

The Great Tribulation – Mt 24:1-32

Review – Last week we started into a mini-series on the End Times.

Gave you many def's (insert); **Timeline** – sums up what I believe the Bible teaches on this; sometimes called Historical/Classical Pre-millennialism . . .

Best thing I heard all week was a comment one of my daughters overheard in the Women's restroom – “Well, I guess I'm going to have to go home, open my Bible, and do some digging.” Yes!

That was last week.

Today, focusing on the GT

Tribulation means distress, affliction, oppression

My goal is not to convince you of something or change your mind, but it is to challenge your thinking and encourage you to know why you believe what you believe . . . And to believe it because it's in the Bible, not because it sounds good to you, or because that's what you've always been taught, or because somebody else believes it

We're going to find that there are some things we can expect in the GT, many of which are found in Jesus' own words in **Mt 24:1-32**

Re the GT, the first thing we can expect is . . .

Expect much suffering (v1-22)

Read v1-3 – have this first prophecy re the temple in v2

Then he sits down and begins to unpack things, describing the upheaval of the ET's prior to his coming, and some of the things we can expect (read 4-14)

Impostors (5); Wars (6-7); Famines; Earthquakes (7b)

Persecution (9); Apostasy, betrayal, hatred (10)

False prophets who lead people astray (11); Lawlessness (12)

And love that grows cold (12)

All of which spells suffering

Doesn't take a rocket scientist to realize this stuff has been going in with increasing intensity for a long, long time

But in the next verses, Jesus indicates that the suffering would get more and more intense with his reference to the *abomination of desolation* – read v15-20

20 – *Sabbath* when many would discourage such travel to avoid working, violating Law 15 – the *abomination of desolation* is a reference to Daniel's prophecy in the 6th century BC, that temple worship would be defiled and destruction would come to Jerusalem Sure enough, Antiochus Epiphanes, king of Syria at the time, attacked Jerusalem in 168 BC, took over the temple, sacrificed a pig on altar, put up statue of Jupiter Olympius *That's* an abomination of desolation

But we also know from v2 (*there will not be left here one stone upon another*), that he was referring to a *future* time when Jer/temple would once again be overthrown Sure enough, in 70 AD – Romans besieged Jerusalem under leadership of Titus Vespas. He eventually overthrew it, leveled the temple, and demanded that everyone show allegiance to him as Caesar

But that's not it – with the verbiage of v21-22, he seems to broaden the scope to an ultimate time of tribulation that's never been seen, nor will be again after it happens Read 21-22 – add to that Luke 21:23 – *there will be great distress upon the earth* . . . All this points to a time *yet-to-come* that is also marked by distress and suffering, on a scale as yet unknown

So in these verses, Christ applies a past prophecy from Daniel, to future and yet-to-come events – events of tribulation that will climax just before Christ returns It's this climax of intense suffering that John describes in Rev in graphic detail Speaks of persecution, martyrdom, natural disasters, death, and plagues Describing man's hatred, Satan's attack, and God's wrath It's suffering with capital S

It's likely, but it's not certain, that this time of GT will be cut short at 7 years or 3½ years The time periods described in Daniel 9:27 and Rev 11 and 13

Regardless of how long it is, when it comes to the GT – you can expect much suffering I think that's clear

Second, when it comes to the GT . . .

Expect much deception (v23-28)

Read v23-26 – these extreme times will be characterized by much deception . . .

Many false christs and false prophets – plural

Point is – *do not believe it*

Don't be deceived – they may perform *great signs and wonders* (24), but they're not the real deal; they're not Jesus

Because when *he* comes you'll know it; there will be no mistaking it (read 27)

It's not going to be a game of spiritual hide-and-seek in obscure places

His coming will be as obvious as lightning, which is seen by everybody, fr all directions

Then he illustrates his obvious coming another way in v28, with a little proverb (read v28)

In other words – just like vultures are a sign that a dead/dying animal is near . . .

