

IS CHRIST COMING AGAIN?

by

William B. Riley, M.A., D.D.

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CHAPTER SIX

THE TRIBULATION AND THE TRANSLATION

The Tribulation is a biblical phrase employed to portray the hour of the earth's matchless agony—the social convulsion of the ages. And yet, to speak of it need not necessarily sadden men, nor sorrow women. All progress is the product of suffering; and all blessed victories are the outcome of battle. The mightiest nations of the earth were baptized in blood, and then made a blessing to others.

One that has read the history of Germany, or of England, or of America, ought not to be surprised that when the Kingdom of God comes to the earth it will be set up in spite of social revolutions, amid the ruins of apostate religions, and will end the bloodiest of all rebellions. And yet believers should not permit the tribulation to greatly trouble them, knowing the triumph that lies just beyond.

The natural and scriptural order of our theme would be “the translation and the tribulation,” but that you may be left at the conclusion of this chapter with the “**blessed hope**,” we turn our theme about and present the tribulation first and the translation afterward.

“THE TRIBULATION”

This season, which, by prophecy, is appointed to close the present age, is variously described in sacred Scriptures. Jesus speaks of it under the phrases: “**great tribulation**” (Matthew 24:21), “**that tribulation**” (Mark 13:24); it is also called “**the hour of temptation**” (Revelation 3:10), and “**the fiery trial**” (I Peter 4:12).

A comparison of Scripture with Scripture will bring out, fully, several thoughts regarding the tribulation.

It will precede the appearance of the Son of man on the earth.

The twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew is Christ's answer to three questions:

- (1) “*When will Jerusalem be destroyed?*”
- (2) “*What shall be the sign of Thy coming?*”
- (3) “*What of the end of the world?*”

In answer to the second of these questions Jesus, when He had fully described “**the tribulation**” that would come upon the earth, concluded, “**Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory**” (Matthew 24:29-30).

There is, then, in this plan of immutable prophecy, no hint of the conversion of the whole world—the conclusion of a millennium of peace, prosperity and righteousness, preceding His appearance! On the contrary, rebellion, battle and blood create the social “midnight” upon which the shout shall break, “**Behold! the Bridegroom cometh**” (Matthew 25:6)!

It will be a season of incomparable suffering.

Daniel, the great seer of the Old Testament Scripture, said of this very season, “**There shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time**” (12:1). Of that time Jesus said, “**Then shall be great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now; no, nor ever shall be**” (Matthew 24:21).

When John was privileged the apocalyptic vision he listened to the blasts of seven trumpets (Revelation 8:6-9:21), each succeeding one of which increased the sorrows of the earth, producing an agony that made men seek death, only to find that desire ungratified, and “**death fleeing from them**” (9:7); and later, to witness poured out upon the earth, seven vials of wrath, the fourth of which scorched men as with fire, and the fifth of which left them gnawing their tongues for pain (16:8-10).

There can be little doubt that the pains of this period are twofold.

On the one side there are the sufferings of God’s people—Israel, and Gentile converts made since the Church stole away to meet its coming Christ, as the beast and the false prophet oppress and persecute them.

On the other side, toward the end of the reign of the Antichrist, God is pouring out His wrath upon those that have followed “**the Man of Sin,**” and whose characters are such that even unspeakable suffering only increases the blasphemy with which they speak God’s name (Revelation 16:11-21).

In Matthew 24:15-22, Christ speaks particularly of the sufferings that shall fall upon God’s ancient people and the new Gentile converts; but Revelation 8, 9 and 16, describe more especially the sufferings that shall be visited upon the subjects of the Antichrist.

Dr. Wayland Hoyt once said that the word “**tribulation**” is derived from the Latin “*tribulum*”—the threshing tool.

“It is a heavy, wooden platform. Its under side is rough with bits of flint or savage with iron teeth. Oxen are yoked to it. Forth and back they drag the *tribulum* over the prostrate wheat. So the kernels are broken out from the useless husk. There, intermingled with the husk and straw, they lie disimprisoned. Now with broad wooden shovels—fans they are called—men fling the mass against the wind. The wind carries off the chaff and straw, and the pure grain falls by itself in a golden pile.”

That is exactly what the sufferings of the great period of the Tribulation will accomplish for saint and sinner.

In a time of unusual peace and prosperity it is not easy to distinguish between them; but when peace is taken from the earth, when pain is universal, when the flames have reached a white heat, then the gold and the dross will separate, and God’s purpose in the Tribulation period will be brought to pass.

