

THE GREAT TRIBULATION

Our English word “tribulation” is a transliteration of the Latin “tribulum.” It is a “picture word” that connotes images of a person beating a rug to remove the dust, or beating wheat with a rod to separate the wheat from the chaff. Both the Latin and English words are a translation of the Greek term “thlipsis.” “Thlipsis” is derived from the word “thlibo,” which means “to crush, press, compress or squeeze.” It is the action used by winemakers as they crush their grapes. That imagery was utilized in John’s prophecy –

“And the angel swung his sickle to the earth, and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God.” (Rev. 14:19)

So, “thlipsis” has come to represent grievous affliction or distress. Christ said that this squeezing, as well as this removing of dust and chaff through chastening, is part of the Christian journey and we should not expect our lives to always be smooth.

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

However, this common trouble is not to be confused with “thlipsis megas,” - “Tribulation the Great.” That is a time of distress unlike any other time and any other trouble. It is the period of Daniel’s 70th week, described in the book of Revelation. Particularly, it is the last 3 ½ years of this present age before Jesus returns to set up His kingdom that shall never be destroyed.

Jeremiah, Daniel, Jesus and the Day of Trouble

When Daniel received his angelic vision of the “70 weeks,” he had been reading from the book of Jeremiah and came to realize that Israel’s 70 years of desolation were about to come to a conclusion. Jeremiah had prophesied a specific time that would run its course, very literally, in the lives of the Jewish nation. And, certainly enough, at the end of the desolation the children of Israel, by the decree of Cyrus and later by Artaxerxes, returned to rebuild the temple, and eventually Jerusalem.

“And those who had escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath until seventy years were complete. Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia-- in order to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah-- the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, ‘Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, ‘The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all His people, may the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up!’” (2 Chron. 36:20-23)

The prophecies of Jeremiah were both accurate and literal - the details and the exact numbers played-out in sequence. Importantly, the ministry of the prophet Jeremiah was specifically to the Jewish nations, and it is in that framework we find the following prophecy -

“The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, Write all the words which I have spoken to you in a book. For, behold, days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will restore the fortunes of My people Israel and Judah.’ The LORD says, ‘I will also bring them back to the land that I gave to their forefathers, and they shall possess it.’ Now these are the words which the LORD spoke concerning Israel and concerning Judah...’” (Jer. 30:1-4)

The dispersed Jews and Israelites will return one day to the land that was promised to their forefathers -

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. But, then the prophecy takes a dark turn.

“For thus says the LORD, ‘I have heard a sound of terror, Of dread, and there is no peace. Ask now, and see, If a male can give birth. Why do I see every man With his hands on his loins, as a woman in childbirth? And why have all faces turned pale?’” (Jer. 30:5-6)

What an odd question. Do men have birth pains and double over, clutching their stomachs? No. Then why does God see every man with his hands on his loins in misery? God foretells a time, part of Israel’s restoration and possession of their land, when all their faces are ashen with pain and grief and there is no peace, only trembling and fear. Why?

“Alas! for that day is great, There is none like it; And it is the time of Jacob’s distress, But he will be saved from it.” (Jer. 30:7)

Jeremiah foresaw a day so terrible that it can truly be said that no other time is like it. The word translated “day” is the Hebrew “*Yom*” and points to a specific moment or event in the plan of time. And, that day of trouble is designated specifically as “Jacob’s trouble.” Jacob was the original name of the progenitor of the 12 tribes, who later had his name changed by an angel of the Lord to Israel - “prince who has power with God” (*Gen. 32:28*). But, the word from God also includes the promise that Jacob will be saved out of it!

So, file that under “important.” There is time of trouble coming for Israel, a time such as no other – a time of trial and pain. But, they will be delivered and ultimately established in the land of promise.

