

*Things to Come
and Why They Matter*

An Introductory Study in Prophecy



**Volume 4:
The Tribulation**

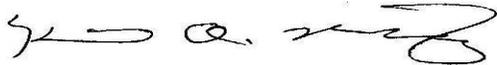
Prophecy Series Sermons

Our sermon series for the summer of 2014 investigated the subject of prophecy. The response by the congregation at Vistoso Community Church was so encouraging, that we are publishing each of the sermons both in booklet form and online on our web site.

These first five sermons are being released in booklet form together with the final five sermons in the series to be added in 2015:

- Volume 1: Two Kinds of Wisdom
- Volume 2: The Kingdom is Coming
- Volume 3: The Second Coming of Christ
- **Volume 4: The Tribulation**
- Volume 5: The Believing Will Be Leaving, Part 1

In His grace,



Kevin Redig, Pastor
Vistoso Community Church

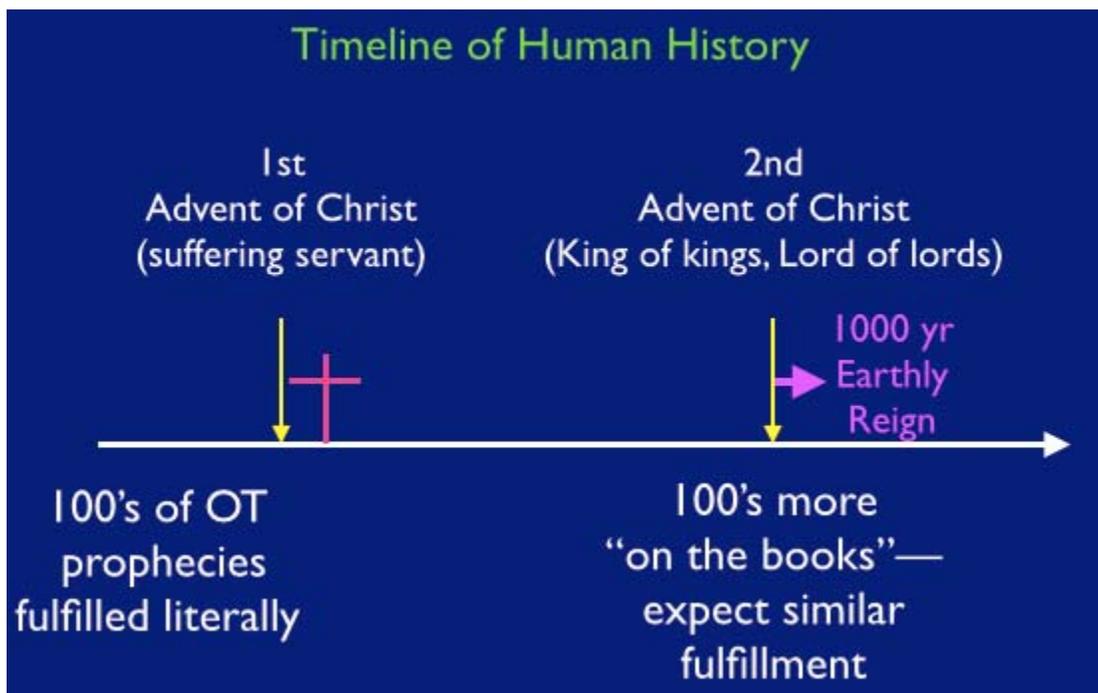


Volume 4: The Tribulation

An Introduction

In our last lesson, we asked and answered the question—what is the most significant event remaining in human history? The answer, of course, was the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords.

After we placed this event on our timeline, we moved forward in time, which caused us to investigate the preparation for and establishment of His earthly reign, often referred to as the Millennial Kingdom, due to its length of 1000 years. Here is an updated view of our “Timeline of Human History” with these events added.



Now our plan for today’s investigation is to once again start with the Second Advent of Christ as a reference point, and this time take a closer look at the events preceding His coming. This will lead us to the darkest and most difficult time in human history. Furthermore, it will also make clear both the consequences of rebellion and how it tragically *plays out*.

Our study today will also set us up to answer the question: Could we perhaps be approaching the time of Christ's coming. In other words, is this time of great difficulty drawing close? Finally, as always, the goal is to: generate hope, motivate towards purity, and instill confidence. I also hope today's content will give us a sense of daily urgency with respect to spiritual things as well as increased boldness to share our faith.

