

# TLCBiblical.com Video Lessons

## 406 - The Great Tribulation

### 1. Introduction

God's wrath is evident in the scriptures. The Lord has taken action against individuals, cities, nations and at one time, the entire world. Some believe the end times will be marked by a series of trials that will afflict the globe. Pestilence, disease, destruction and supernatural actions will manifest as the anger of God toward a world turned to evil is poured out.

### 2. A troubling forecast

Among a number of developments some believe will signal the end times and the return of Christ is a series of disasters, calamities and other things known as the Great Tribulation. This period is said to represent God's fury poured out on a world that has given itself almost completely to the influence of Satan and his representative. For seven years this will ravage the planet and will end when Christ returns to face the armies of darkness and establish his kingdom.

This is difficult for anyone listening to the news and other current events because they all seem to fit this pattern. Some may wonder every day if the end times have begun and feel anxious that they're still in the world instead of being taken as we discussed in the last lesson. Historically major conflicts and other things have been interpreted as the beginning of the tribulation. We'll talk about some of those ideas that have been proposed over the past century in a later lesson, but for now we need to take a careful look at this teaching. In this lesson we'll examine:

- a. The basis for belief in the Great Tribulation
- b. The tribulation in context
- c. A review of the contextual timelines

Let's take a look at each of these.

### 3. The basis for belief in the Great Tribulation

Over the years as I've talked to people about the subject of the Great Tribulation and the End Times, there's a focus on two areas of scripture that mention this. The most prevalent is **Matthew 24**, which I covered in a previous lesson, and which we'll examine here as well. Luke records aspects of what Christ conveys to the disciples in **Matthew 24** but doesn't refer to the period of tribulation that Matthew does.

The second place that is used to support the idea of such a period is the book of Revelation. We'll talk about Revelation in this lesson and others moving forward as many of the images and ideas associated with the end times are found in John's writing. Let's take a look at

## TLCBiblical.com Video Lessons

### 406 - The Great Tribulation

these passages and then we'll explore their context as we did when discussing the Rapture.

Matthew records Christ's answer to his disciples questions after his lament over the city of Jerusalem indicating it was going to be destroyed. The disciples in turn ask when these things will take place and requested to know the sign that would precede Jesus return to Earth. I broke Christ's response down into three groups of verses. One group detailed social, religious and political changes that would take place. A second group drew on the prophecy of Daniel referring to the destruction of Jerusalem. And a third group that specifically refers to the second coming of Christ. The verses in Matthew 24 referring to each of these groups are:

Matthew 24 - verses by context		
	Subject	Verses
Group 1	Developments in the world including preaching of the Gospel & persecution	4-14, 23-26
Group 2	Prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem	15-22, 28-29, 32-33, 34-35, 40-41
Group 3	The Second Coming	27, 36-39, 42-44, 45-51

#### Matthew 24 - verses grouped by subject / context

**Group 1:** Social, religious and political changes including the spread of the Gospel and rising persecution against Christians

**Group 2:** Statements about the coming destruction of Jerusalem with reference to the prophecy of Daniel about the abomination that makes desolate referring to the approach of the Roman army in A.D. 70.

**Group 3:** Specific statements about Christ's return including the fact that only God knows when this will happen and Jesus declaration that no sign will precede the event. Christ emphasizes the need to be faithful and vigilant so we aren't caught off guard when he does return.

As a reminder, we can rule out anything that would act as a sign as an indicator of Christ's second coming and end of the world. Statements therefore appearing in the first two groups of verses will necessarily refer to events other than the second coming. It is in that context we find statements about tribulation that we'll examine more closely in a moment.

The second source for the idea of the Great Tribulation comes from the book of Revelation. Several chapters in the book speak of the rise of the beast and a subsequent judgment to come on this power. Throughout the book are statements concerning tribulation. John, writing to the seven churches of Asia, notes that he is their companion in tribulation. Addressing the

## TLCBiblical.com Video Lessons

### 406 - The Great Tribulation

churches individually, John records Christ's knowledge of the tribulation facing the church at Smyrna (**Rev 2.9**) and informs them that they will face more (**Rev 2.10**) emphasizing the need for them to remain faithful. Christ also states that he will bring tribulation on those who failed to repent of their deeds in the church at Thyatira (**Rev 2.22**).