Meanwhile, Daniel foresaw this same day of trouble and offered us further insight as to its timeframe. In the last chapter of his book, after listing the horrors that the “little horn” will undertake, detailing the battles and attacks against Jerusalem, Daniel wrote -

“Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt. ...4a “But as for you, Daniel, conceal these words and seal up the book until the end of time...” (Dan. 12:1-2,4a)

If the language here sounds familiar, it hearkens back to the first chapter of this book. Daniel connects this time of tremendous trouble with the resurrection of the dead. But, even as trouble sweeps over the earth, Michael the archangel, the one who protects Israel, who helped conquer the “kings of Persia,” stands up to protect and defend Israel. These events and this deliverance are ordained of God, and the names of the protected remnant are “written in the book.” And, the events are to be sealed up until “the time of the end.”

So, file this along with the earlier fact: Daniel also predicted a time of trouble, such as never was or would be again, but Daniel’s people – Israel – will be delivered. And both the resurrection of the dead and “the time of the end” are inexorably tied to this terrible time.

Then, in Matthew 24, Jesus’ disciples asked Him what signs would indicate the end of the age and His return. He answered by saying that they were to take heed that they were not deceived by the false Christs who would come and deceive many. They would hear of wars and rumors of wars, nations rising against nations, kingdoms against kingdoms, famines, pestilence and earthquakes in divers places. But, these were merely the “beginnings of sorrows” (*Mark 13:8*).

Now, Jesus chose a specific word when He told them of the coming “sorrows.” It is the Greek “*odin*,” which means, “pains of labor, distress and woe, comparable to the pain women experience in childbirth” - a direct

parallel to Jeremiah's description of "the time of Jacob's trouble."

He went on to say that many would be afflicted and killed, and hated for their testimony of the name of Christ. Men will betray each other, false prophets will arise, iniquity will abound and the love of many will wax cold. But, some will endure to the end and they will be saved. And, the gospel of the kingdom will be preached to the entire world for a witness to all the nations and then the end shall come. It is in that context, as Christ was answering the disciples' question, that we discover the verse we referenced earlier.

"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..." (Mat. 24:15-20)

The references to Daniel's prophecy, Judea and the Sabbath make this an undeniably Jewish instruction. And, where are they to flee? Just "into the mountains"? No, Christ already gave his audience their clue - Daniel's "abomination of desolation" –

"He will also enter the Beautiful Land, and many countries will fall; but these will be rescued out of his hand: Edom, Moab and the foremost of the sons of Ammon." (Dan. 11:41)

The final word ruler will invade Jerusalem to set up his image in the temple and show himself that he is god. But, his armies will providentially miss the ancient territories of Edom, Moab and Ammon, along the eastern shore of the Dead, or Salt, Sea. They are ensconced in a mountain range. Ammon is to the northeast of the sea, Moab is due east, and Edom is southeast. This is the area that God has set aside for the purpose of protecting his remnant from the onslaught of the armies of the "little horn."

But, why the rush? What's the big hurry that would preclude even returning to the house to grab a coat? Why should nursing women be concerned? And, why worry about the weather?

"... for then there will be a great tribulation [thlipsis megas], 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." (Mat.24:21-22)

Jesus predicted the same event foretold by Jeremiah and Daniel, using the same language. Now, as a point of clarification, "the elect's sake" is a reference to Israel, not the Church. Christ had not been to Calvary yet, Pentecost had yet to occur and the Church was not in existence. The only election of which His Jewish disciples were aware was their national election –

"For the sake of Jacob My servant, And Israel My chosen one, I have also called you by your name; I have given you a title of honor Though you have not known Me." (Isa. 45:4)

So, you have a consistent theology handed down from Jeremiah to Daniel to Jesus. There is a time of trouble coming on the Earth, such as never was or will be again. Israel is the focus of the trouble, but they will be delivered out of it. These events were future to Jesus and they remain future to us. Either that or we must uncover some event that occurred between Jesus' ministry and today that adequately fulfills this prophecy.