God Made a Point to Tell Us

So let's begin! Recall one of the Scriptures with which we started our study. God delights to:

“. . . declare the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done.” Isaiah 46:8

God has made a point of telling us what is going to come—He has not kept it hidden or secret.

How Does Man Respond? So how does man respond to God's revelations? He has made a regular practice of finding creative ways of *explaining away* fulfilled prophecy or simply ignoring it. For example, consider the now commonly-held view that the book of Isaiah was written by two or even three authors. Although the Jews never believed this to be the case, so-called Bible scholars pushed the idea primarily because the book of Isaiah mentions the king, by name, who would decree Israel's return to the land after her exile. This king was named Cyrus, and his prophetic mention in the book of Isaiah occurs more than 100 years before Cyrus was even born.



Thus, in the thinking of many modern scholars, there is no way for Isaiah to have known the name ahead of time. Therefore, in the reasoning of these scholars, this prophecy was obviously added by another author long after Isaiah had died.

Have you picked up on the unbelief of man? Look again at the quote from Isaiah. This prophecy regarding Cyrus is taken from the very book of the Bible in which God declares His intent to make known to us things to come. But when He does so, man out of hand rejects it as impossible because it would be supernatural.

So what are we to do as Christians?

We are to feel the *weight* of God's track record! What I mean is that we, as believers, are to take into account the immense volume of evidence demonstrating that God is completely capable of declaring to us what He is going to do and then doing it!

From this vantage point of faith, we then move forward, looking for what He has declared about things still to come, and taking Him at His Word.

Where Do We Find God's Information? With that in mind, let's consider the possibility that not only has God declared the details associated with the Second Coming of Christ, but that he has also made known to us the details of that time preceding His coming? Did it please Him to reveal this as well, multiple times and long before it happened?

It turns out, not surprisingly, that He did in both the books of Daniel and Matthew. Let's begin by turning to the ninth chapter of the book of Daniel.

We find Daniel studying his Bible:

"Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the Lord through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem."

Daniel 9:2

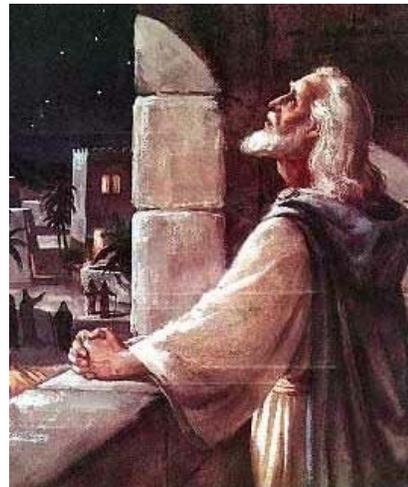
Daniel was also spending time in fervent prayer:

Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.

Daniel 9:3

You see, what Daniel knew from both Jeremiah Chapters 25 and 29 was that the duration of the exile God had in mind for the Jewish nation was a period of 70 years—and he took this prophecy literally! Furthermore, since that time was almost completed, Daniel was compelled to pray fervently on behalf of his people.

(It is worth the time to meditate upon his prayer in Daniel 9:4-20. It is very moving.)



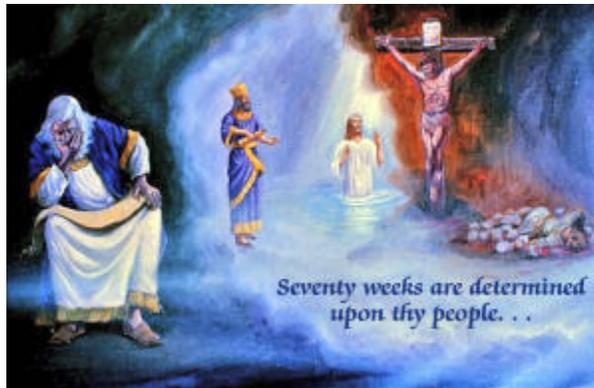
Now Daniel's prayer time is interrupted with a visit from the angel Gabriel, and as he records this event, Daniel gives us one last clue as to what he had been praying about:

"Now while I was speaking, praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God for the holy mountain of my God. . ."

