

## Toward Understanding the Tribulation

### Introduction:

#### What does “Tribulation” mean?

- 1) The Tribulation is the term Jesus gave in the Gospels (Matt. 24:21, 29; Mark 13:19, 24) to describe a yet future seven-year period of time during which God judges an unbelieving world and His disobedient people, the nation of Israel.
- 2) It is also referred to in Scripture as:
  - a) “The Day of the Lord” (Zech. 14:1; Acts 2:29; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:10).
  - b) The “time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7; cf. Dan. 12:1).
  - c) The indignation/wrath (Isa. 26:20; 1 Thess. 1:10; Rev. 6:16-17).
  - d) Some of the passages seem to have a partial fulfillment in history while awaiting a complete fulfillment in the future.
- 3) There seems to be at four distinct categories of “the day of the Lord/Christ/God”
  - a) Any judgment of God in history
    - i) Babylon’s invasion by Medes and Persians—Isa. 13:6, 9
    - ii) Israel’s invasion by locusts—Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11
    - iii) Israel’s invasion by Assyria—Amos 5:18 (2), 20
    - iv) Israel’s invasion by Babylon—Zeph. 1:7, 14 (2)
  - b) The Catching Away of those “in Christ”—1 Cor. 1:8; 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14; Phil. 1:6, 10; 2:16
  - c) The entire period from the beginning of the Tribulation to the end of the Millennium—Joel 2:31; 3:14; Obad. 1:15; Zech. 14:1; Mal. 4:5; Acts 2:20; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 16:14
    - i) That time in God’s program when He deals specifically with Israel, beginning with the Catching Away of those who are “in Christ” and extending through the Second Coming and the creation of new heavens and a new earth after the Millennial age.
    - d) The time of the Father’s rule in eternity—2 Pet. 3:12
- 4) Other phrases referring to these same periods of time include: “in that day,” “the great day”.

#### What is the significance of the Tribulation?

- 1) God created the universe for His own sovereign purposes (Rev. 4:11).
  - a) Therefore, the heavenly and earthly realms are owned and ruled by God (1 Chron. 29:11-12; 2 Chron. 20:6; Psa. 47:2; 103:19; 135:6; Isa. 40:12-26; Jer. 10:7, 10; Dan. 4:17, 34-35, 37; Acts 17:24; 1 Tim. 1:17; Rev. 5:13).
- 2) “The day of the Lord refers to God’s special interventions into the course of world events to judge His enemies, accomplish His purpose for history, and thereby demonstrate who He is—the sovereign God of the universe (Isa. 2:10-22; Eze. 13:5, 9, 14, 21, 23; 30:3, 8, 19, 25-26).” (Showers, *Maranatha, Our Lord Come!*, 30)

### Why will the Tribulation occur?

- 1) Judgment of those confirmed in sin
  - a) Note the idea of sin reaching its maturity and demanding God's judgment.
    - i) Matt. 13:29; Rev. 14:15, 18
  - b) Note the idea of the incorrigible nature of the wicked during the Tribulation.
    - i) Rev. 9:20-21; 11:18; 16:9-11 (2 Thess. 2:11-12)
- 2) Chastening of Israel
  - a) Jer. 30:7; Dan. 12:1 (John 5:43)
- 3) Salvation of a multitude of Israelites
  - a) Rom. 11:26; Zech. 3:9 (Isa. 66:2; Hos. 6:2); 12:10; 13:1, 8-9
- 4) Salvation of a multitude of Gentiles
  - a) Zeph. 3:9; Rev. 7:9-17; Matt. 25:34

### Who will be in the Tribulation?

- 1) Unbelieving Jews and Gentiles
  - a) All people who enter the Tribulation will be unbelievers because all genuine believers will have been removed during the Rapture.
- 2) The Antichrist, the Beast, and the False Prophet
  - a) Antichrist will sign a covenant with the nation of Israel at the beginning, but will break that covenant—Dan. 9:27
  - b) The Beast will be a political and religious leader during the Tribulation—Rev. 13:1-10
  - c) The False Prophet will perform miracles to deceive the unbelievers into following the Beast—Rev. 13:11-18
- 3) Martyrs
  - a) Those killed because of their faith in Jesus Christ—Rev. 6:9-11
  - b) The two witnesses—Rev. 11:1-19
- 4) Note those will not be in it! Church age believers.

