

GOD'S PROPHECIES

FOR

PLAIN PEOPLE

by William L. Pettingill

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Chapter Eight -

Why Only One Great Tribulation?

Tribulation is the appointed portion of GOD's people in every age. Our LORD says, "**In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world**" (John 16:33).

And oftentimes the tribulation through which GOD's people must pass is very great. Paul went everywhere, in his missionary journeys, "**confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God**" (Acts 14:22).

The benefit of tribulation for the people of GOD is often insisted upon in the Scriptures. For example, it is written in Romans 5:3, "**we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience.**"

In II Corinthians 1:3, 4, Paul showed that his own tribulations, and the comfort he received from GOD in connection with them, were for the purpose of fitting him for a ministry of comfort to others. And again, in the same letter, he writes:

"Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my glorying of you: I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation" (II Corinthians 7:4).

Upon learning, through Timothy, of the sufferings through which the Christians of Thessalonica were passing, he wrote:

"That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know" (I Thessalonians 3:3, 4).

The Tribulation that is Different

From Patmos, John the Revelator, writing to the seven churches of Asia, signs himself as "**your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the Kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ**"

(Revelation 1:9). And to the church in Smyrna the same writer says:

"I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Revelation 2:9, 10).

All this is true, and yet all this has no reference whatever to what is called in the Bible "**The Great Tribulation**." This is yet future, such a time of suffering as this poor old Earth has never seen in all its history, and such - thank GOD! - AS IT WILL NEVER SEE AGAIN. What saith the Scripture?

In the Second Psalm the HOLY SPIRIT points to a time when the voice of GOD shall be heard in judgment against His enemies, who have taken counsel together against the LORD and against His Anointed (MESSIAH-CHRIST), saying, "**Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.**" It is a Declaration of Independence against the GOD of Heaven. Then we read:

"He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure" (Psalm 2:4, 5).

The burden of His message, when He shall speak in wrath, is seen in the next verse, the 6th:

"Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion" (verse 5).

This is what the LORD's enemies would hinder, and precisely this is what the LORD proposes to do, when the fulness of time shall come.

What an awful thing to contemplate! Think of the GOD of all grace, the "**very God of peace**," speaking to the world in His wrath! So long has He spoken in grace, and drawn men by the cords of love, that to speak in wrath will be indeed His strange work.

The church of CHRIST will not be subjected to that dreadful visitation of GOD's wrath, for she has put her trust in the Son of GOD, "**whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come**" (I Thessalonians 1:9, 10).

"For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him" (I Thessalonians 5:9, 10).

Those who teach that the church must pass through the Great Tribulation are forgetting that in the person of her Substitute she has already endured the wrath of GOD, having been in CHRIST on the Cross when all the waves and billows passed over Him (Psalm 42:7). It is unthinkable that the Church, now reconciled to GOD and the bride of CHRIST, should again be subjected to the horrors of "**the wrath to come.**" Indeed, the promise is written large, in the message to the church in Philadelphia:

"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).

Of course, it must be understood that by "the church" here is mean "the church which is His body," the born-again ones. No one else is included in the true church, the real church of CHRIST.

In the thirtieth chapter of Jeremiah we may find a key passage touching our subject, showing that, although the sufferings of the Great Tribulation will involve the whole Earth (and this will be shown later in this article), yet the Jews will be the chief sufferers in that awful time. Observe also that the Great Tribulation has some connection with the return of Israel to the Holy Land, of which we studied in our last article:

"The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, Thus speaketh the Lord God of Israel, saying, Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book. For, lo, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the Lord: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it. And these are the words that the Lord spake concerning Israel and concerning Judah. For thus saith the Lord; We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child? wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness? 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 30:1-7).

The Time Without A Precedent

The language here, **"that day is great, so that none is like it,"** finds almost exact counterpart in Daniel 12:1:

"And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and 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 shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book."

Also, in our LORD's words, in the Olivet Discourse:

"When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains . . . For 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 should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened" (Matthew 24:15-22)

"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" (Mark 13:19).