Revelation depicts various judgments that are to come on the oppressive world power (**Rev 6-10**) including the opening of seven seals, the image of the four horsemen of the apocalypse and seven angels who sound trumpets resulting in catastrophes in the world. Toward the end of the book seven last plagues are delivered (**Rev 15**) followed by the pouring out of seven vials of God's wrath upon the world (**Rev 16**). The number seven is a prominent figure in the book, but there isn't a reference to a seven year period of time that coincides with the teaching of the Great Tribulation.

One other scripture is generally used to determine the length of time for the Great Tribulation. Daniel mentions things that will take place which appears to coincide with the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem. The times that are used in both Revelation and Daniel are symbolic but theologians have interpreted the timing to be seven years based on information in **Daniel 9.27**. Reading through the scriptures used to support the idea of the Great Tribulation, evidence of a seven year period is inconclusive. There are even some today who believe in a Great Tribulation period of three and a half years.

The question we need to examine is whether these passages teach that such a time will take place marking the end times or end of days. Establishing the context of these references will help us gain a better understanding of this issue.

#### 4. The tribulation in context

In the Overview Of **Matthew 24**, I discussed the subjects addressed by Christ in answer to his disciples questions. Christ states, "*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: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: 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.*" (**Matt 24.15-22**).

There are some notable things we need to be aware of in regard to this prophecy. First is

## TLCBiblical.com Video Lessons

### 406 - The Great Tribulation

the reference made to the prophecy of Daniel that I covered in detail in **The Abomination Of Desolation**. I discussed the nature of the prophecy and the fact that this is the last Old Testament prediction to be fulfilled as verified by Christ. The tribulation under consideration in **Matthew 24** is specifically tied to the Roman siege of Jerusalem. The writings of Josephus and other historians of the time discuss the brutality that took place inside the city as the inhabitants turned on each other. Because of the severity of the distress, Christ stated that God would shorten those days for the elect's sake as we just read. The elect in this context refers to those who are Christians. When we isolate these statements we find there's no indication they're speaking of any other time period or of a distant event at the end of time. Related to this passage is Christ's statement that these things would be fulfilled during the lifetime of those who were listening to him on that occasion (**Matt 24.34**). The tribulation of that time was severe, unique and represented a judgment from God. Luke records Christ's statements about the destruction of Jerusalem and adds that these were "*the days of vengeance*" (**Lk 21.22**).

Comparing the description of the destruction of Jerusalem to statements made by Christ about the second coming reveals that if there was a Great Tribulation that would be a sign of the imminent return of the Lord. Christ indicates that there will be no sign of his return which means that we can't apply those prophecies to the end of time.

The next context we need to determine is that of the book of Revelation. The opening of the book begins to set limits that must be understood and respected. The first of these is that John provides a time frame for the fulfillment of the things he's writing about. "*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...*" (**Rev 1.1**). The key statement here is that things must "*shortly come to pass*".

The idea that these things were to take place "*shortly*" has led to a lot of debate and discussion. Some think that the events prophesied in the book were fulfilled in the next ten years while others extend that to fifty years. There are some who take a continuous historical view of the book and see it as a roadmap leading from the time of it's writing up to the second coming including events and signs such as the Great Tribulation. Carefully going over the characteristics of the fulfillments described by John it is possible that the "*shortly*" in verse 1 encompassed the next several centuries.

The idea that Revelation extends into the modern era prophetically doesn't fit the overall purpose of the book which is a part of establishing the context. The book is written and addressed to seven churches of Asia. John denotes this early in the writing. "*John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the*

## TLCBiblical.com Video Lessons

### 406 - The Great Tribulation

*kings of the earth.” (Rev 1.4-5).*

We now have two important keys for establishing the context. We have the book written specifically to seven churches located in the region of Asia Minor. The prophecies are things that are to “*shortly*” come to pass. The final piece lies in the opening, indicating the nature of the book itself. John states that the contents are “*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him...sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John...*” (Rev 1.1). Two words in this first sentence provides detail about the nature of the book.