### When does the Tribulation start?

- 1) Following the Rapture and the Judgment Seat of Christ—Rev. 4:4-5
- 2) Technically speaking, the Tribulation begins with the breaking of the first seal in Rev. 6:1-2.
  - a) It is often assumed that the Tribulation begins immediately following the Rapture.
  - b) There appears to be a small amount of time between the Rapture and the breaking of the first seal.
- 3) Before the Millennium—Matt. 24:29-31

### How long will the Tribulation last?

- 1) It will last seven years—Dan. 9:27
- 2) It will be divided into two 3 ½ year periods

- a) The first half—Rev. 11:31—1,260 days
- b) The second half
  - i) Rev. 12:6—1,260 days
  - ii) Rev. 12:14 (Dan. 7:25)—time, times, and ½ time
  - iii) Rev. 13:5—42 months

### What will the Tribulation be like?

#### 1) OT descriptions

- The “Day of the LORD” (see above); tribulation/distress (Deut. 4:30); Israel’s calamity (Deut. 32:35; Obad. 1:12-14); punishment (Isa. 24:20-21); indignation/wrath (Isa. 26:20-21; Dan. 11:36); the overflowing scourge (Isa. 28:15, 18); Yahweh’s strange work (Isa. 28:21); Yahweh’s strange act (Isa. 28:21); indignation (Isa. 34:2); anger/fury (Isa. 34:2); vengeance (Isa. 34:8; 35:4; 61:2); the year of recompense (Isa. 34:8); seventieth week (Dan. 9:27); wrath (Zeph. 1:15); distress (Zeph. 1:15); wasteness/devastation (Zeph. 1:15); desolation (Zeph. 1:15); darkness (Zeph. 1:15; Amos 5:18, 20; Joel 2:2); gloominess (Zeph. 1:15; Joel 2:2); clouds (Zeph. 1:15; Joel 2:2); thick darkness (Zeph. 1:15; Joel 2:2) the trumpet (Zeph. 1:16); alarm (Zeph. 1:16)

#### 2) NT descriptions

- The great tribulation (Matt. 24:21; Rev. 2:22; 7:14; cf. the tribulation—Matt. 24:29); the day of the Lord (Acts 2:20; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10); wrath (Rom. 2:5; 1 Thess. 5:9; Rev. 16:19); the wrath to come (1 Thess. 1:10; Rev. 11:18); the great day of the wrath of the Lamb (Rev. 6:16-17; cf. Joel 2:11, 31; Zeph. 1:14; Mal. 4:5); the wrath of God (Rev. 14:10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1); the hour of trial? (Rev. 3:10); the hour of judgment (Rev. 14:7; 16:7; cf. judge—Rev. 6:10; 11:18; 16:5; 18:8, 20; 19:2, 11)

#### 3) Distinguishing aspects

##### a) Two SENSES

- i) **Broad** sense—covering both the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Dan. and the 1,000-year kingdom.
- ii) **Narrow** sense—the day on which Christ will return to earth from heaven with His angels.
  - (1) Rev. 16:12-16—the armies of all the nations of the world will not begin to gather in Israel for Armageddon until the 6<sup>th</sup> bowl is poured out.
  - (2) Joel 3:9-16; Zech. 14:1-5—the “day of the LORD” comes **after** the armies of the nations have gathered in and against Israel (cf. Rev. 19:11-21).

##### b) Two PHASES

- i) Phase one—will be characterized by darkness and an outpouring of God’s wrath upon the earth
- ii) Phase two—will be characterized by light, an outpouring of God’s blessing, and His rule upon the earth

##### c) Two FOCUSES/foci

- i) **Broad** focus—the Gentile nations (Isa. 2:12-22; 13:6-16; Eze. 30:1-9; Joel 1:15-20; Obad. 1:10-20; Zeph. 1:14-18; 1 Thess. 5:1-3; 2 Thess. 2:1-4; 2 Pet. 3:10-12)
- ii) **Narrow** focus—ethnic Israel (Eze. 13:1-7; Joel 2:1-11; 3:14-17; Amos 5:18-20; Zeph. 1:7-13)
- d) Two PURPOSES
  - i) Negatively: to address wickedness through judgment
    - (1) Wicked ones—Isa. 13:9; 34:1-8
    - (2) Wickedness—Isa. 24:19-20
  - ii) Positively: to bring about worldwide revival through restoration
    - (1) The means of revival—Rev. 7:1-8
    - (2) The results of revival—Rev. 7:9-17
    - (3) Specifically: to break the stubborn will of ethnic Israel—Dan. 12:5-7; Eze. 20:33-38; Joel 2:18-19; Mal. 4:5-6