Daniel 9:20

The "holy mountain of my God" is a reference to the Kingdom of God. Daniel is praying about the coming eternal Kingdom and its great King—the prophecy to which he gave voice back in Daniel Chapters 2 and 7, and which we have already briefly studied. Daniel would have known about the prophecy in Isaiah of the suffering servant, but, when given a choice, we all prefer a glorious king over a suffering servant. And as we know from hindsight, the First Advent needed to occur in God's time table prior to His Second Coming.

Do you see what Daniel is thinking? He is hoping the restoration of Israel at the end of the 70 years is going to include the coming everlasting Kingdom and its King. Daniel is going to get an answer to his prayer, delivered by angel, but it is going to be completely different than what he was expecting (and hoping for).



Note, first of all, the way Gabriel begins his report to Daniel in Verse 23: he calls Daniel "greatly loved!" What a testimony to the faithfulness of Daniel to his God over a period approaching 70 years.

Both an answer to Daniel's prayer and additional prophecy regarding the coming King are given in Verse 24:

"Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy." Daniel 9:24

The word translated weeks, actually means *sevens*, and the context determines the duration. Daniel has been thinking in terms of the years of exile, and so it naturally follows that the angel is talking about 70 periods of seven (weeks of years)—or a total of 490 years (70 x 7).

And at the end of this time period, the anointing of the Most Holy will occur, that is the King of kings will begin His reign.

We Must Understand God's Message

Now this would be straightforward, if the prophecy referred to an uninterrupted period of 490 years. However as the text makes clear, it does not.

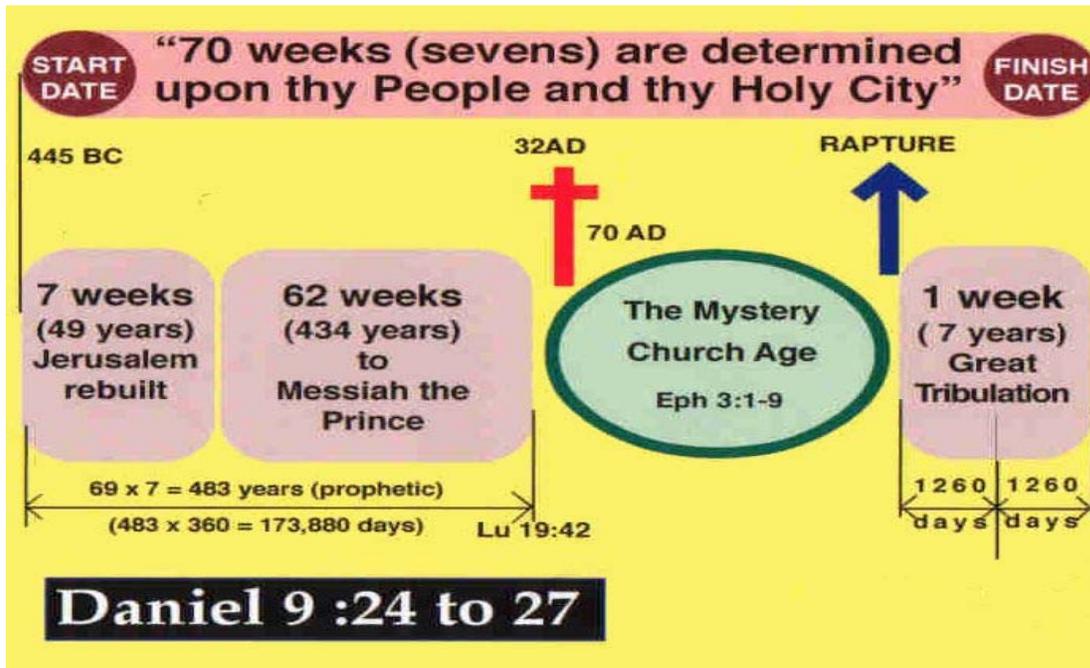
"Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times. "And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined. Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate."

Daniel 9:25-27

Now this is a complex and amazing prophecy upon which volumes have been written. Since the time period just preceding Christ's return is our subject for today, we will have to limit ourselves to a brief summary.

Three Periods

The 490 years is itself broken down into three periods: A period of 7 weeks (49 years); a second period of 62 weeks (another 434 years for a total of 483); and a final week of seven years for a grand total of 490 years.



