

THE CHURCH AND THE TRIBULATION

Principles on Why the Church Will Not Go Through the Great Tribulation



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Attention must be given to a disagreement which exists between premillenarians of equal sincerity over whether the Church will enter or pass through the "Great Tribulation," called Jacob's Trouble. The reasons the Scripture gives that the Church will not go through the Tribulation are the following:

1. THE NATURE OF THE TRIBULATION.

The tribulational period, yet to be experienced in the world, is the completion of a sequence of predicted years. These years intervene between the plucking of Israel off the land, which occurred at the time of the Babylonian captivity, and the final return of that people to their land in the full realization of their covenanted blessings under the Messiah's reign. But for the intercalary age of the Church, this period is precisely measured by 560 consecutive years, which time is divided into intervals, namely, 70 years of the Babylonian captivity, as predicted by Jeremiah 25:2-11; 49 years in which Jerusalem would be rebuilt, Daniel 9:26; and seven years in which the covenant between the prince and the many will be confirmed. Such is the precise measurement of Gentile times, though these years are equally laden with events which are Jewish.

In the final seven years, the last Roman emperor, the Beast, arises and Gentile times are terminated by the glorious appearing of Messiah. Whatever belongs to the Gentile times began with the Babylonian captivity, and aside from the intercalary age of the Church, is revived and consummated in the yet future seven years.

It therefore follows that only as the Church is found to be a part of Gentile times before the cutting off of Messiah will she be rightfully present in the consummating seven years. Only the blindest form of covenant theology would ignore the overwhelming evidence in the Scriptures that the Church is not in Daniel's 483 years, or in

any period of the Old Testament history. Those who would thrust the Church into the last seven years of Gentile times are guilty of introducing an element into that period which has no place in that period since it is not to be in the Earth during the eventful years which that period consummates. As a confirmation of these distinctions, it may be asserted again that no New Testament Scripture necessitates the placing of the Church in that period, nor does any New Testament Scripture warn the Church regarding the Tribulation as though she were in danger of it.

Again the purpose of the "Great Tribulation" is wholly extraneous to the Church. The period is declared to be for the final judgments of God upon a "God and Christ rejecting" world. It is the ending of the "COSMOS" system. Over against this, the Church is neither a part of the COSMOS.

John 15:24, "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father." John 17:14-16, "I have given them Thy Word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." 1 John 5:19, "And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the Wicked One."

The Church is never to be brought into judgment, condemning judgment. John 5:24, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My Word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

She will be judged relative to rewards which belong to faithful individuals, which judgment is not on the Earth but in Heaven, and certainly is no feature of the earthly

Tribulation. **To demand that believers must experience the terrible judgments and destruction which must fall on unbelievers is to do violence to every feature of the saving GRACE of God.**

2. THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH.

Far more conclusive than all else is determining the question at issue is a right understanding of the nature of the Church. That she could not share in the Great Tribulation is settled finally for all who comprehend the essential Truth of the individual believer's relation to God. Not only is the Church a product of this specific age with no relation whatsoever to any other age, but each believer is perfectly accepted now and forever before on the ground of his place in Christ. The righteousness of God is imputed into him, and, being saved out of this COSMOS world, he is no more of this world than Christ is of this world.

John 15:18-19, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." John 17:14-16, "I have given them Thy Word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."

The coming Tribulation is the judgment of this world. Israel has her part in it since being not yet saved, she is of the world. Romans 11:26, "And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob." The believer, being what he is in Christ, has no more a rightful place in this COSMOS world's judgments than Christ Himself or any unfallen angel.

Back of the theories that the Church will enter or pass through the Tribulation is the Armenian heresy that the believer contributes something to his own acceptance before God, and having failed to some extent in this responsibility, he will be purged and pu-

rified by these offerings which the Tribulation affords.

It is sort of Christian purgatory... false. There is a line of truth which concerns the believer's personal faithfulness but this, as has been seen, is consummated before Christ at His judgment seat in Heaven. As for any condemnation, or other judgment, the Christian is wholly delivered forever on the most righteous ground that a Substitute bore the condemnation and judgment and has provided a perfect standing before God. It is established by unqualified Scripture that the believer is delivered from all condemning judgments.

- A. John 3:18, "He that believeth in Him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the Name of the only begotten Son of God."
- B. John 5:24, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My Word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."
- C. Romans 5:24, "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ."
- D. Romans 8:1, "There is therefore no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."
- E. Romans 8:33, 34, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God who also maketh intercession for us."
- F. 1 Corinthians 11:31, 32, "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged, but when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world."

