

# THE GREAT TRIBULATION

The Great Tribulation gets its name from the great time of distress, such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then (Dan 12:1) or as Jesus expressed it, “There will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now – and never to be equaled again (Matt 24:21). Daniel said, “As I watched, this horn was waging war against the holy people and defeating them” (Dan 7:21). John said, “The beast (Antichrist) was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise its authority for 42 months, It opened its mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and dwelling place and those who live in heaven. It was given power to wage war against God’s holy people and to conquer them. It was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation” (Rev 13:5-7).

An angel told Daniel:

“The holy people will be delivered into his hands for a time, times and half a time” (Dan 7:25b). “It will be for a time, times, and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed” (Dan 12:7).

The holy people are the saints, the people of God in the last days before Jesus returns, in other words, the last generation of Christians. They are to be delivered into the hands of ‘a little horn,’ Daniel’s expression for the Antichrist. In the visions that the apostle John saw about the last times in the book of Revelation, Daniel’s half-week is expressed in three ways.

1. a time, times, and half a time (Rev 12:14)
2. 42 months (Rev 11:2, 13:5)
3. 1260 days (Rev 11:3, 12:6).

These times connect Daniel’s visions to John’s visions which refer to the final week of this age called the Great Tribulation. The suffering and martyrdom of the Church in the last days is expressed in the following verses (Rev 6:9-11, 7:9-17, 12:10-11, 16, 13:7-10, 15, 14:13, 17:6a).

In a vision, the apostle John saw a great multitude of people that no one could number standing in heaven. They came from every tribe nation and language. John was told that they were coming out of the Great Tribulation (Rev 7:14). They are Christian martyrs that John had previously seen in heaven, slain because they bore witness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ (Rev 1:2, 6:9). This Great Tribulation culminates in the Day of the Lord which begins with the second coming of Christ.

This period will be a horrific time of death and destruction. Daniel said the end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed (Daniel 9:26b). Jesus said that when people see the Abomination that causes Desolation spoken of by Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those in Judea should flee (Matthew 24:15). That presumes that there will be a Jewish temple in Jerusalem as Paul predicted:

“Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day (Jesus’ return and Christians being gathered to him by resurrection and rapture) will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will

oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God (2 Thess 2:3-4).

Daniel, Jesus, and Paul all confirm that there will be a temple in Jerusalem, the building of which will be a sign that Jesus' return is imminent. Paul's words confirm a post-tribulation rapture because he says the rapture will not occur until after the Antichrist is revealed.

In summary, the following events will occur during the final 3 ½ years:

1. There will be war in heaven. Satan and his demons will be thrown down to earth, and he will be filled with fury because he knows that his time is short (Rev 12:7-12).
2. The nations under the Antichrist will trample Jerusalem for 42 months (Rev 11:2, 13:5).
3. Empowered by Satan, Antichrist will slander God and set himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God (2 Thess 2:4). Ezekiel and Malachi also predict a temple in Jerusalem when the Messiah returns (Ezek 43:4-7, Mal 3:1).
4. Satan, through Antichrist and his False Prophet, will first try to destroy Israel, but just as God bore Israel on eagles' wings and brought them from Egypt to the wilderness of Sinai (Hos 2:14), so he will save them again and protect them for 42 months in the wilderness (Rev 12:13-14).
5. As the Antichrist has authority over every tribe and nation, he will then demand worship for 42 months, killing those who refuse (Rev 12:17, 13:5-8). The 'saints' mentioned here are those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life, those who hold to the testimony of Jesus. They have not been raptured and many will be martyred.
6. The False Prophet will deceive people of all nations with miracles, enforcing the worship of the Antichrist and requiring everyone to receive his mark, without which no one can buy or sell anything (Rev 13:11-17).
7. In paradise, victorious Christian martyrs await the Messiah's victory (Rev 6:9-11, 7:9-14, 14:1-5, 15:2-4). They are told to wait until the full number of their fellow servants are killed.
8. Two anointed witnesses (Zech 4:2-6, 11-14, Rev 11:3-6) preach in Jerusalem for 42 months.
9. When these Jewish Christian prophets finish their testimony, the Antichrist attacks them and kills them, and the unbelievers rejoice. When God brings them back to life, the Israeli remnant gives glory to God (Rev 11:7-13).
10. Unbelievers are tormented for five months by the effects of nuclear, biological, and chemical warfare or crowd-control measures (Rev 9:1-11). They long to die. This plague of "locusts" comes out of the smoke of a gigantic furnace and only affects those who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads (Rev 9:4). Christians are still in the world but are protected.

Nobody can predict the *day* of the Messiah's return because Jesus said that nobody knows the day. However, by comparing the teachings of this future time from the OT prophets, Jesus' teaching (Matt 24), Paul's teaching (2 Thess 2), and John's visions in the book of Revelation, the Bible does tell us of many events that can be dated in relation to Jesus' coming. For example, the Great Tribulation is a 3 1/2-year period that precedes Jesus' coming and the Millennium is a 1000-year period that follows it. Unbelievers will be surprised by Jesus' coming, but believers should not be. They are not in darkness that his coming should surprise

them like a thief (1 Thess 5:4). They will certainly have a better idea of the *year* of his return as the event draws closer.

**Caveat** – the following chronology is a suggestion only. We have been given many details about future end-of-age events and they are scattered throughout the Bible. Daniel was instructed to shut up the words of prophecy and seal the book until the time of the end, to keep them safe for the future generation for whom they would be relevant (Daniel 12:4). Then, in the Book of Revelation, an angel told John that he should not seal up the prophetic words of his book, because the time is near. Past generations have found it difficult to discern how the future will pan out, but as we draw closer to the time of Jesus' return, world events and Bible prophecies will coalesce. This is an effort to put the various end-of-age events in chronological order. The events and order in which they will occur are still not entirely clear. The sequence of events given here is a possible scenario of what we are to expect as we keep alert and watch and wait for that day.

