

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 the day of Pentecost, Christians have had to endure persecution. Christians are called upon to suffer for their Lord, even when the world seems to escape entirely the troubles that befall Christ's followers. The word "tribulation" means pressure, affliction and anguish. It indicates the pressure of affliction, which results in deep soul anguish. Any reader of the New Testament knows that all Christians are called upon to face tribulation. Our blessed Lord warned His disciples that this would be their lot. "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). "Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also" (John 15:20).

Paul reminded the early Christians of this fact when he exhorted them "to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Christians may expect worse persecution than they have yet known. There is no doubt about whether or not they should expect tribulation as they pass through this world.

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 Men are asking "Is peace a thing of the past, something our forebears enjoyed in measure, but is withdrawn from us and from the generations to come?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,
'Twixt 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."

We must differentiate between the tribulation which comes to Christians while they are in the world and "The Great Tribulation" which is sent by Almighty God upon the world. The tribulation of Christians is thrust upon them by an antagonistic world because of their loyalty to Jesus Christ. The Great Tribulation will come upon the world because of hatred toward and rebellion against God and His Anointed One, the Lord Jesus Christ. The tribulation of Christians comes from the world to strengthen their spiritual fiber and keep them in close and vital union with God. The Great Tribulation is an exhibition of divine displeasure at the world, a punishment for sin and rebellion against the Almighty One.

That there is to be such a tribulation we know from God Himself. He expects us to understand that He is referring to a particular period of suffering, one that will stand out in the history of mankind. No honest, unbiased student of God's Word will fail to notice this particular period, for it is frequently mentioned as being unparalleled in human history.

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 referred to 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 so far exceed the first part in its severity that it will be known as "The Great Tribulation."

"And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days" (Revelation 12:6). "And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies: and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months" (Revelation 13:5). That will be far too long to suit the unhappy people who will have to pass through it. God will certainly pour out His wrath on the world in a very definite manner, for that specific period and for a clearly expressed reason.

III. The Nature Of The Great Tribulation.

For centuries man has been given great liberty of action. He has been left very much to his own devices and given plenty of rope. Consequently, in his pride, he has come to regard this world as his own and himself as its all-powerful possessor. Because this is "The Day of Grace," God has interfered greatly with man's brazen rejection of proffered salvation in and through the Son of God. Many have come to think that God has no intention of inflicting punishment, but in this they are wrong.

The time will come when God will wield 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 a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made each one for himself 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, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth. Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?" (Isaiah 2:20-22).

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 has 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 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 her. 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. "And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:3).
 - (4) Man must acknowledge but one Sovereign, and that is not Antichrist, but Christ.

Will the children of God escape The Great Tribulation? The answer is yes. The rapture will reveal a real distinction between possessors and mere professors. None of those who possess salvation will be left here, but all of the mere professors will be. God will speak unto the latter "in His wrath and vex them in His sore displeasure" (Psalm 2:3). "The tribulation, the great one," will be something altogether different from any other time or type of trouble. It will initiate a period of unprecedented and unparalleled suffering according to the prophecy of Daniel and the statements of Christ. "For in those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be. And except that the Lord had shortened those

days, no flesh should be saved: but for the elect's sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days" (Mark 13:19-20). From this outpouring of divine wrath, the saved will be kept. "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth" (Revelation 3:10).

The Great Tribulation is for the world and not for God's children. It is unthinkable that God would deliberately punish His children with the same punishment that the sinful world receives. It simply does not make sense. It is opposed to all that we know about our loving God and is contrary to the plain teaching of His Word. "Much more then, being now justified by His blood, shall we be saved from the wrath of God through Him" (Romans 5:9).

The blood of Jesus Christ not only cleanses us but also protects us from coming wrath. We, who are Christians, will be removed from this world before this period of dreadful tribulation and wickedness comes upon the Christ-rejecting world.