First Period. The first period of 49 years begins with the decree of Artaxerxes in approximately 445 B.C. to rebuild Jerusalem and ends in rough correspondence with the time of Malachi and the close of the Old Testament.

Second Period. The second period of 434 years is clearly focused upon and related to the coming of Messiah (Verse 25). Is this the coming of the eternal King and Kingdom for which Daniel hoped? It can't be, as Verse 26 makes it clear that the Messiah is "cut off" to close out the second time period. This is a very clear reference to His First Advent and crucifixion.

Now let me summarize an immense amount of debate. There are those who have carefully accounted for the 434 years to come to an end on the very day of the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem before His crucifixion. There are others who disagree with such a precise date. The issue is complicated because of the change from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar, the length of a prophetic year vice a calendar year, and so forth. No matter how much you want to nitpick all of these details, however, the first 69 weeks of years takes us up to the three year ministry of Jesus—perhaps to its very conclusion. And, I want you to see why this is the essential point.

Recall the tremendous pressure the Pharisees brought against Jesus. They became intensely focused on killing Him. They refused to consider His claims, and acted in rank disbelief in the face of many, many miraculous signs. However, what we often fail to realize is the extent of their culpability in rejecting Jesus and its ramifications for the Jewish people.

You see this group had memorized the first five books of the Bible. They were deep students of the Word of God and highly revered it. The Pharisees would have been very familiar with Daniel's prophecies about a coming King and Kingdom and its timetable. The text of Daniel is so clear that every single Pharisee should have been looking for the Messiah! Jesus thought so!

Then, as He was drawing near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen. . . some of the Pharisees called to Him from the crowd, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples" . . . Now as He drew near the city He wept over it. . . For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around. . . and level you, and your children with you. . . they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation." Luke 19:39-44

I suggest you read this passage in its entirety, but do you see what Jesus is saying? The terrible destruction that is going to come upon Jerusalem at the hand of the Romans is because they did not recognize Jesus when He came! And they should have, for God gave them a specific timetable in His Word ahead of time. (See Lk 20:13-16 for another parable that shows the destruction that follows rejection of the Son, and why the Pharisees did so.)

Third Period. Now Verse 27 of Daniel 9 clearly focuses upon the one remaining week of 7 years. Let's not yet worry about the *when*, but instead let's focus on the characteristics of these last seven years. It begins with a covenant with these characteristics:

- The covenant is made by a prince (ruler).
- At the halfway point, 3.5 years later, there is an abrupt change.
- The change involves the end of temple sacrifice and the substitution of an abomination to the Jewish people.



So in summary, here is what we have from the book of Daniel. A timeline consisting of a total of 490 years. 483 of those years have already been accounted for up until the time of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Following the crucifixion, there are still seven years to go, which involve a covenant made with the Jewish people, and the breaking of that covenant at the halfway point of the remaining seven years.

A Big Question about God's Message

This raises a big question—when is the time period of that remaining seven years? The first step in answering this question is to move from the book of Daniel to the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 24. Notice how in Matthew 24:3, the disciples of Jesus ask the very question in which we are interested:

*“Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of
Your coming, and of the end of the age?”*

Matthew 24:3

Jesus answers by describing both a number of signs, and a set of very negative circumstances: wars and rumors of wars; nation will rise against nation; famine, pestilence and earthquake; the love of many will grow cold. Then beginning in Matthew 24:15 Jesus makes a very clear connection:

*“Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation, spoken of
by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place. . . then there
will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the begin-
ning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And un-
less those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved. . . For as
the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also
will the coming of the Son of Man be.”*

Matthew 24:15, 21-22, 27

Did you notice how this ties everything together? First, Jesus clearly relates this back to Daniel Chapter 9. When this time occurs, it will be a time of tribulation which becomes so intense that unless God had cut it short—no one would survive. And this cutting short coincides with the coming of Jesus Christ.

So there we have it—what precedes the coming of Jesus Christ is a period of increasing tribulation, that gets so bad that the coming of Jesus Christ is necessary lest the human race be destroyed. Furthermore, this period coincides with a covenant made with the Jewish people, which is broken halfway through with an event that is an abomination to the practitioners of the Jewish faith.

The general idea in Matthew 24:15-f is captured in the word translated “tribulation” in Verse 21. It is the Greek word *thlipsis*, and refers to the application of pressure, or the squeezing of something. It is for this reason we call this last seven-year period *The Tribulation*, as it very appropriately describes the *pressure* the human race will come under as the judgment of God is poured out.