So too, when these events of great tribulation start happening, you know that Christ's coming is near – they go hand in hand

When I was a kid, a lightning bolt hit a telephone pole at the corner of our property in the middle of the night – pole was maybe 100 feet from our house

When it hit, there was no mistaking that something overwhelming had just happened

Didn't know exactly what it was, but it jolted me out of bed so fast that the flash was still lingering

It was so powerful that it fried every thing in our house; Everything that was plugged in

When Christ returns in his power and glory, you'll know it; There will be no question

It won't be like a little carpet shock – did you feel Jesus, I think he's here

No-no – when he shows up, you'll be *struck* (pun intended)

And if it weren't for his grace, you'd be struck dead

So don't be deceived by anything or anyone else – not even *thee* AC

The one Paul describes as *the man of lawlessness* in 2 Thess 2 (key passage re the AC)

Paul says AC will present himself as focus/object of worship, *proclaiming to be God* (4)
Find that Satan is behind his power, false signs, wonders, and *wicked deception* (9-10)

Eventually, this deception will turn to outright blasphemy against God as shown once again by John in **Rev 13** (keep your finger in MT, and turn there) – read v1-10a
Mass deception and Satanic power is followed by outright blasphemy, leading to the persecution and death of many believers

Right along side him is the False Prophet, referred to as the second beast in v11, who will force people to worship/show allegiance to the first beast, the AC – read v11-18
11 – 2nd Beast is the FP due to the similarities in how they are described
There's deception through great signs and wonders to *attract* your worship
And if that doesn't work, there's the mark of the beast to force it

This is quite the wicked duo
On the one hand – have political deception and power of the AC
On the other – religious deception and influence of the FP

Fortunately, it's all cut short at Battle of Armageddon at end of GT – listen to Rev 19:20
Their downfall is certain, but in the meantime, their power is real and their desires evil
If they arise in your lifetime – don't be deceived and don't be swayed

You can expect much deception, much suffering, and if it hasn't been apparent thus far, you can . . .

Expect to go through it (v29-35)

Suffering is so far from our N. American Christian mindset that we can't imagine having to go through the GT
We're so accustomed to ease, we'd consider it an offense if God put us thru such a thing
But the fact is, suffering is a normal part of the Christian life at times
2 Tim 3:12; Phil 1:29; Acts 14:22b; Jn 16:33b

The only difference between our suffering now, and our suffering during the GT, is the intensity
We should expect to suffer then, just like we should expect to suffer now

With that in mind, I want to give you **7 Reasons** (believers will go through the GT):

1. Christ will come at the *end* of the tribulation to gather those who are saved (read 29-31)
Immediately *after* the tribulation of those days (29), Christ will appear to gather his elect from all over the world (*his elect* – those who are saved)
Which means – as a believer, you will go through the GT if you're still alive by then

A pre-trib would say that Jesus wasn't talking to believers in this chapter, but only to Jews in the midst of the GT – so it doesn't apply to us
Problem is, there's no indicator in the text that his intended audience changed between ch 23 and 24, then back again between ch 25 and 26

More importantly, throughout the NT, the term *elect* refers to those God chooses for salvation through faith, no matter what your ethnicity is
That's exactly how Jesus uses it in Lk 18 with the parable of the persistent widow that we just looked at a few weeks ago.

Nobody says that passage on prayer applies only to Jews in the GT and not to us

2. The rapture & Christ's 2nd Coming are one simultaneous event

1 Thess 4:16-17 – the word for *meet* is the Greek word “*apantesis*” which is regularly used in extra-biblical Greek to describe . . .