- G. 1 Thessalonians 1:10, “To wait for His Son from Heaven whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivers us out from the wrath to come.”

In general those who contend that the Church will experience the Tribulation assert that all believers, spiritual and non-spiritual, will enter that period of suffering, though there are those believing in a partial Rapture which assert that the Church will be divided and the spiritual element, which always includes those who advance this notion, will go directly to Heaven, while the unspiritual will suffer for their sins in the Tribulation.

This constitutes a Protestant purgatory. The answer to all such conceptions is the recognition of the truth that, when members of this sinful race go to Heaven, it is not on the ground of their own merit, but only through the merit of Christ.

Romans 5:1, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Romans 8:30, 33, 34, “Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified. Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God who also maketh intercession for us.” This is wholly within the range of Divine justice. Romans 3:26, “To declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.”

Thus the contention that the Church will enter or pass through the Tribulation is greatly an insult to, and unbelief towards, the measureless GRACE of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

To suppose, as some are asserting, that the Great Tribulation is greatly overestimated with respect to its sufferings becomes no less than a direct contradiction of the Word of the Christ. He said, “For then shall be great tribulation, such as 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 24:21, 22.

Let these who teach that the Church, or any part of it, will enter the Great Tribulation, state how saved ones who are clothed in the righteousness of God, justified forever, and wholly rescued from the COSMOS world could in accord with either reason or revelation be thrust into those last judgments which fall upon a Christ-rejecting, Satan-ruled, COSMOS world.

3. MUST THE LAST GENERATION OF THE CHURCH SUFFER ESPECIALLY.

Those who entertain the idea that the Church experiences the Great Tribulation must reckon with the fact that of upwards of 75 generations who comprise that company all but the present generation have entered glory without the supposed benefits of that purging experience. Why then, should the last generation suffer that from which the vast host have been spared?

On this point a specious argument has been advanced, namely, that as the Church has suffered martyrdom in certain periods of history she may be expected to suffer thus again at the end of the age, but back of this claim is the failure to recognize that past sufferings were due to the attack of wicked men upon the Church, while the Great Tribulation is God’s judgment upon wicked men. Wholly justified believers have no place among evil men who are destined to eternal doom. Christ is not going to beat His bride.

4. THE TESTIMONY OF THE SCRIPTURES.

The Bible is far from silent on this important theme, however, there is no more occasion for the Word of God to state specifically that the Church is not in the Great Tribulation than for it to declare that the Church is not in the Babylonian captivity, though in one test it is directly declared that the Church is not to be tested in that trial. The evidence of the Scriptures is gained from

that which be deduced. As has been stated, no Scripture intimates that the Church is in the Tribulation, nor is the Church warned as though in danger of so great a fall. Certain aspects of this phase of the subject should be considered separately.

A. THE IMMINENT RETURN OF CHRIST.

Whether it be the coming of Christ to the Earth in glory when Israel is to be delivered, or that coming into the air to receive His bride, the coming is imminent. Scripture which directs Israel in the Tribulation, which time is terminated by the glorious return of Christ as their Judge and Deliverer, warns her to “watch” for He will then come, “as a thief in the night.” Matthew 24:32-25:13. Thessalonians 5:1-8. Peter 3:8, 10.

Over and against this, the Church is instructed to “wait” and to “look” for Christ’s return for her. 1 Thessalonians 1:9, 10, Titus 2:13, Hebrews 9:28. In both instances, the return of Christ is unannounced and therefore impending, within the period to which each event belongs.

The return of Christ for His Church was not impending in Old Testament days, not if the glorious appearing impending was until the Tribulation. 2 Thessalonians 2:3. The imminent return of Christ to receive His Church is held before every believer as a “blessed hope”, happy hope. It is written. “Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions, if it were not so, I would have told you, I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.” John 14:1-3.

The very absence of a date in this passage, addressed to the 11 in the upper room, extends that promise to all succeeding generations until He comes again, it is recorded.

“For GRACE of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men. Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appear-

ing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ,” Titus 2:11-13.

Here, as before, the promise extends to all generations until He comes. In a similar way, it is declared. “For they themselves show us what manner of entering in we had unto you and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from Heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even, Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.” 1 Thessalonians 1:9, 10.