One Final Piece. We have looked at the Old Testament in Daniel Chapter 9. We have looked in the Gospels to see what Jesus has to say. We have one final piece of the puzzle from the book of Revelation. Beginning in Revelation Chapter 4, we are in the throne of heaven, where the scene involves the worship of the Father as the creator of all things. In Chapter 5 a scroll is introduced—one that is covered with seven seals.



This was typical of important documents in the ancient world such as wills and deeds. The seven seals make it clear that it was a very important document. Of course the question immediately arises, what is contained within this document. Initially there is no one “worthy” to break the seals and open the document—causing John to weep. But then John is told not to weep for there is one who *“has prevailed to open the scroll.”* Who is it that has prevailed and who is worthy to open the scroll?

“. . .in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain. . . He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth. . . Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!" Revelation 5:6-12

He, Who Is Qualified. Who is qualified to open the scroll, and, as we shall see, begin the unfolding of God's judgment upon the earth? None other than the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world—Jesus Christ! Upon reflection this really shouldn't surprise us—for both authority and judgment belong to Him.

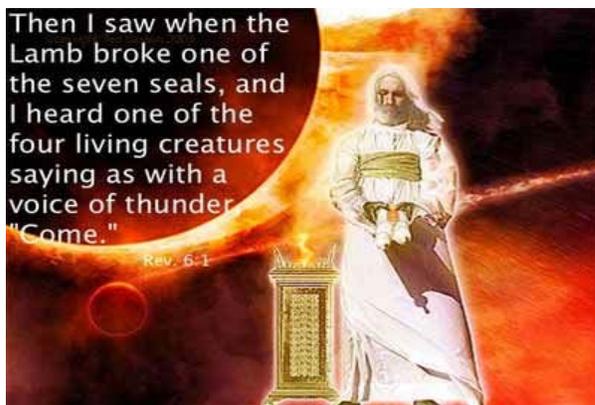
*"All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. . .
Go therefore and make disciples of all nations. . ."*
Matthew 28:18-20

"For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father." John 5:22-23

Now look at how Revelation chapter 6 opens:

"Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals. . ."
(Revelation 6:1)

The scroll contains God's judgment upon rebel angels and that portion of the human race which aligns itself with the rebellion of Satan via a rebellion of its own. The removal of the first seal begins the outpouring of God's wrath, and each successive seal leads to additional judgment.



Revelation Chapters 6-19 contain the unfolding of human history for the final seven years prior to the return of Christ. As the seven seals turn into seven trumpets, which lead to seven bowls—all depicting another phase of God's judgment against the unholy trinity of Satan, the Antichrist, and the False Prophet, and that portion of mankind which is following their leadership.

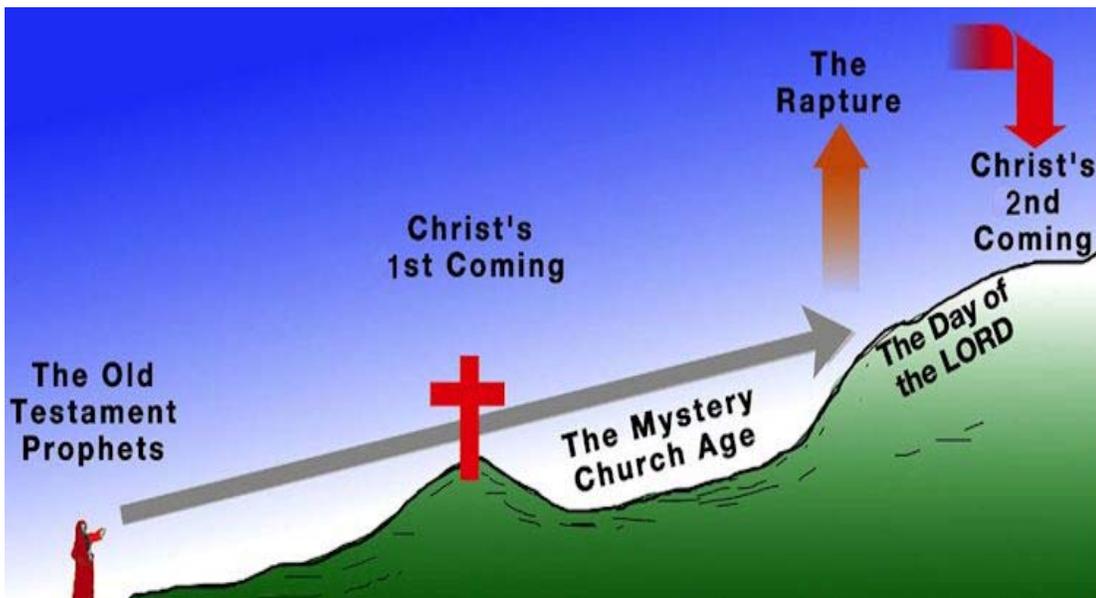
Were we to study out these various judgments in detail, we would find: military conquest, death, scarcity of basic needs, famine, pestilence, natural disasters, cosmic disturbances (searing heat and darkness), direct demonic persecution, and terrible persecution of those who believe in God. In all, over half the earth's population dies. This is the dark, dark, dark ages of

