 2 Chron. 6:6; 12:13; 33:7; Psa 135:21). It ought to be treated as holy. When it was defiled, it was such a demonstration of the hatred of the people against Him, that God told them to flee for their lives!

Today, it is no different. We ought to flee from the things that God hates! The Bible tells us to "flee immorality" (1 Cor. 6:18). We are told to "flee from idolatry" (1 Cor. 10:14). Paul told Timothy, to "flee from youthful lusts" (2 Tim. 2:22). We are to flee from "the love of money" (1 Tim. 6:10). In the book of Proverbs, Solomon instructs us to flee from sin, like an animal or a bird would flee from a hunter (Prov. 6:5). Have you ever seen an animal scurry away from your presence? Perhaps you come around the corner of your house and catch a squirrel digging in the ground. He will always take off and run up a tree. Perhaps you have been walking in some taller grass near where a rabbit is sitting. When you come sufficiently close, the rabbit will always run away very quickly. We have recently hung a bird feeder outside our window. Whenever there are birds on the feeder and we open the door, they always fly away. This is a great picture of how it is that we ought to flee from sin.

If this passage teaches us anything, it teaches of the seriousness of sin in our lives. You can't play with sin, any more than you could survive the Roman onslaught of Jerusalem. When Potiphar's wife sought to seduce young Joseph by grabbing him and wanting him to lie with her, "he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside" (Gen. 39:12). The Lord was faithful to preserve Joseph. And yet, there are others who will take this fire into his bosom and will burn his clothes (Prov. 6:27). There are those who will walk on hot coals, only to have their feet scorched (Prov. 6:28). Whoever "goes in to his neighbor's wife ... will not go unpunished" (Prov. 6:29). "He house sinks down to death, and her tracks lead to the dead; none who go to her return again, nor do they reach the paths of life" (Prov. 2:18-19). Such is the seriousness of sin. You can't play with sin and survive. We are to flee from sin. When the temptation comes, run away, as these disciples were told to do.

Before we proceed to our second point, I wanted to say a final word about the abomination of desolation. Most people who talk about these things will say that the abomination of desolation will be some time in the future. They say that the temple needs to be rebuilt, so that sacrifices might start again, so that someone can come and fulfill this passage. Now, it may well be that such things will happen in the future. In such case, this prophecy would be like many prophecies, that have several fulfillments. So, I'm not excluding the possibility of this. But, I'm not sure that it has to take place.

If you think about it for a little bit, you will realize that re-establishing Jewish sacrifices would be an abomination itself! It would be a slap in the face of God by saying that the sacrifice of Christ was insufficient! We ought to oppose any such efforts on the part of people to re-institute

such sacrifices, for they testify against the once and for all sufficiency of the death of Christ.

We now turn to the next sign, ...

2. Mounting Tribulation (verses 21-22)

In verses 21 and 22 we read, "for then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall. And unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short."

In these verses, Jesus tells his disciples what to expect: mounting tribulation. In fact, Jesus said that the tribulation that would be faced in the city of Jerusalem would be worse than the tribulation that anyone would ever face for all time. Certainly, this can't mean that more people would die, for in the holocaust of World War II, six million Jews were put to death. During the reign of Stalin, some twenty million people were systematically murdered. ³ The destruction of Jerusalem never came close to these numbers. But, Jesus' words about mounting tribulation do mean that the brutality and the savagery would never be duplicated again! Josephus describes the suffering that took place in his book, "The Wars of the Jews." It is incredible suffering

During this siege, the Romans came upon the city and surrounded it, cutting everybody inside off from the outside world. As a result, a famine broke out in the city, which turned family members against family members, as they sought for food. The suffering of famine was so bad that they "invented terrible methods of torments to discover where any food was, and they [would] stop up the passages of the privy parts of the miserable wretches, and to drive sharp stakes up their fundaments; and a man was forced to bear what it is terrible even to hear, in order to make him confess that he had but one loaf of bread, or that he might discover a handful of barley-meal that was concealed; and this was done when these tormentors were not themselves hungry" (Josephus, Wars of the Jews 5:10:3).

