

## TRIBULATION AFTER THE RAPTURE

by Ed Hindson

Jesus warned His disciples that in the last days there would be a period of time more horrific and traumatic than any other time in human history. He was, of course, referring to the Great Tribulation: *"There will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be"* (Matt. 24:21).

The disciples were familiar with this prophesied time of anguish, for many of the Hebrew prophets of old had warned Israel about a future period of intense suffering. The prophet Jeremiah called it *"the time of Jacob's trouble"* (Jer. 30:7). Throughout the Old and New Testaments, the Tribulation is referred to by a variety of names including *"the day of the Lord"* (1 Thess. 5:2), the seventieth week of Daniel (Dan. 9:27), *"a day of desolation"* (Zeph. 1:15), *"the wrath to come"* (1 Thess. 1:10), *"the hour of judgment"* (Rev. 14:7), and *"the great tribulation"* (Matt. 24:21). Not only is the Tribulation mentioned in more than 60 passages in the Bible, but more space is allotted to it than any other subject except for salvation and the second coming of Christ.

Both the prophet Daniel and the apostle John stated this period would last seven years (Dan. 9:24-27; Rev. 11:2-3). After rising to power, the evil *"prince who is to come"* (Dan. 9:26), the Antichrist, will make a covenant with Israel. This event will signal the beginning of the seven-year Tribulation period. Three and a half years into the Tribulation, at the halfway point, the Antichrist will break the covenant by desecrating the rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem. This will usher in the Great Tribulation, a period of suffering and terror worse than any that mankind has ever experienced in history. Although the Tribulation lasts only seven years, the devastations unleashed during that time will seem endless to those who must face them.

### THE NATURE OF THE TRIBULATION

Through various prophetic passages found in the Bible, we learn that the Tribulation will be . . .

- a time of *judgment* for those who reject the Savior
- a time of *conclusion* for those who rebel against God
- a time of *decision* for those who will be forced to choose between Christ and the Antichrist
- a time of *chaos* designed to shake mankind's false sense of security
- a time of unprecedented *revival*, resulting in the greatest soul harvest in history

When will the Tribulation take place? Although no exact date is given, the Bible indicates in Matthew 24:29-31 that it must occur immediately before the glorious appearing of Christ, when Jesus Himself returns to Earth to destroy the Antichrist. It will also occur after the rapture of the church, when all those who have placed their trust in Jesus Christ will be instantly removed from the planet in order to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:15-18).

Those who view the Tribulation as primarily a time of wrath overlook the fact that it is also a time of mercy and grace. The Lord is not some angry monster heaping catastrophes upon the heads of innocent men and women. In reality, the people who suffer the judgments of God during the Tribulation are not innocent. Not only do these rebels reject God and His free offer of salvation, they indulge in every vile sin known to

mankind, including the massacre of those who come to Christ during this time. Even then, God's hope is that these rebels will at some point turn to Him. The Tribulation judgments therefore serve a dual purpose: to punish hardened sinners, and to move others to repentance. The following Scripture passage exemplifies this truth: *"I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: Blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved"* (Joel 2:30-32).

#### THE TRIBULATION SAINTS

The untold millions who miss the rapture because of their rejection of God will still have an opportunity to become saved. The apostle John writes: *"After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands"* (Rev. 7:9).

These Tribulation saints, whose numbers are so large they can't be counted, come to the Lord as a result of the Tribulation's trials—demonstrating that our holy God is a God who will continue to show His love and mercy to mankind even in the last days. When John asked, *"Who is this great multitude?"* the reply was *"These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation"* (Rev. 7:14). No wonder the apostle Peter was able to write, *"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Pet. 3:9).

#### THOSE LEFT BEHIND

In many respects, the rapture will set the stage for the coming Tribulation. Following the disappearance of millions upon millions of Christians from the face of the Earth, the world will be in a state of shock and chaos that defies comprehension. This will prepare the way perfectly for the rise of the Antichrist. He will come to power peaceably using diplomacy—as represented by the rider on the white horse, the first of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse (Rev. 6:1-2). His charm and outward compassion will bring badly needed comfort to a populace on the brink of mass hysteria.

The controlled media will be used to effectively coerce the world into adopting this new leader as the man of the hour. Ongoing efforts to discredit the Bible and other prophetic books such as the *Left Behind* series, which foretold the rapture and the rise of the Antichrist in advance, will be a top priority of the new world government. Every attempt will be made to convince the confused populace that those who have been left behind are, in fact, the lucky ones, even though nothing could be further from the truth.

The spiritual vacuum left by the disappearance of millions of Christians will also enable the Antichrist to further his plan for a forced one-world religion. This pagan religion will unite all religions—with the lone exception of biblical Christianity—into one. In the midst of all this, the Holy Spirit will work through the 144,000 evangelists and the two witnesses in Jerusalem to draw countless numbers of people to Christ during the Tribulation—despite the fact that such a choice will most likely result in martyrdom.