**How does the Tribulation proceed? (A probable timeline)**

- 1) Sometime soon after the Catching Away
- 1) The breaking of Antichrist's covenant with Israel—Dan. 9:27
  - a) Half-way through the Tribulation
- 2) The judgments of seals (Rev. 6), trumpets (Rev. 8-9), and bowls (Rev. 16)
- 3) The destruction of the political/financial/religious super-church—Rev. 17-18
- 4) The battle of Armageddon—Rev. 16:16; 19:17-21; Zech. 12:11
  - o This battlefield will stretch from Megiddo to Edom (@ 200 miles N & S) and from the Mediterranean Sea to the hills of Moab (@100 miles E & W).
- 5) The Second Coming of Christ—Rev. 19:11-16
  - a) To the earth on the Mount of Olives—Zech. 14:4
  - b) To judge—Zech. 14:9-21; Matt. 25:31; Rev. 20:4
    - i) The judgment of the nation of Israel—Matt. 24:37-25:46
      - o Approximately 1/3 of the nation of Israel will genuinely trust Jesus as their Messiah—Zech. 13:8-9; Rom. 11:26
    - ii) The judgment of the Gentile nations—Matt. 25:31-46

A more detailed suggested timetable  
*The Greatness of the Kingdom*, Alva J. McClain, pp. 178-205  
Chapter 16, The Establishment of the Prophetic Kingdom

**Introduction:** We need to use our Hebraic system of thought as we go through this section. We use Roman time and that does not work for the development of this section. The Jewish day was and is from sunset to sunset, Lev. 23:32.

- A) **Evening—Preparatory** events before the Day of the Lord (Joel 2:31)
  - This is the first half of the Tribulation
  - 1) Court of judgment set up (Dan. 7:10)
    - a) Judicial

- b) In heaven
  - c) End of “the times of the Gentiles”
  - d) First great preparatory event
  - e) Associate judges (1 Cor. 6:1-3; Rev. 4-5)
- 2) Prophetic messenger heard on earth (Isa. 40:1-11; Mal. 3:1, 4:5)
- a) Work of preparation
  - b) Will be effective (Mal. 4:6)
  - c) Will go out to all men (Isa. 40:6-9)
  - d) Elijah the prophet (Mal. 4:5 cf. Jn. 1:21; Matt. 17:11)
  - e) Before the coming of the Lord
- 3) Chaos will sweep the world (Isa. 33:7)
- a) Under divine fury (Jer. 25:15-17)
  - b) Earth laid waste (Isa. 24:1-13)
  - c) Man’s efforts utterly fail (Isa. 33:17-24)
- 4) Blasphemous political leader arises (Isa. 14:16)
- a) Little horn out of revived Roman Empire (Dan. 7:7, 8)
  - b) Court is in session as he rises to power (Dan. 7:8, 9)
- 5) Great geological and cosmic disturbances (Isa. 24:20)
- a) Earth affected first (Joel 2:30-31)
  - b) Fire and smoke
  - c) Trouble with the starry heavens
  - d) Blood on earth
  - e) All happens before the day of the Lord
  - f) Deliverance is promised if they call (Joel 2:32)
- B) Darkness—Penal events during the Day of the Lord (Zeph. 1:14-15)**
- This will be during the second half of the Tribulation
- 1) Wrath will fall upon the great Northern power (Ezk. 38:21)
- a) Latter days (Ezk. 38:8, 16, 39:22-29)
  - b) Power is named Gog (Ezk. 38:2-3, 6, 15-Russia)
  - c) Will lead others against Israel (Ezk. 38:8-16)
  - d) God will hinder (Ezk. 38:19-22)
  - e) Cannot be Rev. 20:7-10
  - f) First object of God’s wrath appears to be Russia.
- 2) Wrath against Israel (Jer. 30:11)
- a) Time of Jacob’s trouble (Jer. 30:7)
  - b) Against the saints, not the unsaved (Dan. 7:21-25)
- 3) Wrath against all Gentile nations (Isa. 26:21)
- a) Against pride (Isa. 2:12)