A welcoming party that goes outside the city gates to meet an honored guest or royal dignitary, and then escort them back to the town
It means – leave to meet, and immediately return with

That's exactly how the word is used in its two other NT occurrences

When the wise bridesmaids *meet* bridegroom, escort him back to his home (Mt 25:6)
When the believers from Rome travel south to meet up with Paul and escort him back to the capital (Acts 28:15)

All of which means that the rapture of believers and Christ's 2nd coming are one event
Since we know his coming is after the GT, so too is the rapture

2 Thess 2:1-3 – Christ's 2nd Coming and our gathering to him (rapture), will not occur until the rebellion happens and the AC is revealed – both of which are during the GT
Meaning – we will go through it

3. We're called to endure for a reason

Rev 13:7 – the beast was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them
Dan 7:25 – the Beast/AC will wear out the saints of the most high

Because of that, **Rev 13:10** says – *Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints* (again in 14:12)

Mt 24:13 – *The one who endures to the end will be saved*

Mt 24:22 – *for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short*

There's no reason for a call to endurance, if we have nothing *to* endure
There's no reason for those days to be cut short if we're not *in* them
We're called to endure in the trib because we're going to be in it

4. We're promised protection – if we're not in it, there's no need for it

In **Rev 3:10**, *I will keep you from* does not necessarily mean taken out of
Keep you from is the key phrase – it can mean a variety of things

But our best clue to its meaning *here*, is found in **Jn 17:15**

It's only other NT text that combines these two words in this same sentence structure
The meaning here (Jn 17:15) is clear – Jesus is not asking that God remove us from the world to guard us from Satan . . . but to *protect* us from him

So it's not unlikely, in fact it's probable, that Jesus intends the same meaning in **Rev 3:10** – we won't be *removed* from the hour of trial and God's wrath during the GT, but *protected* from it

5. The book of Rev applies to the everyone, including the church

Just because the word *church* isn't mentioned after chapter 3, doesn't mean chapters 4-21 don't apply to us

If that were the case, then neither would the passages that refer to *heaven* apply to us

If you employed that method of interpretation consistently throughout the NT, then neither would the bk of Hebrews, Titus, John, Mark, Luke, or 1&2 John apply to us
Nobody in their right mind advocates that

More importantly, though John doesn't use the word *church*, he does use the word *servants* to refer to believers both in heaven and on earth
Clearly, God's servants are his followers, the church

6. Relief for suffering believers is granted when Christ returns, not before
In 2 Thess 1:5-8 – Paul says, I know, you're suffering, no doubt about it
But I want you to know something . . .
God considers it just to grant relief to you who are afflicted [when?] *when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire*
Relief from our suffering, now or in the GT, will be granted when Christ returns in power and glory, *not* in a secret rapture beforehand

7. The NT nowhere says the church will be taken out of the world before the trib
Some people will infer it from the passages we're looking at
But nowhere is it explicitly separated from Christ's 2nd Coming
Those who do so, do so primarily to preserve a distinction between ethnic Israel and the church – something we'll look at in a few weeks

What's more, the pre-trib or mid-trib views that say believers will not go through some or all of the GT, were invented 170 years ago; some as recently as 30 years ago
Which means, if they are true, they were unseen or obscured from the church for over 1800 years

I wish it wasn't the case, but I believe the Scriptures teach that we will go thru the GT – and we need to be ready

When it comes to the GT – Expect much suffering; Expect much deception; Expect to go through it; and . . .

Expect God's protection (Luke 21:16-19)

As children of God, we need not fear
Yes we will suffer, we're not immune from it
But in the end we can expect God's protection in the GT – either by enabling us to persevere and live, or allowing us to die and go to heaven

We've already seen in Rev 3:10 that God will protect us from the hour of trial that is coming on the earth
There are a few instances in Rev where we're spared from the hardship of the GT

But most reassuring is the promise of Jesus in **Lk 21:16-18**
Speaking of this time of GT, Jesus said . . . (read it)
Not a hair of your head will perish
In other words – *they can kill the body but not the soul* (Mt 10:28)

Whether in life or death, if you're a genuine follower of Christ – you can expect God's protection in the GT
It's the same protection you enjoy now because you've been bought/obtained with the blood of Christ through faith in him
He didn't die for you, only to lose you in the end

Be ready to suffer; Don't be deceived; Trust God to protect you