Now I know what you are expecting, that we will start breaking down the details: specifics of the seven seal judgments, the seven trumpet judgments, and the seven bowl judgments. For the most part, that is not where we are going to spend our time. You see, I want to make sure that you have the big picture: God has made known “*the end from the beginning, from ancient times what is to come.*”

The Mystery of the Church

God foretold for us a time period of 483 years from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem until the Messiah would come at His First Advent—and then be “cut off” by means of the crucifixion. Although rejected by His own people, Jesus would be in the plan of God dying for the sins of mankind. And since that time we have been *on hold* until the final seven years prophesied by Daniel, named as a time of Tribulation in Matthew and described in Revelation 6-19.

What is the reason for the hold? The insertion of the Church, that mystery that was not revealed in the Old Testament. As shown below, the Old Testament prophets saw Christ’s First Advent and details of the end times, but the mystery of the church was hidden from them.



Now, during this *holding* period, the Church is the agency through which God is at work calling the lost to Himself. When the final week does come, it is a time of great judgment upon the plans of Satan and all those who have chosen to follow him. What is more, it is judgment that is unfolding from the hand of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

It is a terrible, terrible time—the darkest days of man. If it had not been “cut short” no one would survive. This is all the framework you need. You can investigate the specifics if you have the inclination, but I want us to keep the *big picture* in perspective. We must maintain a panoramic view, so that we might be ready to make application in the day in which we live.

Now the first thing you might be wondering is, “Is there really such a bleak time of judgment as this Tribulation you have described, and have we got the timing correct? After all, we only looked at three passages. Are there any other references to the time of coming tribulation?” Good questions. The following three passages are just a sampling of the many, many passages which talk about the “dreadful day of the Lord”, “the day of wrath” and other synonyms for this time of coming judgment.

“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. . .before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.” Malachi 4:1

Do you see how “great and dreadful” accurately describe what we have labeled *The Tribulation*?

“The great day of the Lord is near. . . The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter; there the mighty men shall cry out. The day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation...” Zephaniah 1:14-15

“. . . how you turned to God from idols. . .to wait for His Son from heaven. . .even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.” 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10

Observations

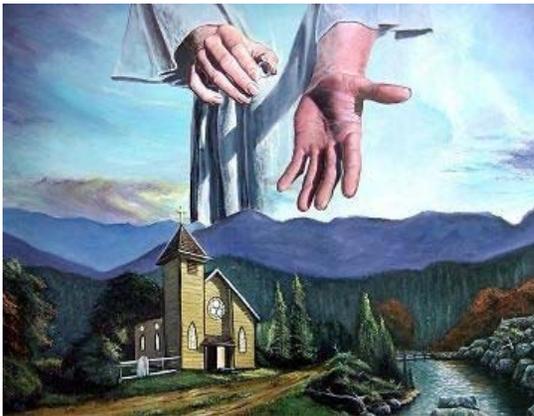
We have gone through a lot of Scripture and much that might be new to you. Let's firm up our understanding by making a few observations and then summarizing.

The Church is Gone. After the scroll is opened and God's judgment begins to unfold against the earth—there is not one single mention of the church. This is very peculiar given the fact that the word translated church is mentioned 19 times in the first three chapters of Revelation. It is also strange given the immense amount of evangelism that is going to occur during the timeframe of the Tribulation.