The first is “**Revelation**”. The word expressed here in the Greek is “**αποκαλυψις**” or **apocalypse**. Vine states that this refers to “**an uncovering**” or “**an expression of the mind of God for the instruction of the church**” The second is the word “**σημαινω**” rendered as “**signified**” which means “**to give a sign**” “**indicate**” or to “**express by signs**”. Putting these two things together we see this as a message from God delivered in a series of images, visions or signs. Something that has to be remembered is that this implies that the things expressed are being rendered in a non-literal form. A mistake frequently made in interpreting prophetic language is to literalize symbols or remove them from their context which will distort the meaning.

So, with **Revelation** we have a letter which is...

- a. A message to seven churches in a specific region
- b. The content is from Christ who received it from God
- c. The message is expressed in signs or symbols
- d. Events in the book had reference to specific powers and figures

This isn't a study of the book of Revelation but we can identify specific themes in the letter which will deepen our understanding of the purpose and therefore the meaning of the book. Each of the churches are addressed, commended or chastised for their actions. They're given directives and things that need to be addressed. Christ warns the churches that they're to face persecution and tribulation, and they needed to be faithful. The bulk of the letter speaks of the oppressing power that is bringing persecution on the church and who will be judged by God. There are descriptions in the book that help us identify the oppressing power as Rome and we're given a glimpse of how God would bring judgment on that power. The end result of enduring the trials they were to face appears toward the end of the book as the Christians are assured that if they're faithful, their names will be recorded in the book of life and they'll have an eternal home with God and Christ.

There's an underlying theme to the book. One which I believe is overlooked and often mistaken for other things. That's the need for faithfulness and the coming consequence of apostasy. The seven churches of Asia were in an area where some of the earliest congregations

## TLCBiblical.com Video Lessons

### 406 - The Great Tribulation

outside Judea were established. They were also some of the first to fall prey to erroneous doctrines making their way into the church by gnostics and Jewish mystics. The underlying imagery, I believe, depicts the judgment of the oppressing power that receives a blow but is brought back to life through the power of that apostasy. That's a conversation for another time, but as we look at early church history we find some of the earliest changes in the structure and doctrine of the church are rooted in this area. For that reason they received the revelation John records from Christ that they should be strong, hold to the truth and refuse to compromise.

Descriptions in the book don't refer to a single period of trial or tribulation. As God's judgment is brought against the oppressor there are multiple periods of tribulation that fall on them. Although it appears that there's a connection to the prophecies of Daniel and other Old Testament prophets, the similarity exists only in the nature of the signs and images used in the book. And there's a reason for that.

In an earlier lesson I said that God doesn't have a signature that he uses to verify that a writing is genuine but there are other ways this is accomplished. Throughout the scriptures we have the appearance and usage of various expressions, figures, numbers and other things that remain constant. This constancy links the writings to each other. The Bible, written over a period of between 1000 and 1200 years, was recorded by around forty authors who lived at different times and different locations. In spite of the time differences and variation in the writers homes, the Bible is uniquely and consistently connected from beginning to end. For that reason, as we study the book of Revelation, we'll find images from the Law of Moses, Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah and other prophets. These similarities don't mean that we're reading a very long progressive prophecy, we're seeing the signature of God confirming that He's the source.

Having said, that it wouldn't be appropriate to associate things Daniel or Ezekiel stated to what we read in Revelation. In regard to Daniel, Christ indicates the prophecy of the abomination of desolation, including the tribulation of those days, was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem. That happened in A.D. 70. Once a prophecy has been fulfilled, we can't recycle it and reuse it making application to another time period. When it's over, it's over. Nor can we extend the statements made by John in the book of Revelation to identify the end times and signal the return of Christ. There's not going to be a sign.

So, **Matthew 24** and Daniels prophecy is fulfilled in A.D. 70, closing the book on both of these. The book of Revelation was written to the seven churches of Asia in symbols concerning things that would take place in a finite period described as "*shortly*". The tribulation spoken of in Matthew took place during the siege of Jerusalem and is over. The tribulations mentioned in Revelation are numerous and are in reference to the oppressing power - Rome - who would be judged and ultimately destroyed by God. Today the Roman empire is a thing of the past. It's influence on the world is still felt, but the power it wielded and evil it practiced are over. The real

## TLCBiblical.com Video Lessons

### 406 - The Great Tribulation

lesson we need to learn is that God remains the final authority and power over the nations and exercises that power even today.