- b) Against false religion (Isa. 2:20)
- c) Rebellion (Psa. 2:1-3; Zech. 12:2, 3)

**C) Dawn—Transitional events (Zech. 14:7)**

- This will be during the 75 days after the Tribulation
- 1) Glorious arrival of the King (Isa. 25:9)
- 2) Destruction of hostile armies (Zech. 12:9)
  - a) Human defenders endowed with supernatural power (Zech. 12:6, 8)
  - b) Michael the archangel (Dan. 12:1)
  - c) Supernatural wrath upon the attackers (Zech. 12:4, 14:12, 13)
- 3) Doom of the “Little Horn” (Dan. 11:45)
  - a) Utterly defeated (Dan. 7:26)
  - b) None come to assist (Dan. 11:45)
  - c) Defeat reaches to the dead (Isa. 14:3-8)

**D) Light—Constitutive events (Isa. 60:1, 20; Dan. 12:1-3, 11-13)**

- 1) Resurrection
  - a) Physical—sleep in the dust
  - b) Israelites—thy people
  - c) Selective—many
  - d) After the time of trouble
- 2) Repentance in the land (Zech. 13:9)
  - a) After the judgment upon the nations (Zech. 12:9, 10)
  - b) Work of God
  - c) Genuine
  - d) Throughout the land (Zech. 12:11-12)
  - e) Spiritual cleansing (Zech. 13:1, 2)
  - f) Impacts all the earth (Psa. 67:7)
- 3) Regathering of dispersed Israelites (Jer. 29:14)
  - a) Happens after regeneration
  - b) International in scope
  - c) Great revival (Ezk. 34:10-16)
  - d) Permanent (Amos 9:15)
- 4) Judgment of living Israelites (Ezk. 20:38)
  - a) Follows the regathering
  - b) In the wilderness of the peoples
  - c) Judicial and regal
- 5) Judgment of living Gentile nations (Joel 3:3:1-3)

- a) In that time
- b) Valley of Jehoshaphat, probably valley of Kidron
- c) Indictment is crimes against His chosen people
- d) Persons and governments
- e) Only living Gentile nations at the beginning of the Kingdom

E) Building of Millennial temple (Ezk. 40-48)

F) Leveling of topography (Zech. 14:10; Isa. 26:15)

G) Mass of Gentiles converted (Zeph. 3:9)

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### What is the Christian's relationship to the Tribulation?

- 1) Do not confuse the "Day of the LORD" with the "day of Christ"—1 Cor. 1:8; 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14; Phil. 1:6, 10; 2:16; 2 Thess. 2:2 (?)
- 2) Remember the promise of 1 Thess. 1:9-10; 5:9.

The doctrine of the Anti-Christ (cf. <a href="#">Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity, McCune, vol. 3</a> )
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- 1) Introduction
  - o The meaning and usage of the term "antichrist"
  - a) The Greek word is composed of the preposition *anti* and the noun *christos*. It designates a three-fold significance.
    - i) *Anti* means "against"; so the Antichrist is in opposition to Jesus Christ in every conceivable way—2 Thess. 2:4; Rev. 19:19 (17:14)
    - ii) *Anti* means "instead of"; so the Antichrist has the role of substitution for Jesus Christ—2 Thess. 2:4
    - iii) *Anti* in the sense of "instead of" also connotes the idea of imitation; Antichrist will be a pseudo (false) Christ trying to imitate and duplicate the Lord Jesus Christ at certain points—2 Cor. 11:13-15; 2 Thess. 2:9-11; Rev. 6:2 (the white horse rider)
  - b) The term "Antichrist" is used several ways in the NT
    - i) An eschatological person—1 John 2:18a
    - ii) Many persons with the characteristics of Antichrist—1 John 2:18b
    - iii) One who denies God the Father and God the Son—1 John 2:22
    - iv) A spirit that denies that Jesus is from God—1 John 4:3
    - v) Deceivers who deny that Jesus Christ is coming in the flesh—2 John 1:7
- 2) Biblical names for the Antichrist (some are harder to discern than others ☺)
  - the king of Babylon (Isa. 14:4); the one who brings distress (Isa. 51:13); the little horn (Dan. 7:8); the prince who is to come (Dan. 9:26); the king [who] will do as he pleases (Dan. 11:36); the worthless shepherd (Zech. 11:17); the

man of lawlessness (2 Thess. 2:3); that lawless one (2 Thess. 2:8); the antichrist (1 John 2:18); the beast (Rev. 13:1)