Consider these excerpts from Revelation 7:

“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, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’ . . . then one of the elders answered, saying to me, “Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?”. . . These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Rev 7:9-10, 13-14

You are probably thinking, “How can there be no Church?” This is a very important question for us, and we will spend time trying to answer it in our next lesson.



For now let me just say there is no mention of the church at all after Chapter 3 until Chapter 19, when the Church is mentioned as the Bride of Christ. At that point, the Church is getting ready to return with Jesus. Somehow, the Bride of Christ got herself to heaven, but does not appear during the Tribulation. Perhaps we can find a hint in what many consider to be a summary of the book of Revelation contained right in the first chapter.

“Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.” Revelation 1:19

John speaks of the vision he has. He speaks of the things which are—the descriptions of the various churches in the first three chapters. And then he speaks of the things that will take place “after this,” as if there is a time period in the plan of God that follows the time of the Church. That’s enough for now, we will investigate more fully in the next lesson.

God is Not Detached. There is a tendency among many professing Christians, even if one does grant God some degree of sovereignty, to make it a kind of detached sovereignty. The Biblical record is exactly the opposite of this.

Here is what I mean. There is a tendency to treat God as a detached observer. History unfolds, and God steps in as needed to straighten things out as best He can. This is the exact opposite of the Biblical record we have just gone through.

In Daniel Chapter 9 and Matthew Chapter 24, God lays out the specifics of what is to come. The scroll in Revelation 6 and following contains the precise judgments that are to come—and nothing begins until the moment Jesus Christ opens the first seal. God is watching everything carefully, and will preserve the elect according to Matthew Chapter 24. When it says He is sovereign over the number of sparrows and the hairs on our heads—it means He is a God of the details and definitely not a detached observer.

The Tribulation Summary

The Tribulation is not a truth we are expected to like, but a reality we are expected to understand. But why this terrible time? How could a loving God bring such terrible calamities on human beings?

A Commonly-Asked Question. This is a very commonly asked question. In fact, it is constantly raised as an issue whenever judgment is the subject. Let me begin to answer this issue by saying that although this is a commonly-asked question, it is not a particularly good question!

How could I say such a thing? Do you remember Revelation Chapters 5-6? From whose hand does judgment start to unfold. It is from the hand of Jesus Christ. But more specifically, recall Revelation 6:1:

*“Now I saw when the Lamb opened
one of the seals. . .”*

This is the ultimate answer to any form of the question, “How could a loving God do such a thing?” Go ahead and bring this question right to the one opening the scroll and beginning the release of judgment. It isn’t just God, but the “Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world.” It is from the hand of the One who died in our place, the One who left His rightful place in heaven to become fully human.



He is the ultimate example of love and knows more about being on the receiving end of unfairness than we could ever imagine! No man will ever be able to bring a charge of unfairness against the perfect Lamb of God or question His love.

Only a small, self-centered person who has rejected the scope of Biblical revelation could accuse the Son of God a lack of love or of unfairness! Let me show you something about the character of God.

*But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious,
long-suffering and abundant
in mercy and truth. Psalm 86:15*

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. 2 Peter 3:9

*He shall judge the world in righteousness, And He shall administer judgment for the peoples in
uprightness. Psalm 9:8*

The Lord, the righteous judge. . . 2 Timothy 4:8

These passages reveal two aspects of God's nature, that is that He is both loving and merciful and will act in judgment toward unrighteousness. If He wasn't both of these simultaneously (and much else), He wouldn't be God! Frankly, the more I study the Biblical revelation about what God is like, the more I move away from asking, "How could a loving God let. . ." and move to the question "How could a holy God ever find a way to redeem and reconcile mankind to Himself?"

A Grand Drama. Let us not forget that history is the unfolding of a grand drama! I am sure you are thinking, "What grand drama?" The greatest creature that ever came from the hand of God revolted against Him. Satan then co-opted mankind—that which was made in the image and likeness of God for fellowship and worship—to follow him instead.



And now the earth groans waiting for deliverance from its bondage to corruption—decreed as judgment for this rebellion. Every disease, natural disaster—even weeds and pests are the result of sin. The inhumanity of man against man that is the history of this planet is evidence of man’s inability to manage himself apart from God.