Now, some folk - those who promote the theory that every prophecy of the Bible has already been fulfilled and the future holds nothing but Christ's eventual return - point to the destruction of Jerusalem and the tearing down of the temple in 70 AD as this cataclysmic event. They find in Titus, the Roman general who led the invasion and destruction, the person they define as the "little horn," thus wrapping up the loose ends and neatly pushing

all prophecy into the past. Granted, that event is the literal completion of Jesus' prophetic warning -

"And Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. And He answered and said to them, 'Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here shall be left upon another, which will not be torn down.'" (Mat. 24:1-2)

But, it is an enormous stretch of even the most fervent imagination to conclude that this limited skirmish in a small middle-eastern city could be defined as "great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." Certainly after the Dark Ages, the Inquisition, the Crusades, two World Wars, and the Holocaust, it's hard to imagine that none of those events superseded Jerusalem in 70 AD in terms of trouble, tribulation or suffering – particularly Jacob's trouble.

And, Titus is most assuredly not the "little horn", since neither "this age" came to its conclusion, nor did Christ return. He was a tool in the hand of Sovereign God to accomplish Christ's word concerning the temple. But, then he was removed from the stage of history and Biblical prophecy. The 29th verse of Matthew 24 ought to be sufficient to convince us -

"But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken, and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory." (Mat. 24:29-30)

Unless these particular events – the sun and moon darkened, stars falling from heaven, all the tribes of the earth mourning as they witness the sign of Christ as He comes in the clouds of Heaven with power and glory - can be historically located and connected with Titus, he is not the man Daniel or Jesus spoke of.

But, we have even more textual/historic evidence that "the day of Jacob's trouble" is still a future event - primarily, the evidence of **Revelation 2:22**. The great weight of Bible scholarship agrees that the Apostle John wrote his "apokolupsis" – the removing of the veil, the uncovering - during the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian. John was imprisoned on the island of Patmos in the fifteenth year of Domitian, according to Eusebius.

Quite a few scholars date the book about A.D. 68 or 69 (Westcott, Lightfoot, Hort, and Salmon). The reasons for this, however, are not convincing. The best date seems to be A.D. 95 or 96 (cf. Swete, Milligan, Moffatt, and Zahn). This date accords with evidence from Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Eusebius to the effect that the banishment to Patmos was in the later reign of Domitian, A.D. 81-96. This view is in agreement with the fact that the Domitian persecution, unlike the Neronic, was the result of the Christians' refusal to worship the emperor.?

Now, John's first vision was of Christ, who dictated letters to the seven churches of Asia, over which John was Presbyter. In His pronouncements to the church at Thyatira, Jesus said, speaking of the followers of Jezebel –

"Behold, I will cast her upon a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds." (Rev. 2:22)

So, as we follow the flow of prophetic revelation, we find Jeremiah predicting a time of "Jacob's trouble," a day of trouble so great that there is none like it. Then, Daniel picked up Jeremiah's vision and wrote of a time of trouble, such as never was since Israel was a nation, even to that same time. Jesus, then, spoke of this same event, great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And lastly, Jesus spoke to John on Patmos in the early 90's AD and thrust that event even further out into the future.

So, if Jesus spoke of a future tribulation twenty years after the fall of Jerusalem, we cannot claim that event as the fulfillment of the prophecy.

The tribulation was future to Jesus, future to John, and future to the whole of Scripture. Descriptions of this time of trouble pervade the text of Biblical prophecy. There has yet to be such a cataclysmic time on Earth.

The Day of the Lord

This period of trouble is made doubly worse by the fact that not only does the “little horn” inflict persecution on Israel and the surrounding kingdoms, but as he lifts himself up to the position of deity, God intervenes and begins pouring out His wrath on the inhabitants of the earth for their rejection of His Son and their proclivity for sin. That period when God begins the work of punishing sin is called “The Day of the Lord.” It is a time truly unlike any time that has gone before -

