

THE GREAT TRIBULATION

"Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days shall be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; but for the elect's sake (the elect of Israel) those days shall be shortened." Matthew 24:21-22.

"And He said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Revelation 7:14.

Since Pentecost saints have had to endure persecution. Our Lord said, "In this world ye shall have tribulation." "The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me they will also persecute you." Christians may expect worse persecution than they have yet known.

Everywhere men's hearts are failing them for fear. War is the order of the day. There is hardly a home in the world but what is affected in some way by the world conditions. Suffering and sorrow are reaching gigantic proportions. Where is there any trace or evidence of peace? Only in the hearts of God's believing children.

The future holds nothing bright for the world. Great tribulation with all its terror awaits it. For the Christian, however, this need hold no fear. He may pursue his daily duties and fulfill his God-given obligations, ever keeping in mind that before this unprecedented trial comes he will be in glory.

Momentous questions fill the minds of men today. Men are asking "Is peace a thing of the past, something our forebears enjoyed in measure, but is withdrawn from us and from the generations to come? Must we resign ourselves to endure hardships, sorrows, and wars? Is the world becoming less inviting for its inhabitants?"

"Careless seems the Great Avenger;
History's pages but record
One death-grapple in the darkness,
'Twi'xt old systems and the Word.
Truth for ever on the scaffold:
Wrong for ever on the Throne:
But that scaffold sways the future;
And, behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God, within the shadow,
Keeping watch above His own."

In a day when doubt of the supernatural is deepening into gross materialism there is great need of reminding ourselves from the Scriptures that in God's revealed program the most startling supernatural events of history are still before us.

Earth's darkest hour still lies ahead. Democracy has had its most glorious day; dictatorship is coming. Even now the nations are in the process of preparation. Liberty will go, and freedom be no more. It is true that there will be a Millenium, but the Great Tribulation must come first. And it is with this GREAT TRIBULATION that we are now concerned.

The Bible speaks frequently of a period of unusual and distressing punishments for the wicked world. This period is known by several designations. In Deuteronomy 4:30, it is known as "tribulation." In Isaiah 61:2, it is called the "day of vengeance" of our God. In Jeremiah 30:7, it is mentioned as "the time of Jacob's trouble." Daniel 12:1 used the phrase "time of trouble." In Joel 2:2 it is called a "day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of thick darkness." Micah calls it the "indignation of the Lord." (7:9). It is referred to as "a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wastefulness and desolation." Zephaniah 1:15. The participants of that dreadful period call it the "great day of His wrath." Revelation 6:17. We have become familiar with the designation, "THE GREAT TRIBULATION" as used in Revelation 7:14.

I. The Fact of The Great Tribulation.

"Alas for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble but he shall be saved out of it." Jeremiah 30:7.

In Ezekiel 20:34-38, it is spoken of as the time when Israel shall "Pass under the Rod;" and in 22:19-22, we read how that God is going to cast Israel into His "Melting Pot," where they are to be refined as "gold is refined."

Daniel 12:1 says, "There shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time THY PEOPLE (the Jews) shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book."

Isaiah 26:20-21 says, "Come, My people (Jews), enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For, behold, the Lord cometh forth out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity."

"Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days shall be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; but for the elect's sake (the elect of Israel) those days shall be shortened." Matthew 24:21-22. Note, it is a time: --

1. Definitely determined -- "then."
2. Unparalleled in history.
3. Never to be repeated.
4. Graciously limited in duration.

II. The Time Of The Great Tribulation.

It is AFTER the saints have been caught up or translated, and during the reign of the Antichrist or World Dictator.

While the "Tribulation Period" shall last for about seven years, as to its severity it will be divided into two parts of three and a half years each. The second or last part will be so far exceeding the first part in its severity that it will be known as "THE GREAT TRIBULATION."

III. The Nature Of The Great Tribulation.

This is best known through the name most generally given to it, "THE DAY OF THE LORD." This expression is used to bring out the fact that there has been for many centuries "THE DAY OF MAN" or "MAN'S DAY." Man has been left much to his own devices. Man has been given great liberty of action. He has had plenty of rope. Consequently, he has come to regard the earth as his own and himself as its permanent, all-powerful possessor. Man has been left to his own devices because this is "THE DAY OF GRACE." God has not interfered much with man's brazen rejection of proffered salvation in the Son of God. Man has come to think that God has no intention or inclination to punish.

But now "THE DAY OF THE LORD" looms, a day in which God will take a strong hand.

"The lofty looks of man shall be brought low, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low." Isaiah 2:11-12.

"And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down and the haughtiness of man shall be brought low: and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. And the idols He shall utterly abolish. And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His majesty, when He ariseth to shake terribly the earth." Isaiah 2:17-19.

"In that day men shall cast away their idols of silver, and their idols of gold, which have been made for them to worship, to the moles and to the bats; to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, from before the terror of the Lord, and from the glory of His majesty, when He ariseth mightily the earth. Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of?" Isaiah 2:20-22.

There are many prophetic pictures of this time of suffering on earth. An outstanding characteristic of man is his pride. But God is determined to show man his true state. When man's pride is humbled, defiance turned to fear, the money which has occupied such a large place in his affections and which has so often enabled him to escape just punishment, is now discovered to be worthless, so in disgust and despair, he throws it away. Seeking refuge in caves and underground places, supposed to be safe in time of earthquakes, he discovers there is no place where he can find security -- no place but in that REFUGE which he had despised. It is a sad picture but justice has caught up at last with sin.

THE GREAT TRIBULATION will be a time of unparalleled suffering, involving the whole world, but especially the Jews, who, however, will be supernaturally preserved from total annihilation.