In this Scripture the important fact is revealed that it was in the Divine purpose that the very first generation of Christians were appointed, not to look for the Tribulation or for death, but for the imminent coming of Christ. So also it is written, “Beloved now we are the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that, when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is, and every man that hath hope in Him purifieth Himself, even as He is pure.” 1 John 3:2, 3.

This purifying hope was as much a reality to those of the earliest days of the Church, as it has been to any later generations. The force of this argument is inescapable. The Tribulation is not the hope of the coming of the Lord, it is not at “hand” but, “the Lord is at hand.” Philippians 4:5. The apostle Paul by a fivefold use of the self including pronoun “we” placed himself among those who were actuated by the hope of Christ’s return. 1 Corinthians 15:51, 52, 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17.

B. THE ANTICIPATION OF THE ELEMENT OF TIME.

It will be recognized that no prediction could be made of events within this age without a veiled intimation that the element of time would intervene. The problem is not one engineered by man, it is wholly of God. Therefore, it is, as other problems of a like nature, solved only in the mind of God. Both things are true, the Lord has always been at hand, yet certain times and events are predicted.

Peter would grow old and die, John 21:18, "Verily, verily I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldst: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not."

The nobleman would delay a long time in a far country, Luke 19:11, "And as they heard these things, He added and spake a parable, because He was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear." This parable teaches more the requirement that service is to continue than that time intervenes.

The Gospel is to be preached in all the world, but had it been commanded to convert all nations, the case would have been different. Every new generation extends the evangelizing effort which, of itself, knows no end. It will be terminated whenever the Lord returns. **Since there is no revealed goal to be reached, the termination by His return could be at any time and is therefore impending.** The conclusive feature of this particular argument is the truth that the very men to whom it was disclosed that there would be times and events related to this age, are the ones who in their writings declare that the return of Christ is imminent.

C. THE DISPENSATIONAL FEATURE.

The interpretation of the Scriptures, as advanced by those who teach that the Church will enter or pass through the Tribulation, is subject to errors which are traceable to a failure to discern dispensational distinctions, as well as to discern the true nature of the Church or of the Tribulation.

One writer builds his argument upon the statement that for the elect's sake the days of the Tribulation will be shortened, Matthew 24:22. It does not occur to this individual that there are two elect companies, Israel and the Church, and that the context of Matthew where the declaration occurs is dealing only with Israel.

Evidence of this is seen in the truth that the Church is never "hated of all nations," Matthew 24:9, nor will its members, the members of Christ's, "hate one another," verse 10, nor will they ever be related to the "sabbath day" nor will they ever pray that their "flight be not in the winter," verse 20.

D. THE MAJOR SCRIPTURE.

The determining passage is Revelation 3:10, which is an address by the glorified Christ to the Philadelphia church. The Lord declares, "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."

It is generally agreed that Philadelphia represents the true Church which has continued from the beginning and will continue until removed by translation. It is also conceded that the "hour of temptation" is a reference to the Great Tribulation.

Those who would relate the Church to the Tribulation, interpret this passage as a guarantee that the Church will be preserved while passing through the Tribulation. Those who oppose this view assert that the guarantee is that the Church will be kept out of that hour. It becomes a study of the original language of Scripture, the Greek and Hebrew.

Assuming that the Philadelphia Church represents the missionary Church and that "the hour of trial" refers to the future Tribulation, we need to examine the words, "I will keep thee from the hour of trial." More especially do we want to know what is the meaning of the verb, "will keep," which is the Greek word, TEREÓ, and the preposition "from," which is EK. EK is translated "out of the midst of." The promise here is not merely to be kept from trial, but from "the hour" of trial. It holds out exemption from the period of trial, not only from the trial during that period.

So we have in this text a promise that the whole Church will be taken away before the hour of temptation begins, and not merely an assurance of protection in it.

E. THE 24 ELDERS.

In his desire to inform the saints concerning the future, Genesis 18:17, John 16:13, which is the Divine motive for providing all prophetic Scriptures, God calls John into Heaven, Revelation 4:1, and causes him to see and hear what will be experienced by the Church in Heaven, and what will occur on the Earth during the period of the last seven prophetic years. Genesis 18:17, "And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do." John 16:13, "Howbeit when He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all Truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will shew you things to come."

The purpose of this unveiling to John is that he may write these things, to the end that they may be transmitted as information to all believers. Revelation 1:1, 2, 19, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass; and He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John: Who bare record of the Word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that He saw. Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter."