“And you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD to the land of Israel, ‘An end! The end is coming on the four corners of the land. Now the end is upon you, and I shall send My anger against you; I shall judge you according to your ways, and I shall bring all your abominations upon you. For My eye will have no pity on you, nor shall I spare you, but I shall bring your ways upon you, and your abominations will be among you; then you will know that I am the LORD!’ Thus says the Lord GOD, ‘A disaster, unique disaster, behold it is coming! An end is coming; the end has come! It has awakened against you; behold, it has come! Your doom has come to you, O inhabitant of the land. The time has come, the day is near-- tumult rather than joyful shouting on the mountains. Now I will shortly pour out My wrath on you, and spend My anger against you, judge you according to your ways, and bring on you all your abominations. And My eye will show no pity, nor will I spare. I will repay you according to your ways, while your abominations are in your midst; then you will know that I, the LORD, do the smiting. Behold, the day! Behold, it is coming! Your doom has gone forth; the rod has budded, arrogance has blossomed. Violence has grown into a rod of wickedness. None of them shall remain, none of their multitude, none of their wealth, nor anything eminent among them. The time has come, the day has arrived. Let not the buyer rejoice nor the seller mourn; for wrath is against all their multitude. Indeed, the seller will not regain what he sold as long as they both live; for the vision regarding all their multitude will not be averted, nor will any of them maintain his life by his iniquity. They have blown the trumpet and made everything ready, but no one is going to the battle; for My wrath is against all their multitude. The sword is outside, and the plague and the famine are within. He who is in the field will die by the sword; famine and the plague will also consume those in the city. Even when their survivors escape, they will be on the mountains like doves of the valleys, all of them mourning, each over his own iniquity. All hands will hang limp, and all knees will become like water. And they will gird themselves with sackcloth, and shuddering will overwhelm them; and shame will be on all faces, and baldness on all their heads. They shall fling their silver into the streets, and their gold shall become an abhorrent thing; their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the LORD. They cannot satisfy their appetite, nor can they fill their stomachs, for their iniquity has become an occasion of stumbling.’” (Ezek.7:2-19)

That terrifying description of God’s anger and unrestrained punishment is just the beginning. These concepts of righteous, Heavenly judgment, complete destruction and earthly lamenting run throughout Scripture. And, they are most always connected to The Day of the Lord. Read on -

“Gird yourselves with sackcloth, And lament, O priests; Wail, O ministers of the altar! Come, spend the night in sackcloth, O ministers of my God, For the grain offering and the libation Are withheld from the house of your God. Consecrate a fast, Proclaim a solemn assembly; Gather the elders And all the inhabitants of the land To the house of the LORD your God, And cry out to the LORD. Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, And it will come as destruction from the Almighty.” (Joel 1:13-15)

“Blow a trumpet in Zion, And sound an alarm on My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, For the day of the LORD is coming; Surely it is near, A day of darkness and gloom, A day of clouds and thick darkness. As the dawn is spread over the mountains, So there is a great and mighty people; There has never been anything like it, Nor will there be again after it To the years of many generations.” (Joel 2:1-2)

“They run like mighty men; They climb the wall like soldiers; And they each march in line, Nor do they deviate from their paths. They do not crowd each other; They march everyone in his path. When they burst through the defenses, They do not

break ranks. They rush on the city, They run on the wall; They climb into the houses, They enter through the windows like a thief. Before them the earth quakes, The heavens tremble, The sun and the moon grow dark, And the stars lose their brightness. And the LORD utters His voice before His army; Surely His camp is very great, For strong is he who carries out His word. The day of the LORD is indeed great and very awesome, And who can endure it?" (Joel 2:7-11)

"Therefore, thus says the LORD God of hosts, the Lord, "There is wailing in all the plazas, And in all the streets they say, 'Alas! Alas!' They also call the farmer to mourning And professional mourners to lamentation. 'And in all the vineyards there is wailing, Because I shall pass through the midst of you,' says the LORD. Alas, you who are longing for the day of the LORD, For what purpose will the day of the LORD be to you? It will be darkness and not light; As when a man flees from a lion, And a bear meets him, Or goes home, leans his hand against the wall, And a snake bites him. Will not the day of the LORD be darkness instead of light, Even gloom with no brightness in it?" (Amos 5:16-20)

"Near is the great day of the LORD, Near and coming very quickly; Listen, the day of the LORD! In it the warrior cries out bitterly. A day of wrath is that day, A day of trouble and distress, A day of destruction and desolation, A day of darkness and gloom, A day of clouds and thick darkness, A day of trumpet and battle cry, Against the fortified cities And the high corner towers. And I will bring distress on men, So that they will walk like the blind, Because they have sinned against the LORD; And their blood will be poured out like dust, And their flesh like dung. Neither their silver nor their gold Will be able to deliver them On the day of the LORD'S wrath; And all the earth will be devoured In the fire of His jealousy, For He will make a complete end, Indeed a terrifying one, Of all the inhabitants of the earth." (Zeph. 1:14-18)