Many of the Jews, therefore, attempted to escape the city, but this was well nigh impossible, as the Romans were stationed all around the city. But, they were often captured by the Romans. Once captured, they were whipped, and "tormented with all sorts of tortures, ..." and then were crucified in front of the wall of the city (Wars of the Jews, 5:11:1). They were doing this to some 500 Jews each day that they had captured. Titus, the Roman general in charge of the destruction of Jerusalem, allowed this to continue on because "he hoped the Jews might perhaps yield at that sight." Josephus wrote, "the soldiers, out of the wrath and hatred they bore the Jews, nailed those they caught, one after one way, and another after another, to the crosses, by way of jest, when their multitude was so great, that room was wanting for the crosses, and crosses wanting for the bodies" (Wars of the Jews, 5:11:1). In other words, they didn't have enough crosses to crucify those who were caught trying to flee Jerusalem.

Josephus describes the situation of those in Jerusalem, "The noise also of those that were fighting was incessant, both by day and by night; but the lamentations of those that mourned exceeded the other; nor was there ever any occasion for them to leave off their lamentations, because their calamities came perpetually one upon another, (Wars of the Jews, 5:1:5). As constant and loud as the fighting was, the cries of agony exceeded it.

When Josephus looked back at the war as a whole, he said, "That neither did any other city ever suffer such miseries, nor did any age ever breed a generation more fruitful in wickedness than this was, from the beginning of the world" (Josephus, Wars of the Jews 5:10:5). He continued, "... it appears to me that the misfortunes of all men, from the beginning of the world, if they be compared to these of the Jews are not so considerable as they were" (Wars of the Jews, Preface, paragraph 4). This is almost an exact description of the words of Jesus in verse 21, "Then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall" (verse 21). Thus, I believe that verse 21 was fulfilled in the days of the Roman siege of Jerusalem in 70 A. D.

I believe that the next verse speaks about how the Lord sovereignly shortened the time of the siege of Jerusalem. Had He not, there would have been absolutely no survivors. But, for the sake of the Christians in the city, who are here identified as "the elect," God shortened the suffering. Now, this doesn't mean that God will always protect the elect from death. In other words, they were martyred for their faith. For those at the church in Smyrna, God told them to "be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10). In Revelation 6:11, we are told that God would not put forth His final wrath upon the earth until "the number of their ... brethren who were to be killed ... should be completed." In other words, God has decreed a certain number of individuals to be martyred for their faith. The end will not come until they all have been killed for the sake of Christ. We see some of them appear in Revelation 7, coming out of the "great tribulation" to stand before the Lord with their robes washed white in the blood of the lamb (Rev. 7:14).

Yet, here Jesus promises that the days will be shortened for the sake of the elect (verse 22). This ought to give us great comfort. God is mindful of us in our times of distress. When the Romans were pouring out their wrath upon those in Jerusalem, all of it was done under the watchful eye of God. He observed the atrocities that were going on in the city of Jerusalem. Nothing escaped His notice. He was mindful of His chosen ones, whom He had chosen from the foundation of the world unto salvation. He wasn't going to sit by and let them be destroyed. Rather, God "shortened the days" to save some of His people from certain death.

Difficult days may indeed be ahead of us. Tribulation may well come upon us. Jesus promised it. Though I believe that these words were fulfilled historically, it doesn't mean that we, as Christians, ought to think that it cannot happen again. This is the way that prophecy works. There are often multiple fulfillments. What took place in the days of the apostles may very well come upon us as well in some measure. In fact, the Lord promised that we will have tribulation. He said, "In the world, you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

But, even in our days of tribulation, we may stand secure, knowing that we serve a good God, whose eyes are in every place, "watching the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3). When evil comes upon from the hands of wicked men, we know that nothing escapes the eye of the Lord. We know that he "knows how to rescue the godly from temptation" (2 Pet. 2:9).

If you are here today and are a believer in Jesus Christ and have trusted in His atoning sacrifice upon the cross, then rest in the grace of

God. It is the grace of God that has saved you from your sin. It will be the grace of God who is able to save you from destruction at the hands of sinful men! When difficult days come, rest and trust in the grace of God. If He wants to rescue you, He will rescue you. If not, know that He will make all things right someday. "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord (Rom. 12:19).

In these times, we need to do as Jesus did, "while being reviled, He did not revile in return. While suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Pet. 2:23).

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on April 17, 2005 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] If this math doesn't seem to quite add up, you need to remember that 0 A. D. didn't exist. You go straight from 1 B. C. to 1 A. D.

[2] William Hendrickson, New Testament Commentary on Matthew, p. 858. He deduced this by referring to Josephus, who describes Jerusalem as being in an overcrowded condition.

[3] D. A. Carson, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Matthew, p. 501.