

The Tribulation

Matthew 24:15-22

“¹⁵ So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁷ Let no one on the housetop go down to take anything out of the house. ¹⁸ Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. ¹⁹ How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! ²⁰ Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. ²¹ For then there will be great distress (great tribulation), unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. ²² “If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.”

The Last Days

Review

- A. The Olivet Discourse (Discourse on the Last Things) (Matthew 24 and 25)
 - The disciples’ question about the Temple and end of the Age
 - There is an interval between the two events
 - One is a type of the other
- B. General Characteristics of the Last Days (Matthew 24:1-14)
 - Danger of being deceived
 - Danger of defecting (persecution)
 - World Evangelization
- C. The Unseen Realities
 - The 2nd and 4th visions of Revelation
 - Satan opposes God’s plans, the church and Christ’s return
 - God reigns and Christ has taken the scroll and is opening the seals

Revelation

1st Coming

2nd Coming

1. Letters to the 7 Churches (1-3)
2. The Scroll and Seals (4-7)
3. The Trumpets of Warning (8-11)
4. The Dragon, Woman and Child (12-14)
5. The Bowls of Wrath (15-16)
6. The Fall of the Harlot and Beasts (17-19)
7. Satan’s Defeat and the New Jerusalem (20-22)

The Tribulation

I. **General Tribulation** (Throughout the Last days)

“Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other... And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” (Matthew 24:9-10, 14)

“After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands... Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?” I answered, “Sir, you know.” And he said, “These are they who have come out of *the great tribulation*; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” (Revelation 7:9, 13-14)

- “The identity of the great multitude is then communicated: **These are they who come** (‘come’ being a timeless present indicating the totality of those who come from every generation) **out of the great tribulation**, by which is signified not some particular period of tribulation... but the awesome totality of tribulation which from century to century has been the experience of the people of God.” (Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, Commentary on Revelation)
- “This one tribulation is great because it is all-inclusive: all the persecutions and trials of God’s people, symbolized by the seals, are included in it.” (William Hendriksen)

II. **Tribulation** (Associated with the destruction of the Temple A.D. 70)

“¹⁵ So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁷ Let no one on the housetop go down to take anything out of the house. ¹⁸ Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. ¹⁹ How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! ²⁰ Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. ²¹ For then there will be great distress (great tribulation), unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. ²² If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.”

Jesus now answers their question about the destruction of the temple:

A. **The Sign: The Abomination that Causes Desolation** (Daniel 11:31-32)

1. Desecration of the Temple by Antiochus IV Epiphanes 167 B.C.
2. Desecration of the Temple (Jewish Zealots); Roman Legions surround Jerusalem AD 70 (Matthew 24:15; Luke 21:20)
3. Desecration by antichrist during the end times...

“A divine oracle may apply to more than one historical situation: the sacrilege that results in the desolation of the city and temple takes place more than once in history. Let the man who reads Danial’s prophecy understand this! Just as in the past the holy places of the Lord had been desecrated, so it will happen again. And it did indeed take place when the Roman armies with the image of the emperor upon their standards, the emperor worshipped by them, laid siege to Jerusalem. But just as the pagan altar and the swine offered upon it in the very temple of Jehovah in the second century B.C. pointed forward to the idolatrous legions of Rome, so these in turn foreshadowed the great and final violation by the antichrist of all that is sacred. (William Hendriksen, Commentary on Matthew)

B. The Tribulation of 70 AD (The Historian Josephus recorded this history) (21-22)

- The Acts of the Jewish Rebels (Zealots)
- The Roman Siege
- Suffering, Cannibalism, Crucifixion
- 1,100,000 Jews were killed; 97,000 were taken captive

III. The End Time Tribulation (The Return of Christ) (Matthew 24:21-22, 29)

“²¹For then there will be great distress (great tribulation), unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. ²²If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened... ²⁹Immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened...”

- “The reference to *the elect* seems to take us beyond Judaism and again *no one* (all flesh) surely means more than Judaism.” (Leon Morris, Commentary on Matthew)
- “Though the setting of these words has a distinctly Jewish and Judean flavor... the reference to the shortening of the days for the elect’s sake indicate that Jesus is predicting a tribulation so great that it will surpass any similar tribulation which may have preceded it. In other words, Jesus is here looking beyond the tribulation in store for the Jews... to a final tribulation which will occur at the end of this age. For according to verses 29 and 30, Jesus goes on to indicate that this “great tribulation” will immediately precede His Second Coming.” (Anthony Hoekema)
- “¹At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. ²Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.” (Daniel 12:1-2)
- “No nation has ever witnessed distress such as this... The forces of evil will unleash themselves in desperate fury against the saints. This period of severe affliction is the time, times and half a time of Daniel 7:25 (Antichrist). (E.J. Young, Commentary on Daniel)

The Questions

When will this happen?