There are also references to that day in Zechariah and Malachai. They convey a similar message. The Day of the Lord is the day when God unleashes His anger and His wrath on this planet. He starts with Israel for their hard-hearted refusal to follow Him, but His punishment finally encompasses all the inhabitants of this world for their mistreatment of His chosen and their unending perniciousness. It is a time of darkness, distress, fear and anguish. It is a time of torment at the hand of God. It is a time of judgment and punishment. The New Testament picks up this theme -

"AND I WILL GRANT WONDERS IN THE SKY ABOVE, AND SIGNS ON THE EARTH BENEATH, BLOOD, AND FIRE, AND VAPOR OF SMOKE. THE SUN SHALL BE TURNED INTO DARKNESS, AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD, BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD SHALL COME." (Acts 2:19-20, quoting Joel 2:30)

John also saw this specific moment in his vision, but he added one critical element to the mix. John not only saw the men of earth running to hide from the wrath of God, but also -

"And I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. And the sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come; and who is able to stand?'" (Rev. 6:12-17)

Jesus, the Lamb, takes part in this vengeful wrath. Take note of how complete the list of terrorized people is - kings, great men, rich men, chief captains, mighty men, every servant, every free man. That's a very extensive list and it is most certainly John's intention to convey the idea that no one is left out. Absolutely everyone living on Earth at this juncture in time falls under the wrath not only of God, but also of Christ, Himself.

"Be on guard, that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day come on you suddenly like a trap; for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. But keep on the alert at all times, praying in order that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man." (Luke 21:34-36)

The day of the Lord descends on every inhabitant of Earth. There is no church hiding somewhere, or no

“Christian Nation” which escapes these horrific events. There are no individuals with solar-paneled homes, private gardens, their own milk cows and water wells who will “ride out” this period of unrestrained terror. The only people who are safe during this wrath are the people who no longer populate the earth.

Now, as a side note, please recognize how often the Biblical prophets and authors referred to this event. It is primary to the whole of Scripture. Yet, it is often ignored or underplayed. Whole denominations and movements have risen around single, once-said phrases, such as “ye must be born again.” And, I’m not knocking that emphasis. However, the teaching of “The Day of the Lord” absolutely permeates the bulk of the Bible and very few folk seem to understand it.

A Thief in the Night

You would think that with all this warning, given all the signs Jesus catalogued and the multiple appearances of this theme in Scripture, men and women would see this horrible time coming and avoid it at all costs. But not so. “The cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches” (*Mark 4:19*) are tough taskmasters. And, virtually no one dwelling on Earth sees it approaching.

“For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so shall the coming of the Son of Man be.” (Mat. 24:37-39)

“It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building; but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed.” (Luke 17:28-30)

Life goes on. People continue doing what they have always done, ignoring God’s word and every witness against them. Noah was 120 years in building the ark in the middle of a desert. His neighbors and all the people who heard of this tremendous oddity were without excuse when the rain started falling. They had Noah’s evidence and witness of the judgment to come. Nevertheless, as they ate and drank, took wives and husbands and carried with “life as usual,” the first raindrops began to fall. As God safely closed Noah into the ark, the judgment of God fell on everyone else.

Likewise, Abraham’s nephew, Lot, was the only just man in Sodom. As Lot and his little family were being escorted from the city by an angel, the residents were eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting, building - looking toward the future. But, the flaming hail destroyed them all. Christ said that His return would have the same element of surprise to those who had not received the witness and the warning. And, He likened that element of surprise to a thief coming in the night -

“Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. For this reason you be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.” (Mat. 24:42-44)

That’s fair warning. Any homeowner, if he knew a robber was coming and knew what time he would arrive, would wait up to thwart the robbery. Likewise, Christ warns men to watch and be ready, because while they are busy getting on with their lives He will suddenly appear in power and in judgment.