The final seven years will see Israel take a prominent place on the world stage. Despite its small size, nuclear-powered Israel is numbered among the ten most powerful nations in the world. Dan 9:27 suggests that the Antichrist will make a covenant with Israel for seven years and allow their temple to be rebuilt, but in the middle of the week, he will break the treaty, set up an idol of himself in the temple, and demand worship from everyone in the world. That time will be more distressful than any the world has previously known. It will be a terrible time for Christians and for Israel, but the Messiah will return to rescue them from it (Jer 30:7).

#### ❖ **The two witnesses**

Two anointed Christian witnesses will preach in Jerusalem during the final 3 ½ years. Dressed in sackcloth symbolizing repentance, they resemble Joshua (high priest) and Zerubbabel (governor) who supervised the building of the second temple (Zech 4). God will protect them and give them the power to withhold rain, turn water into blood, and bring pandemics until they have finished their testimony. The Antichrist kills them and unbelievers from every tribe and nation gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial for 3 ½ days. Then they will come to life and ascend to heaven in a cloud. An earthquake causes a tenth of Jerusalem to collapse and the survivors give glory to God.

#### ❖ **The nations oppose God**

Psalm 2, a Messianic Psalm, long ago prophesied that the nations would plot in vain as their kings rise in rebellion against the Lord and his Anointed saying: Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles (Ps 2:1-3). The nations will surround Jerusalem and Israel (Ezek 38:1-9, 14-16, 39:1-2, Zech 12:2-3), and the final battle will center on a place called Armageddon (Rev 16:16, 19:19) to Jerusalem's North. God will strengthen Israel and give them victory (Zech 12:5-6) but not before two-thirds of Israel perish (Zech 13:8).

#### ❖ **Persecution of the Church**

The Antichrist blasphemes God and everything that belongs to him. He is given authority over every tribe, people, language, and nation, and all the inhabitants of the Earth worship him. God

allows him to make war on the saints for 3 ½ years and conquer them (Dan 7:21, 25, Matt 24:15-16, Rev 13:7-8). Their martyrdom is their victory. As a result, they are granted the sovereignty, power, and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven (Dan 7:27).

#### ❖ **Unparalleled distress**

Nations are in anguish and perplexity at the ‘roaring and tossing of the sea,’ an idiom for major warfare. The distress experienced is unequalled from the beginning of the world until that time. If God doesn’t cut short those days of warfare, no one would survive (Dan 12:1, Matt 24:21,29, Luke 21:25-26). It is nuclear warfare that will destroy much of the Earth. For this reason, God judges and destroys those who destroy the Earth (Rev 11:18).

#### ❖ **The Antichrist in the last days**

The Antichrist’s activity during this time is described in Dan 11:36-45. He will do as he pleases. and magnify himself above every god, speaking amazing things against God. He will succeed until the indignation is completed because what has been determined (by God) must be carried out. The Antichrist will *spend lavishly on military power* to support his position and *act against any opposition* with the help of a foreign god, who may be Satan (Rev 13:2b).

Then comes the time of the end (Dan 10:14, 11:35, 40), the battle of Armageddon (Rev 14-16). In Daniel’s prophecy, the king of the North has now transitioned from Antiochus Epiphanes to the Antichrist. Egypt is now a Muslim nation and the setting up of the Abomination that causes Desolation is the catalyst that begins World War 111, a nuclear war with intercontinental ballistic missiles. Egypt begins the rebellion by engaging the Antichrist in battle at Jerusalem to remove his idol from their sacred site. The Antichrist will storm out against the Muslim nations with tanks and armies and many ships. He will invade many countries, moving swiftly through them until he enters Israel, consolidating his power over many countries, including Egypt. Then, reports from the East (Iran) and the North (Gog), will alarm him, and he’ll go forth in great anger, intending to destroy many. However, when he pitches his royal pavilions near Jerusalem, he comes to his end with nobody to help. This is the end of the Antichrist (Rev 19:19-21). God remembers his worldwide empire, Babylon, with the full force of his fury and the cities of the nations collapse (Rev 16:19).

#### ❖ **Armageddon - a suggested scenario**

Antichrist’s empire is a coalition of nations that does not remain united (Dan 2:43). The first five bowls of wrath are directed toward unbelievers with the mark of the beast who worship his image. Ugly festering sores break out on them, and Antichrist’s kingdom is thrown into darkness. People gnaw their tongues in agony and curse God because of their pains but they refuse to repent (Rev 16:10-11). Judgment day approaches. At least four coalitions of forces are involved in the battle against Israel at Armageddon:

At a precise moment determined by God, four destroying angels are unleashed to lead a 200-million-strong army (Ezek 38-39) from beyond the Euphrates to fight at Jerusalem and kill a third of mankind. Demonic spirits, coming from Satan, the Antichrist, and the False Prophet, perform signs and involve the kings of the whole world in the battle of the great day of God Almighty (Rev 9:15, 16:14). This great world war will have its armies, navies, and airforces, but much of the warfare will be carried out long-range by intercontinental ballistic missiles,

The nations will set out in a great rage to destroy each other and gain the ascendancy, and Gog and the many nations with him will come to an end in Israel (Dan 11:44-45, Rev 9:13-19, 16:12). If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened (Matt 24:22).