No wonder the last prophet of the Old Testament, speaking of this time, says: **“But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner’s fire, and like fuller’s soap: and he will sit as a refiner and purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver; and they shall offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.”**

How significant the language with which he follows this: **“I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against the false swearers and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith LORD of hosts. For I, Jehovah, change not”** (Malachi 3:5-6).

It will be a season of short duration.

Of it Jesus says, **“Except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elects sake those days shall be shortened”** (Matthew 24:22).

With this agrees perfectly the voice of the Apocalypse, saying, **“Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time”** (Revelation 12:12).

The very length of time is suggested when, two verses later, it is written, **“And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent”** (12:14).

That **“a time and times and half a time”** means three years and a half, is put past further dispute, when we remember that it was previously written that **“the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that there they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days”** (12:6), exactly three years and a half by the Jewish calendar.

When that period of intolerable pain shall be upon the world, and the sorrows of Satan's children are increased by uncertainty as to what is yet to come, the children of God will be encouraged to bear their oppressions by the sure promise of **"a short season."** That will be a time when the Spirit will bring to their remembrance what Paul penned to the Hebrews (10:37), **"For yet a little while, and He that cometh will come, and will not tarry."** Yea, even a time when their quickened ears shall catch the advent cry, **"Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me."** (Revelation 22:12).

THE TRANSLATION

"The Jew," "the Gentile," and **"the Church of God"** are the three classes known to Scripture.

Your attention has already been called to certain Scriptures that involve suffering for God's ancient people—the Jews, and for the Gentile converts of the tribulation period; but you are concerned to know what is to be the state of **"the Church,"** when this intolerable torment shall come upon the earth. That state is as joyful as the scenes through which we have just passed are sorrowful!

The Church will have already accomplished a triumphant exit.

Daniel says, **"At that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some (the sleeping believers) to everlasting life"** (12:2).

This Old Testament prophet is confirmed by the New Testament teaching. To the Corinthians Paul declared: **"Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality"** (I Corinthians 15:51-53). When writing to the Thessalonians he tells them how these changed ones **"shall be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord"** (I Thessalonians 4:17).

What a remarkable agreement, so far as resurrection is concerned, with Isaiah's declaration that puts into the lips of the Lord the phrase, **"with my dead body they shall arise"** (26:19); and with the New Testament teaching concerning translation, for it was Christ, who, speaking of the day when the Son of man should be revealed, said: **"In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot's wife. Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it. I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. And they answered and said unto him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together"** (Luke 17:31-37).

Christ is the magnetic body, and eagles are the Scripture symbols of saints.

Isaiah, thinking of that sweet meeting of saints and Saviour, in some chamber of beauty beyond the clouds, voices it after this manner: **“Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood and shall no more cover her slain”** (26:20-21).

We are fully persuaded, also, that the glorious woman who, at the daybreak of persecution, went into the wilderness, where **“God had prepared her a place, there to nourish her for a thousand two hundred and three score days”** is the apocalyptic picture of the catching away of believers (12:6).

It is a significant thing that John says a little later, **“There was given to the woman the two wings of the great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness unto her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times and half a time, from the face of the serpent,”** for is it not written that when the woman has escaped him entirely, his wrath waxed, and he went away **“to make war with the rest of her seed, that keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus”** (12:14-15); or, in other words, with those Jewish believers, and Gentile converts—made as a result of the sudden translation and the sweeping tribulation?

All of this is in confirmation of the promise Christ makes His own concerning this period, **“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).

Quoting the words of the Lord, **“Behold, I come as a thief,”** Gordon comments, “Not one of the sleeping household saw the robber as he snatched the jewels and crept away,” and then significantly adds, **“And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels.”**

The saints’ sudden exit is a sure sign of the Saviour’s speedy entry into the world.

The author of *“Ecce Venit”* has called attention to the fact that **“to meet the Lord in the air”** are words crowded with significance, conveying the idea of “to meet and return with,” “As the disciples in Rome went out to meet Paul when they heard of his approach, and accompanied him to the city; as the wise virgins are pictured as going forth to meet the bridegroom and attending him to the house of the bride,—so by the same form of speech it is here implied that the Church will be raptured away to join the Lord on His advancing way, and escort Him back to the earth.”

This is what Daniel saw when the Ancient of Days— **“his raiment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool”** came to the throne: **“thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him”** (7: 9, 10).