“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.” (2 Pet. 3:10)

The conclusion of this time of horror sees the skies and heavens disintegrating and the elements that make up

the physical earth burning and melting in the final cataclysm. But, the inception of these events appears as if out of nowhere. In His warning to the church at Sardis, Christ admonished -

“Remember therefore what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. If therefore you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you.” (Rev. 3:3)

(“Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his garments, lest he walk about naked and men see his shame.”) (Rev. 16:15)

This warning comes on the heels of Christ’s description of the gathering to the final conflict. He advised watching the events leading up to this point and that the recipients of this warning keep their garments with them at all times, since they will be fleeing with haste to the mountains and are not to go back to get anything. Again, the options are: either watch and be ready to flee to the wilderness, or be destroyed.

“On that day, let not the one who is on the housetop and whose goods are in the house go down to take them away; and likewise let not the one who is in the field turn back. Remember Lot's wife.” (Luke 17:31-32)

Lot’s wife was running from Sodom and she paused, turned and looked back at the city as the judgment began to fall. She was instantly turned into “a pillar of salt” (*Gen. 19:25*). When the wrath of God begins and the forewarned begin to flee, it’s an all or nothing at all proposition. Run away and trust God for absolutely everything, or hesitate and fall under the judgment.

[A quick point of clarification: I have frequently heard preachers attach the phrase “like a thief in the night” to the “rapture.” However, as you will clearly notice, there is no such connection in Scripture. The rapture is not the event that appears “like a thief in the night.” The cataclysmic judgment accompanies that phrase. And, as the next chapter will clarify, the “thief in the night” concept never applies to the Church.]

Armageddon

“And the sixth angel poured out his bowl upon the great river, the Euphrates; and its water was dried up, that the way might be prepared for the kings from the east. And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs; for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.”
Vs 16 “And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon.” (Rev. 16:12-14,16)

The Day of the Lord, the time of the Great Tribulation, comes to its culmination as the unholy trio sends out demonic messengers to gather the armies of Earth to do battle against God and His Christ. They have always rebelled against Him. They will not bow in submission to His Lordship and they reject the notion that this Jesus will rule over them. But, this is the time appointed and the Great God will avenge Himself.

“Why are the nations in an uproar, And the peoples devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand, And the rulers take counsel together Against the LORD and against His Anointed: Let us tear their fetters apart, And cast away their cords from us! He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them. Then He will speak to them in His anger And terrify them in His fury: But as for Me, I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain. I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, ‘Thou art My Son, Today I have begotten Thee. Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Thine inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as Thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron, Thou shalt shatter them like earthenware.’ Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; Take warning, O judges of the earth. Worship the LORD with reverence, And rejoice with trembling. Do homage to the Son, lest He become angry, and you perish in the way, For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!” (Psalm 2)

This psalm is frequently attached to Christ’s passion and crucifixion, but it is much more obviously an end-time prophecy. It spells out the same events we have been studying. The “kings of the earth” are gathered to do battle

with God and his Son. But, God is not at all concerned with their pitiful attempts at throwing off his dominion. As Nebuchadnezzar came to realize –

“And all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, ‘What hast Thou done?’” (Dan. 4:35)

In fact, God laughs at them. And, He declares that His Son will have the everlasting authority, which He will establish by breaking them “with a rod of iron” and dashing them to pieces.

But, this is not merely a human battle for fleshly gain. The spiritual battle for dominion began before the first man was created. And, this rebellion against the God of Heaven will culminate at the battle of Armageddon when Satan sends demonic messengers to gather the armies of Earth to do battle against the Lamb.

Two in a Field

“Then there shall be two men in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.” (Mat. 24:40-42)

Interpreters who are overly anxious to make Jesus comment on the rapture often point to this verse. However, Mat. 24:40-42 is not a rapture passage. The Church was not even in existence when Christ was responding to his disciples’ question. His audience at this moment was Jewish. Fortunately, the parallel passage in Luke gives us greater insight into Christ’s true intention –

“‘I tell you, on that night there will be two men in one bed; one will be taken, and the other will be left. There will be two women grinding at the same place; one will be taken, and the other will be left. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other will be left.’ And answering they said to Him, ‘Where, Lord?’ And He said to them, ‘Where the body is, there also will the vultures be gathered.’” (Luke 17:34-37)

What bodies? What eagles? Where are they gathering?