- 3) The personality of the Antichrist
  - a) Dan. 7:8, 24 (cp. 7:19, 23)—he will be different from other men
  - b) Dan. 7:8, 20; Rev. 13:18—he will be highly intelligent
  - c) Dan. 7:20; Rev. 13:2, 5—he will be a great orator
  - d) Dan. 7:24; Rev. 13:7, 17—he will be a great politician
  - e) Dan. 7:20; 2 Thess. 2:4—he will have a strong physical appearance
  - f) Dan. 7:8, 20, 24; Rev. 6:1-2; 13:4—he will possess military genius
  - g) Rev. 13:3-4—he will cause world-wide wonder
  - h) Dan. 11:36-37; 2 Thess. 2:4—entirely self-oriented
  
- 4) The moral character of the Antichrist
  - a) Dan. 11:38—a total materialist
  - b) Dan. 11:36; Rev. 13:1, 5, 6—a blasphemer
  - c) 2 Thess. 2:3, 8—a lawless individual
  - d) Dan. 11:36, 37; 2 Thess. 2:4—a selfish individual
  
- 5) The origin of the Antichrist
  - a) Dan. 11:37; Isa. 14:20; John 5:43—racially a Jew (?)
  - b) Dan. 7:2, 3; Rev. 13:1—politically from restless humanity
  - c) Dan. 7:7-8; 9:26; Rev. 13:1; 17:3, 9-12—nationally part of the revived Roman empire
  - d) Geographically from Western Europe?
  - e) Gen. 3:15; 2 Thess. 2:7; Rev. 11:7; 17:8—spiritually rooted in sin
  - f) Zech. 11:16-17; 2 Thess. 2:11-12; Rev. 6:1-2; 17:17—providentially from God
  
- 6) The career of the Antichrist
  - a) His rise (the beginning of the Tribulation)
    - i) He begins to rise shortly after the Rapture—2 Thess. 2:7-8; Rev. 6:1-2
    - ii) He begins his rise as a minor political figure—Dan. 7:8
    - iii) He makes a seven-year treaty with the Jews—Dan. 9:27
    - iv) He has the backing of a 10-nation confederacy (revived Roman empire) which he eventually controls—Dan. 7:8, 20, 24; Rev. 13:1; 17:12-13
    - v) He defeats the great northern power (Russia) near the middle of the Tribulation—Dan. 11:40-45; Eze. 38-39

(1) His rise takes approximately 3 ½ years. His rule lasts 3 ½ years.
  
  - b) His rule (near the middle of the Tribulation)
    - i) He breaks the treaty with the Jews—Dan. 9:27
    - ii) He kills God's two witnesses—Rev. 11:3-7
    - iii) He destroys the harlot super-church—Rev. 17:15-18



- iv) He stops temple worship and sets himself up for worship—2 Thess. 2:4;  
Rev. 13:14-15 (Dan. 9:27; 12:11; Matt. 24:15)
- v) He launches intense, unprecedented persecution against Israel—Jer. 30:7;  
Joel 2:2; Dan. 7:21-22, 25; 12:1; Matt. 24:15, 21; Rev. 12:13-17
- vi) He reaches the pinnacle of earthly power by controlling the world's:
  - (1) Military—Rev. 13:4
  - (2) Religion—Rev. 13:8, 15
  - (3) Economy—Rev. 13:17-18
  
- c) His end
  - i) His capital is destroyed—Rev. 16:17-21; 18:1-24
  - ii) He launches an attack against God the Father and Christ—Rev. 19:19;  
Psa. 2:1-3
  - iii) He is defeated at Armageddon—2 Thess. 2:8; Isa. 14:4-21; Rev. 19:11-19
  - iv) He is cast alive into the lake of fire—Rev. 19:20; 20:10