“⁷Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them and overpower and kill them. ⁸Their bodies will lie in the public square of the great city—which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt—where also their Lord was crucified. ⁹For three and a half days some from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial...” (Revelation 11:7-9)

- “The gospel age is, however, going to come to an end. The Church, as a mighty missionary organization, shall finish its testimony. The beast that comes up out of the abyss, that is, the antichristian world, urged on by hell, shall battle against the Church and shall destroy it... this simply means that in the midst of the world the Church is dead: it no longer exists as an influential and powerful missionary institution! Its leaders have been slaughtered; its voice has been silenced. (William Hendriksen)

What will happen?

“⁷He was given power to wage war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. ⁸All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the Lamb’s book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world. ⁹Whoever has ears, let them hear. ¹⁰“If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity they will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword they will be killed.” This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.” (Revelation 13:7-10)

- The beast compels worship and when the saints refuse to submit they are martyred... the reference is to God’s faithful servants, giving them the assurance that in the suffering of imprisonment or death nothing happens to them that is not under God’s control or contrary to His will... it is in the acceptance of affliction that the endurance and faith of the saints are triumphantly demonstrated.” (Philip Edgcumbe Hughes)

What about the Rapture? (See Matthew 24:21-22, 31; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18; Hebrews 9:28)

- “When the Lord begins to descend, the souls of the redeemed leave their heavenly abodes (1 Thessalonians 4:14) and become united with their respective bodies (raised). The saints still living on earth at the moment of Christ’s return are changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye (1 Corinthians 15:52), and all the saints – those raised and those changed – now go forth to meet the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:17) to be forever with Him.” (William Hendriksen)
- “So the clear impression of Scripture is that there is only one coming, not two; nor are there two stages. There is only one resurrection... There is, then, no “secret” or “preliminary” rapture, and no coming of our Lord at any moment. Certain things must happen first.” (Martyn Lloyd-Jones)
- “For having been a careful, diligent student of the Bible for nearly 50 years, my mind has long been settled at this point and I have not the shadow of a doubt about it. The Scripture declares plainly that the Lord Jesus will not come until the Apostasy shall have taken place, the Man of Sin, the son of perdition shall have been revealed as seen in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5. Many other portions also of the Word distinctly teach that certain events are to be fulfilled before the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (George Muller)

What about the millennium? (See Revelation chapters 19 and 20)

Premillennialism

- Christ returns to judge the world (Revelation 19:11-21)
- Christ sets up His Millennium Reign (Revelation 20:1-5)
- Satan released after the millennium (Revelation 20:7-10)

Amillennialism

- At end of 6th vision (17-19), Christ returns and there is judgement
- The 7th vision then begins (20-22)
- With Christ's ascension, Satan is cast out and bound for a thousand years (20:1-3) (He is kept from deceiving the nations and hindering the gospel)
- Christ and the souls of the redeemed reign in Heaven during the gospel age (20:4-6)
- When the thousand years (church age) are finished, Satan is released (20:7-9)
- After Satan's brief season, Christ returns and Satan is forever defeated (20:9-10)

What about Antichrist's covenant with Israel (7 years)?

(This involves a wrong interpretation of Daniel 9:24-27, especially verse 27)

Dispensationalist View

The 70th week does not follow the 69th week but is postponed. A parentheses or gap in time occurs which is the church age. Verses 26b-27 refer to a time still to come. The Ruler to come who will destroy the temple and then confirm a covenant and put an end to sacrifice will be Antichrist. The 70th week to come (7 year period) will be the tribulation. Antichrist will sign a peace treaty with the Jews (at or about the time of the rapture) and then break the treaty thus initiating the great tribulation. But nothing in the text separates the 69th week from the 70th.

- “So there are two views and I would ask you to consider them carefully and prayerfully. I see in this section of Daniel a most astounding prophecy of what literally took place over five hundred years later. What a foreview of the gospel! ... Daniel is told about Messiah, the everlasting righteousness, the atonement, the reconciliation and all the glory of the Christian salvation. It therefore seems to me to be totally unnecessary to introduce a gap between weeks sixty-nine and seventy. Seventy follows on directly from sixty-nine. These things are in sequence and they happened in the very sequence taught here.”
(Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Church and the Last Things*)

Correct View

After the 69th week, two things are mentioned. The “cutting off” of Messiah and the destruction of the city and sanctuary. After the 70th week, the Roman prince, Titus Vespasian, came in AD 70. He destroyed the city and temple. Messiah put an end to sacrifice and offering. When he died, the veil in the temple was torn signifying we no longer approach God through sacrifices because the one, true sacrifice had been offered. The sacrifices of the Jews continued for 40 more years but were an abomination. The end decreed through Titus was poured out on the temple.

*A new covenant is not made by Antichrist (27). Instead, He (Messiah) “confirms or causes to prevail” one that already exists. The mention of covenant reminds of Adam (Genesis 3:15) and Abraham (Genesis 15). All the promises are confirmed and established by Messiah.