#### 5. A review of the contextual timelines

We've reviewed the scriptural evidence, so now we can step back and take another look at the relative timeframe in which events associated with a period of tribulation will take place. We have the prophecy of Daniel of the "*abomination that maketh desolate*" (**Dan 12.9-13**). We have Christ's reference to this specific prophecy with the associated tribulation (**Matt 24.15-16**). We know that Christ stated those things would take place during the lives of those listening to him on that occasion (**Matt 24.34**). Historically we know these things took place in A.D. 70. As I stated earlier, once a prophecy has been fulfilled, it can't be recycled and applied to another time period or event. Fulfillment means that the prophecy is closed.

Some today take the descriptions in Matthew and associate them with statements about tribulation that are found in Revelation. The two cannot be connected. Since Jerusalem is destroyed in A.D. 70, and Christ gave us precise signs and characteristics of the siege, including a time of tribulation, it can't refer to anything happening related to the Roman empire, nor can it be extended to the end times and second coming.

There are several things in John's record of Christ's message to the seven churches that are significant. The first is that the things stated in the book were to "*shortly*" come to pass and I discussed this earlier. Second is the fact that the tribulations are multiple, not singular, and carry with them a connection to God's judgment against the oppressing power. A final statement that sheds some light on the timing of the fulfillment of Revelation is found toward the end of the book. John writes, "*And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God. And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand.*" (**Rev 22.8-10**).

This makes sense. The writing was a message to the seven churches of Asia. There were things they needed to hear and correct. They weren't to be delayed. John is therefore told to record these things and "*seal not*" the message because "*the time is at hand*". Regardless of how much time is actually covered by the word "*shortly*" at the beginning of the letter, it wasn't for some period at the end of time. We can compare that to the instructions given to Daniel who wrote about this period identified as the "Great Tribulation" where we find a contrast with John's record in Revelation.

Daniel was told to seal the writings unto the time of the end (**Dan 12.4**), and the words

## TLCBiblical.com Video Lessons

### 406 - The Great Tribulation

were closed up and sealed until the time of the end (**Dan 12.9**). Based on what Christ stated we know that the end was during the last days. The last days began when Christ came into the world and the judgment was fulfilled when Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70. It's fulfillment closed the door on Old Testament prophecy.

The combination and connection to the end of the world that is made with prophecies from Daniel, Matthew and Revelation, violates the context of all three books. It violates the statements made by Christ who declared there would be no sign of his return. The problem with the interpretation is that just because similar words, or in our translations, the same words, appear in different books, doesn't mean they refer to the same thing. We have to be careful to examine and understand precisely what the prophecy is talking about. Any interpretation we arrive at must therefore be in agreement with the entirety of the Bible. There are multitudes of errors that are based on profound misunderstanding of scripture.

Finally we have to note that the plagues and other things spoken of in Revelation are referred to by a number of terms. There's no indication that there's a definite time that can be identified at which all these things would take place. The other problem is that the time of seven years can't be verified or proven from statements in Revelation, Daniel or Matthew. A lot of work has been done over the years to make symbolic elements in Revelation match this idea. Tribulation in the book of Revelation mirrors the kind of judgment that God implements against nations when they become evil, and in the case of Rome, engage in the slaughter of the righteous. We sometimes have the view that God is simply a passive observer and doesn't get involved in the affairs of humans but there are precedents in the scriptures showing that isn't the case. Paul told the Athenian philosophers that God had "***determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation...***" (**Acts 17.26**). We don't know everything that God does but we know that he can bless, withdraw his blessings or allow a nation to be destroyed when they practice certain things.

## 6. Conclusion

Although there are passages that, when removed from their specific context, taken at face value and combined with other references using similar language, appear to teach ideas such as the Great Tribulation, the idea creates problems with the harmony of the scriptures and conflicts between passages and clear statements. We have to be careful not to create things that aren't fully supported biblically. This is especially true of biblical prophecy, and the book of Revelation is perhaps the most difficult that we have to understand. The bottom line is there will be no Great Tribulation to bring judgment on the power of the world which will signal the end of days and return of Christ.



**TLCBiblical.com Video Lessons**  
406 - The Great Tribulation

**7. Next**

In every great story there's a villain and beliefs about the end times are no exception. In the next lesson we'll discuss the identity of **The Antichrist And The New World Order** to see how this measures up when compared to what the scriptures say.