THE GREAT TRIBULATION will be ushered in by the Antichrist who will break his seven year covenant with the Jews in the middle of the seventieth week of Daniel, by setting up the abomination of desolation in the Temple and demanding universal worship. The duration of the great tribulation will be three and a half years, "and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months." Revelation 13:5.

THE GREAT TRIBULATION will be characterized by: --

1. Deception through miracles.

"And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire to come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast." Revelation 13:13-14.

2. Worship of the beast or martyrdom.

"And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed." Revelation 13:15.

3. The mark of the beast as the only condition of trade.

"And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name." Revelation 13:16-17.

IV. The Reason For The Great Tribulation.

1. The sovereign purpose of God must be recognized and acknowledged by man. The Bible deals with the Divine purpose of God in various directions.

(1) Regarding sin and Satan.

They must receive just punishment at the hands of a just God.

(2) Regarding His Son.

The second Psalm tells that God has set His King upon the Holy Hill of Zion. This King exalted by God, was rejected by man. Now He must reign over all the earth, with none above or beneath to dispute His sway. He comes into His own at long last.

(3) Regarding Israel.

Israel will be brought to the final realization that God always keeps His covenants. Israel's faith and allegiance will be restored, but only after the most severe trials which will purge and purify here. She will be lifted to a supreme position among the nations -- the place predicted for her by the prophets of old. Now, with the Hebrew language in common use, they exhibit a unanimity of purpose and loyalty for which God has long waited.

(4) Regarding the nations.

The nations having brought the world into such a sorry mess must have their misrule of the centuries supplanted by the righteous rule of the King of kings.

2. Man's stubborn perversity must be broken.

(1) Sin must be judged and the idols that man has worshipped rather than God -- idols of money, pleasure, power, etc., must be proved valueless and useless in time of trouble.

(2) The despised Gospel of God's Grace must be honored and respected. Through the centuries men have refused to yield their hearts and lives to the glorious gospel of the grace of God.

(3) Man must see that persecution of God's Chosen People has been a disastrous mistake. If man does not change his attitude toward the Jew, he will thereby earn a promised condemnation. Genesis 12:3.

(4) Man must acknowledge but one Sovereign, and that is not Antichrist, but Christ.

V. The Factors In The Great Tribulation.

1. The human factors.

(1) Israel.

"Alas for that day is great, so that there is none like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it." Jeremiah 30:7.

(2) The Nations.

"For the day is near, even the day of the Lord is near, a cloudy day; it shall be the time of the nations." Ezekiel 30:3.

(3) The Apostate Churches.

This is the profession, Laodicean Church of Revelation 3, which the Lord condemns and utterly repudiates. "I will spue thee out of my mouth."

2. The superhuman factors.

(1) God and His Christ.

These, together with the Holy Spirit, constitute the Holy Trinity.

(2) Satan and His Antichrist.

These, together with the False Prophet, constitute the Evil Trinity.

These two most powerful combinations in the universe will wage the most terrific conflict that has ever been known. The interplay of these two during the Great Tribulation is the marvelous story, unparalleled in literature, recorded in Revelation 12:1-20:3.

3. The natural elements.

Nature behaves unnaturally. The elements that have been man's friendly ally seems turned from helping to hurting and affrighting him.

- (1) Drought and famine. Joel 1:15-20.
- (2) Heavenly disturbances. Joel 2:30-31.
- (3) Earthquakes. Joel 3:15-16.

4. The Greatest War.

The distress of the Great Tribulation will be climaxed by the greatest war in history. Joel 3:9-14.

VI. The Outcome Of The Great Tribulation.

1. The abolition of war.

"And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." Isaiah 2:4.

This will be the outcome of the Great Tribulation and not before.

2. Christ will be acclaimed King.

"And He hath on His vesture and on His thigh a name written KING OF KINGS, and LORD OF LORDS." Revelation 19:16.

3. Jerusalem will be freed by her great deliverer.

"And men shall dwell therein, and there shall be no more curse, but Jerusalem shall dwell safely." Zechariah 14:11.

4. Christ will be King over all the earth.

"And the Lord shall be King over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and His name one." Zechariah 14:9.

TWO QUESTIONS:

1. Will the True Children of God Escape THE GREAT TRIBULATION?

The answer is yes. Must we then differentiate between the "tribulation" which comes to Christians while they are in the world and the "great tribulation" which is sent by God to the world? The answer is in the affirmative. The tribulation of Christians comes from their loyalty to Jesus Christ and is thrust upon them by an antagonistic world. The "great tribulation" on the other hand is visited upon the world by an angry God as a judgment because of hatred toward and rebellion against God and His anointed One -- the Lord Jesus Christ.

It ought to be perfectly obvious that there are two vastly different conditions. The tribulation of Christians comes from the world to strengthen our spiritual fibre and keep us in close and vital union with God, our Refuge. The second comes from God Himself, and is an exhibition of Divine anger, -- a punishment for sin and rebellion against the Almighty, by the world.

As Christians, we should not live in dread because of an expected outpouring of God's wrath, but we should sing for joy knowing that His Word says, "Happy are all they that put their trust in Him." Psalm 2:12. "Much more then, being now justified by His blood, shall we be saved from THE WRATH OF GOD through Him." Romans 5:9. We are safe in Christ.

2. Will Anyone Be Saved During THE GREAT TRIBULATION?

The answer is yes. From Revelation 7:9-17 it appears that there will be a great

many saved during that time. Also 13:7. The preaching will be done by a saving remnant out of Israel numbering 144,000.

When Aaron Burr was a student at Princeton University he was under conviction during a college revival. He consulted the President of the University regarding his conviction and sought advice. He was advised to wait until the excitement of the meeting had subsided and then decide what to do. He took that advice, and refused to yield to the entreaty of the Gospel. To delay is not only foolish, but often fatal. "Behold, now is the day of salvation." "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?"