John sees 24 elders in Heaven, even before the Tribulation begins. It is pertinent to inquire into the identity of these elders. Following the futuristic interpretation of Revelation 4:1, to the end of the book, that interpretation which alone is tenable or in harmony with all Biblical prophecy, it is concluded that the words, META TAUTA, twice used in Revelation 4:1, mark a turning point in the message of this book from the history of the Church on Earth, as disclosed in chapters 2 and 3, to that which will immediately follow that earthly history.

These elders are to be distinguished from the "four living creatures," from angels, and from the "great multitude" which it is declared, came out of the Great Tribulation.

There ought to be very little question as to the identification of these crowned elders. They constitute the united royal priesthood, predicted alike of Israel and the Church. They are seen in one company redeemed and glorified.

The prophet Daniel has a vision of the time when the Son of man comes to take His kingdom, and in that vision thrones are set, but they are without occupants. As a matter of fact, in Daniel's day, the thrones, though established, were vacant. Now we come to the time of the accomplishment of Daniel's prophecy and the thrones are filled.

It is included therefore that the 24 elders represent the saints from Earth who are in Heaven. Their praise is both identifying and revealing when they sing, "And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hath made us unto our God kings and priests; and we shall reign on the Earth." Revelation 5:9, 10.

Their own declaration declares and indicates that they represent a vast throng, and they are in Heaven only through the virtue of the redeeming blood of Christ. The presence of this company in Heaven before the Tribulation, points clearly to the truth that they have been caught up to Heaven before the hour of trial begins.

F. THE RESTRAINER REMOVED.

Another determining Scripture is found in 2 Thessalonians 2:6, 7. "And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only He who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way."

The context talks of the man of sin, of the evil he promotes, and of his destruction by the breath of the returning Christ. The central truth of the passage under discussion is that, though Satan would long ago have consummated his evil program for his COSMOS world, and have brought forward its

last human ruler, there is a “Restrainer” who restrains to the end, that Satan’s program shall be developed that completed only at God’s appointed time.

The purpose of this age is not the development of evil, it is rather the outcalling of the Church, and Satan’s enterprise will be timed to end at the moment God concludes the major age purpose. Satan’s program is only permitted by God at most, and he must be subject to the things God is doing. With due recognition of various opinions abroad the Restrainer is God the Holy Spirit, and must be one of the God-head. Even a casual contemplation of the power required will convince the open mind of this necessity, and since the Holy Spirit is the active Executor of the Godhead in the world during this age, it is reasonable to conclude that He it is who restrains.

Doubtless His restraint operates both directly and through the Church in which He dwells. When His work of gathering out the Church is completed, that for which He came into the world, He, the Spirit, the Restrainer, will be removed from the world as resident here and reassume His position as omnipresent only as He is everywhere.

The right understanding of this important Scripture depends upon recognition of the distinction to be observed between the Spirit’s relation to the world as resident therein or omnipresent. He who was always omnipresent became resident on the day of Pentecost. He who is not resident will become merely omnipresent on the completion of that which He came on the day of Pentecost to achieve.

It is clearly asserted that the believer can never be separated from the Holy Spirit. Christ’s prayer, which cannot go unanswered, was that the Spirit should abide with believers forever. John 14:16, “And I

will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever.” Wherefore when the Spirit, the Restrainer is “taken out of the way,” the Church will of necessity be removed with Him. When He goes we go. It cannot be otherwise.

But the appearance of the man of sin, who is the essential character of the Great Tribulation, follows the removal of the Restrainer and the Church. The Church is not bereft of the Holy Spirit and left to suffer in the world.

Closely related to this consideration of the removal of the Church from the world is the fact that time is required between the Rapture, and the return of Christ in glory, so that appointed events may be accomplished. All Bible expositors, who enter at all into these issues, agree that the Church must be caught up to meet Christ before she can return with Him in glory Revelation 19:11-16.

Those who teach that the Church goes through the Tribulation agree that the Church must be translated thus, but to save a theory they declare that the Church is raptured to meet the Lord and then returns immediately, with Him to the Earth. But before she returns, as will yet be indicated, she must pass through the judgment for her rewards, married to the Lamb, and participate in the marriage supper. Revelation 19:1-10.

It is to be concluded, then, that from every line of available evidence the Church will not, because she could not, either enter or pass through the Great Tribulation a time of “Jacob’s trouble.”

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