Jude also makes mention of this attendant company, **“Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him”** (vs. 14-15).

More things of earth are made from the **“pattern seen in the mount”** than men imagine. In their admiration of the governments of earth, men must remember that their customs and manners are always and only a degenerate copy of the divine government.

When the Indian and Oklahoma territories became a state, the author happened, on that very day, to be in the city that was the home of the first Governor. Immediately upon receiving the reins of government, he returned from Guthrie, whither he had gone to receive for himself authority. But, preceding his appearance, his personal friends stole away to join him, and accompany him in his homecoming.

It was a glad and gala hour when the Governor arrived. The whole city was adorned in his honor; musical bands marched the street, discoursing martial music. The crowds that attended him on the train were small beside those that awaited his arrival, and when his feet touched the earth and he stood in the midst of his own, cheer on cheer voiced at once the consciousness of his honor and the pleasure of the people.

If one goes back into ancient history and reads of the reception accorded Pompey, when, in September, 61 B. C., he approached the City of the Seven Hills, where for two whole days crowded processions, with trophies from every land, moved along the Via Sacra, amidst the applause of the people, he has yet a greater, but still a faint, suggestion of what it shall mean when Christ shall come, attended by the noble army of the saints, to take His throne!

But when the rightful Ruler of the earth receives from His Father the Kingdom there will be a result which, for the whole world, will be as blessed as its execution will be bloody.

We speak of the **PASSING OF SATAN’S SCEPTER**. If the Book of Revelation involves, as we believe it does, the plan of the ages, it is little wonder that it should present scenes of constant conflict—Satan and his hosts contending for the supremacy in the earth, and temporarily winning the same, only to find themselves eventually overthrown, their power broken, and the scepter taken forever by the hand of the Son of God. All past history is but the record of this conflict.

Part by part inspired prophecy has been fulfilled.

The Devil has fought his battles, secured certain temporary victories, and, judging by his present movements, anticipates the day when he can put his mark upon the forehead and in the hand of every man of earth. The dream is not a delusion!

There is to be **“given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them”**; and there is to be power **“given him over every all kindreds, and tongues, and nations. And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”** (Revelation 13:7-8).

But, alas for the dream of devils!

Dispossession, discomfiture and death is the portion of everyone, from Satan—the leader—to the most insignificant spirit following him. No sooner hath the first angel sounded and the hosts of hell begin to trample the earth with pitiless feet, than John cries: **“And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire”** (Revelation 10:1). **“And there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever”** (Revelation 11:15).

Again, when the war in heaven is over, and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world, is cast down to the earth and then begins his persecution of the people of God, knowing that he hath but a little time for his hellish endeavor, John hears **“a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night”**—a victory in heaven that is to have its answering victory upon the earth, for when, by the execution of the Divine will, the beast is overthrown, and Babylon—the mother of harlots—is brought to a deserved end, the voice of a great multitude in heaven breaks forth, **“Hallelujah! Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: For true and righteous *are* his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And again they said, Alleluia”** (Revelation 19:1-3).

And yet again, while the man of God listens, the voice of the multitude breaks forth, **“as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth”** (Revelation 19:6).

If it be a joy to behold the angel coming down out of heaven and laying hold on the dragon, the old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, and binding him for a thousand years, and casting him into the abyss, and saying unto him, that he **“should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled”** (Revelation 20:3), the climax of Christian exultation is reached, when at the end of the millennium, Satan having been loosened for a little season out of his prison, to compass the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city, we behold fire come down out of heaven to devour him, and see the Devil, which deceived them, cast into the lake of fire and brimstone (Revelation 20: 9,10), and know that the last rebellion against the authority of Jesus is at an end, and the last rebel against His government is forever overthrown!

Then will our mouths be filled with praises, the expressions of which are hindered by no fearful apprehensions; and with hallelujahs, in the rendition of which the new heaven and the new earth shall joyfully unite.

What man can read the story of Esther and withhold rejoicing when Haman is brought to judgment; or turn the pages of history that Herod stained with innocent blood, without crying, **“How long, oh Lord, how long?”**

Who, then, that hates sin and loves righteousness can grieve when Satan and all his hosts are overthrown, and the scepter is put forever into the hand of the blessed Son of God? Let those who will, write or speak of “the sorrows of Satan”; as for us, we join with Dr. Justin Fulton in saying: “If present when this enemy of man meets his doom, we should, with saints and angels gladly join in the song ‘Hallelujah, ‘tis done’!”

~ end of chapter 6 ~

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