By far the most important passage in connection with the Great Tribulation is in the seventh chapter of the Revelation. In the opening verses of the chapter we see the sealed remnant out of Israel, numbering 12,000 in each tribe, or 144,000 in all. Then beginning at verse 9, John writes:

"After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. . . . And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest" (Revelation 7:9-14).

The rest of verse 14 says: **"And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. 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."**

The Greek in verse 14, is very emphatic. Literally, it reads: **"These are they that come out of the Tribulation, the Great One."** Such an expression is not to be found elsewhere in the Bible.

Thus bringing together our material, we may now draw our conclusions with reference to the Great Tribulation. The details of that terrible period are found in chapters 6 to 18 of the Revelation. Some of its features have already come before us in this series of studies, and will come before us again as we go on.

The Storm Center

The Great Tribulation will be a time of unprecedented and unparalleled suffering, covering the whole Earth, but centering in Jerusalem and upon the land and people of Israel. It will occupy the latter half of Daniel's Seventieth Week, lasting three and a half years. Its immediate occasion will be the violation of the covenant between the Beast King and the people of Israel, and the substitution of man-worship for the worship of GOD in the temple at Jerusalem as well as over the whole Earth. The terrible seal, and trumpet, and vial or bowl judgments will be poured upon the Earth during this period. The cruelties of the reign of the Beast have already been seen in a former study. In that day men must choose between the seal of GOD and the mark of the Beast. Under the fifth and sixth trumpets an army of two hundred million demons is released from the underworld **"to slay the third part of men"** (Revelation 9:3, 15-19).

It is during the Great Tribulation that the two witnesses from Heaven - Elijah and another - will give their testimony in the streets of Jerusalem, be killed by their enemies, raised from the dead and caught up into Heaven (Revelation 11). It is during this Seventieth Week of Daniel that Satan and his angels are cast out of Heaven to the Earth, **"having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time"** (Revelation 12).

The 15th and 16th chapters of the Revelation give an account of the **"the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God"** (Revelation 15:1).

First, there comes **"a noisome and grievous sore"** upon the worshippers of the Beast King

(Revelation 16:2).

Second, the sea becomes "**as the blood of a dead man**," causing the death of every creature therein (verse 3).

Third, the rivers and springs are turned into blood (verses 4-7).

Fourth, the heat of the sun is so intensified as to "**scorch men with fire**" (verses 8, 9).

Fifth, the throne of the Beast King is directly attacked, filling the kingdom with darkness, until men gnaw their tongues for pain (verse 11).

Sixth, the river Euphrates is dried up, "**that the way of the Kings of the East might be prepared**," for by this time the scene is to be set for the Battle of Armageddon (verses 12-16).

Seventh, the Earth is torn by "**a great voice out of the temple of Heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done. And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great. And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And there fell upon men a great hail out of Heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great**" (verses 17-21).

"Babylon" here evidently stands for the whole fabric of Gentile government, which began with Babylon in the days of Nebuchadnezzar and is characterized by Babylon to the end. Revelation 16:19 is parallel with Daniel 2:34, 35, 44, 45.

"Babylon, 'confusion,'" says the Scofield Reference Bible, "is repeatedly used by the Prophets in a symbolic sense. Two 'Babylons' are to be distinguished in the Revelation: ecclesiastical Babylon, which is apostate Christendom, headed up under the Papacy; and political Babylon, which is the Beast's confederated Empire, the last form of Gentile world-dominion. Ecclesiastical Babylon is '**the great whore**' (Revelation 17:1), and is destroyed by political Babylon (Revelation 17:15-18). The power of political Babylon is destroyed by the Return of the LORD in glory.

The notion of a literal Babylon to be rebuilt on the site of ancient Babylon is in conflict with Isaiah 13: "And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there. And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces: and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged" (Isaiah 13:19-22).

But the language of Revelation 18 (for example, verses 10, 16, 18) seems beyond question to identify 'Babylon,' the 'city' of luxury and traffic, with 'Babylon,' the ecclesiastical center, namely, Rome. The very kings who hate ecclesiastical Babylon deplore the destruction of commercial Babylon.

The Great Tribulation ends with the Battle of Armageddon, which will be the subject of our next study.

~ end of chapter 8 ~