#### THE 144,000 WITNESSES

The seventh seal introduces the seven trumpet judgments, which is why many prophecy students consider these judgments to be chronological: The first six seals

cover 21 months, then the breaking of the seventh seal introduces the next seven trumpet judgments, which take place during the second quarter or the second 21 months of the first half of the Tribulation. The sealing of the 144,000 “servants of our God” probably occurs at the beginning of this period, and they witness all during it, along with the special two witnesses describe in Revelation 11.

### THE TWO WITNESSES

In the last days, God will have the gospel message proclaimed worldwide so that people are without excuse about making a decision for Christ. During the first half of the Tribulation God not only uses the 144,000 Israelites from each of the 12 tribes who reach “*a multitude which no one could number*” (Rev. 7:0), but He also establishes in and around Jerusalem two special witnesses endowed with supernatural powers (Rev. 11:3-6).

During the Tribulation, two powerful opposing forces will be at work during the same time: 1) the 144,000 servants of God will bring forth a mighty soul harvest, and 2) the enormous sinfulness of those who refuse to repent. It will be the same as in our day right now, with the church witnessing for the Lord on the one hand, and those who reject the Savior on the other, except that the opposing forces will be intensified during the tribulation period.

Also, because the civil government described in Revelation 13 will be under the total control of Antichrist and his evil forces, Christians will be persecuted and martyred in large numbers. Many people will become saved through the soul harvest, but for a while, it will seem as if Christians are on the losing end of the battle because the Antichrist is in control of the world. However, we know that ultimately, Christ—and His people—will be the victor.

### WORLD WAR III

After his peaceful ascension to power, the Antichrist will initiate what we might call World War III (Rev. 6:3-4) against three of the ten regional leaders who will be in power during this time. Death and destruction will be brought to this earth on a massive scale never before known. This battle may involve a nuclear exchange and will be followed by widespread inflation, famine, and disease. Possibly due in part to nuclear fallout, plagues will sweep across the land and death will come to a fourth of the world’s population (Rev. 6:5-8). All the while, the Antichrist will be carrying out his vengeance against those who have chosen to follow Christ instead of him (Rev. 6:9-11). And the killing of millions of Tribulation saints will escalate as the world sinks further into death and despair.

Up to this point, the judgments that have come upon Earth during the Tribulation are largely the result of man’s endeavors. From here onward, however, the judgments will be acts of divine retribution. Revelation 6:12-15 describes a massive earthquake so large that “every mountain and island was moved out of its place” (verse 14). Apparently there will be a series of massive volcanic eruptions as well, which will cause the sky to darken and the moon to appear red. The apostle John also writes of meteor-like objects that come crashing down onto the earth. So incredible are these events that Earth’s inhabitants will realize they are witnessing God’s judgments right before their eyes: “*The kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the*

*throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"* (Rev. 6:15-17).

Then hail, fire, and blood will rain down from the sky, causing a third of the earth's trees and grass to burn up. Two more meteors will fall from the sky and kill a third of the sea life, destroy a third of the ships at sea, and poison a third of the earth's fresh water supply. Darkness will continue to envelope the land as the light from the sun and moon is dimmed by a third.

#### **HELL ON EARTH**

Revelation chapter 9 describes a plague of locust-like creatures that descend upon the earth and have the ability to sting people. For five months, these creatures will torment, but not kill, unbelievers: *"Out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth. And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. And they were not given authority to kill them, but to torment them for five months. Their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man. In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them"* (Rev. 9:3-6). If that weren't enough, armies of demonic horsemen will then be unleashed and kill another third of the world's population (Rev. 9:13-19).

And then it gets worse . . .

#### **THE MARK OF THE BEAST**

As mentioned previously, halfway into the Tribulation, the Antichrist will break his treaty with the nation of Israel, desecrate the rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem, and kill the two witnesses who have been proclaiming the gospel (Rev. 11:3-12). He will then seize total control over the monetary system of the world (Rev. 13:16-18), requiring all to carry his mark, which in some way will consist of the number six hundred sixty-six (666). This is the prophesied mark of the beast, and without it, no one will be able to buy or sell: *"He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark"* (Rev. 13:16-17).

Even a few short years ago, such a prospect would have seemed inconceivable. But now, with computerized electronic financial transactions occurring on a worldwide scale, the ability to control and track the purchases of every human being is not only possible, but inevitable.

#### **PREPARING FOR ARMAGEDDON**

Meanwhile, as the Tribulation progresses, the judgments of God will continue to afflict the ungodly. Loathsome sores will break out upon those who have the mark of the beast. The sea and remaining fresh water will be turned into blood. Heat from the sun will scorch the unrepentant, and darkness will envelope the kingdom of the Antichrist (Rev. 16:2-11).