“And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, ‘Come, assemble for the great supper of God; in order that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great. And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies, assembled to make war against Him who sat upon the horse, and against His army. And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone.’” (Rev. 19:17-20)

The demonic messengers like frogs will gather together the rebels of Earth to one final conflagration. But, what they intend as the final destruction of God’s authority, God intends as a feast for the fowls of the air. Kings, captains, mighty men, horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, free and bond, small and great are listed in this destruction –

“And the angel swung his sickle to the earth, and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God. And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses’ bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles.” (Rev. 14:19, 20)

The blood will flow up to the very bridles of the horses, covering an area of roughly 200 miles (a furlong is about 1/8th of a mile).

“Behold, a day is coming for the LORD when the spoil taken from you will be divided among you. For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished, and half of the

city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south. And you will flee by the valley of My mountains, for the valley of the mountains will reach to Azel; yes, you will flee just as you fled before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD, my God, will come, and all the holy ones with Him! And it will come about in that day that there will be no light; the luminaries will dwindle. For it will be a unique day which is known to the LORD, neither day nor night, but it will come about that at evening time there will be light. And it will come about in that day that living waters will flow out of Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and the other half toward the western sea; it will be in summer as well as in winter. And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one." (**Zech 14:1-9**)

And, what is the final outcome?

*"And I saw heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He judges and wages war. And His eyes are a flame of fire, and upon His head are many diadems; and He has a name written upon Him which no one knows except Himself. And He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood; and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. And from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may smite the nations; and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." vs 20-21....And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat upon the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh." (**Rev. 19:11-16, 20, 21**)*

Christ is the conqueror! Christ is the victor! And, none - absolutely none! - escape the wrath of the Lamb. And, just who is contained in this army of His? Who are these riding white horses behind Him, wearing "fine linen, white and clean"? Where did they come from? They are more than just His army - they are His bride!

*"And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude and as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. And he said[^] to me, Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.' And he said to me, 'These are true words of God.' And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said to me, 'Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.'" (**Rev. 19:6-10**)*

Now, the observant student will notice that these events exactly precede the events we referenced above (**Rev. 19:11** and following). The "Marriage Supper of the Lamb" in which Christ takes His bride to Himself and clothes her in fine, white linen occurs before Jesus comes back to unleash His wrath and pour out His judgment. The newly adorned saints accompany Him as He returns for that task! This is consistent with what Jesus taught in **Mat. 24:30-31**-

*"And cast out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne." (**vs. 30-31**)*

*"And about these also Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him." (**Jude 14-15**)*

The bride, the blessed elect who were called to the Marriage Supper, are gathered from the wind and from the

sky - not from earth. They have been eternally joined to the Heavenly Bridegroom. And, they return to Earth with Him! Who are they?

They are the Church!

“For I am jealous over you with Godly jealousy; for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” (2 Cor.11:2)

What We Know So Far

Jeremiah, Daniel and Jesus spoke of time of trouble on Earth such as never was, nor ever will be again. Jeremiah called it the time of “Jacob’s trouble.” Daniel was told that it would involve his people, Israel. And, Jesus told His Jewish disciples to watch the temple and flee Jerusalem. So, undoubtedly the focus of the Great Tribulation is national Israel, though Jesus said the trouble would encompass everyone living on Earth at His return.

- The Great Tribulation is also called the Day of the Lord.
- The Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night, unexpectedly.
- The rapture, or catching away of the Church, is never described as appearing “like a thief in the night.” That phraseology applies only to the Day of the Lord.
- Likewise, the events foretold in Matthew 24 and Luke 17 are not connected with the catching away. They foretell the gathering of the earthly armies to the war at Armageddon.
- When Christ returns at the conclusion of Daniel’s 70th Week, He will be accompanied by His saints, who have received white robes during the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.
- Christ returns in order to mete out justice and punishment on every inhabitant left on Earth.