Then the Euphrates River will dry up, allowing the armies of the east to march unhindered to Israel to begin the Battle of Armageddon. The bloodshed will reach unparalleled proportions. A tremendous earthquake will level the cities of the world, and hailstones weighing as much as 100 pounds will fall to the earth. Unfortunately, many of the ungodly still will not repent, despite the severity of these judgments: *"There was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell.*

*And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great” (Rev. 16:18-21).*

And with that, the judgments will draw to an end. The glorious appearing of Christ comes next. He will be in the air accompanied by the armies of heaven, which consist of all those who were raptured to heaven (Rev. 19:11-14). Christ will then descend to Earth in power and glory to win the Battle of Armageddon. He will cast the beast (Antichrist) and False Prophet into the Lake of Fire, and bind Satan in the abyss for 1000 years. Then He will initiate His millennial reign on earth (Rev. 19:19–20:3).

### UNDERSTANDING THE JUDGMENTS

The book of Revelation includes three sets of judgments (6 seals, 6 trumpets, and 7 bowls)—19 total judgments that will unfold during the seven-year tribulation period. An overview of these judgments provides a helpful understanding of how these events will unfold.

*Seal Judgments (Revelation 6):*

1. Seal 1: The Rider on the White Horse (6:1-2)
2. Seal 2: The Rider on the Red Horse (6:3-4)
3. Seal 3: The Rider on the Black Horse (6:5-6)
4. Seal 4: The Rider on the Pale Horse (6:7-8)
5. Seal 5: The Martyred Tribulation Saints (6:9-11)
6. Seal 6: A Great Earthquake (6:12-17)
7. Seal 7: Silence in Heaven—Beginning of Trumpet Judgments (8:1)

*Trumpet Judgments (Revelation 8-9):*

1. Trumpet 1: One-third of vegetation is destroyed.
2. Trumpet 2: One-third of the sea will be turned into blood.
3. Trumpet 3: One-third of the waters are contaminated.
4. Trumpet 4: One-third of the sky is darkened.
5. Trumpet 5: The “first woe”: locust-like creatures plague the earth.
6. Trumpet 6: The “second woe”: An army of 200,000,000 men from the east will destroy one-third of all people.
7. Trumpet 7: The “third woe”: Beginning of the seven bowl judgments.

*Bowl Judgments (Revelation 16):*

1. Bowl 1: Terrible sores on those who follow Antichrist.
2. Bowl 2: Turns all the seas into blood.
3. Bowl 3: All fresh water is turned to blood.
4. Bowl 4: Terrible heat upon the earth.
5. Bowl 5: Supernatural darkness on the earth.
6. Bowl 6: The Euphrates River dries up and an army marched toward Armageddon.
7. Bowl 7: A massive moving of the earth’s crust and 100-pound hailstones.

### WHAT BEGINS THE TRIBULATION?

The prophecy of Daniel 9:27 tells us exactly what will start the Tribulation: when “*he [the prince who is to come] shall confirm a covenant with many for one week.*” It seems that the Antichrist will make a covenant with the nation of Israel to ensure their protection. However, he will break this covenant after three and a half years. This does not mean that the treaty itself will be a seven-year treaty, as opposed to one of indefinite length, but that it will be broken in the middle of the seventieth “week” (seven) of Daniel 9:27. Since the seventieth “seven” refers to the seven years of the tribulation period, the reader understands that the treaty will be broken at the halfway point. But this does not mean the treaty itself is merely a seven-year treaty.

Daniel’s prophecy may relate to the rider on the white horse of Revelation 6, who comes in peace, for he has no arrows or implements of war in his hand. It appears the Antichrist will offer peace to the world and make a covenant with Israel, bringing peace to the Jewish people, who will then be able to rebuild their temple and reinstate their sacrifices again—for three-and-a-half years! But “*in the middle of the week [of years] he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate*” (Daniel 9:27). The Antichrist will break his covenant with the Jews in the middle of the Tribulation (which agrees with Revelation 11 and 13) and will launch the greatest time of desolation in the history of the world. How long will it last? “*Until the consummation, which is determined.*” This is the same as “*the time of the end,*” meaning the end of the 70 weeks or 490 years, which is the same as the “consummation” of God’s dealing with the Jews and the literal coming of Christ to set up His kingdom.

In summary, then, the Tribulation will begin when the covenant of peace between the coming new world government (headed by the Antichrist) and the nation of Israel. But halfway through the seven years, the Antichrist will break that covenant and begin to persecute the nation of Israel, and they will become “desolate.”

Many Christians think the rapture of the church begins the Tribulation, but while it’s possible the rapture and the signing of the covenant may take place very close together, the Bible is not specific on that subject. Still, there has never been a world ruler who has made a covenant of peace with Israel and then broken that covenant after three-and-a-half years. This obviously means that the fulfillment of these events are still future.