Now what does a rebel ultimately want? To throw off authority and replace it! This is exactly the plans of Satan as revealed in the 14th Chapter of Isaiah:

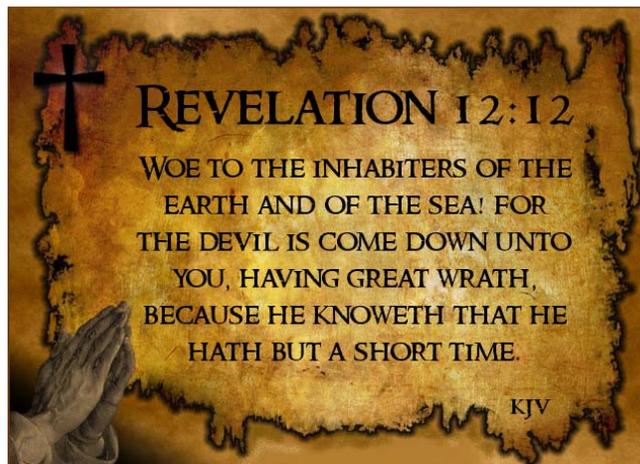
I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. . . I will be like the Most High.”

And the Hebrew of this passage makes it clear that Satan is not trying to set up an independent or benign regime, but steal what God has made and usurp His rulership over creation. And in his vain efforts to rule, he has shown himself to be a brutal, loveless, compassionless ruler—seeking only to use man in his ongoing efforts to supplant God.

Now, rather than instantly snuff out his highest creation, as well as mankind, God has allowed the decision of both to run a kind of trial—almost like a cosmic experiment. The trial is winding down, running its course—the Tribulation is Satan’s last stand while judgment catches up with him. How do I know this? Because Revelation makes it clear that is what is going on during the Tribulation amidst the progressive judgments wrought by the hand of Jesus.

“So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth. . .” Revelation 12:9-f

The passage goes on to declare: woe to the inhabitants of earth. . .; for great is the wrath of Satan. . .; he knows his time is short. (Revelation 12:12) This leads to the unfolding of Satan’s plan to rule the earth through his unholy trinity of the Antichrist (beast), false prophet (another beast), and the dragon (Satan).



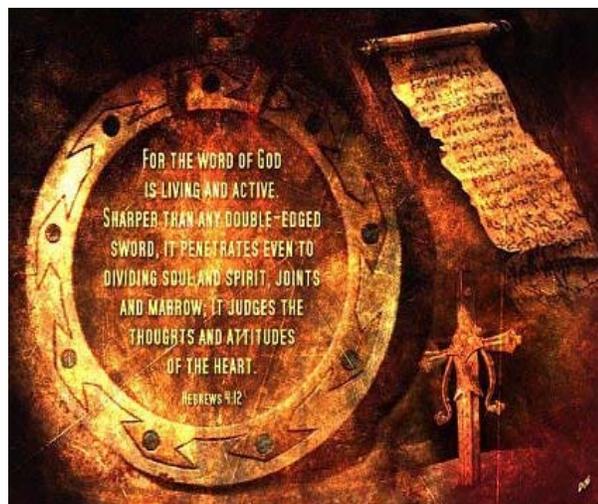
Keep in mind Satan can't create or originate anything—he is simply a counterfeiter of what God has done.

“. . . a beast rising up out of the sea. . . The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority. . . So they worshipped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshipped the beast. . . And he was given a mouth speaking blasphemies. . .and another beast. . .(who) causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast. . . and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.” Revelation 13

And again note that Satan is not a loving, compassionate or fair ruler—he kills those who won't worship him. And so now we see how the Tribulation fits into the overarching story. This is the end of a terrible rebellion and not an arbitrary judgment. Satan is an usurper, leading others astray into his rebellion, promoting false worship, and working to thwart the will of God. Satan uses human beings like pawns to get what he wants, with no regard for their joining him in an eternal damnation that was actually prepared for the devil and his angels—not for human beings.

Man has allowed himself to get caught up in this—he didn't have to, but he did! Nonetheless, God has provided a way of escape, that is a way of redemption. As a result of that plan of redemption, countless millions are going to become part of the redeemed.

Once we understand the *big picture* story-line—what might we predict to occur as human history winds down? The answer: death throes for the one who has plotted to overthrow God and replace Him, and birth pangs for the renewed creation that is going to come. That's what the Tribulation really is—and once we understand this, we begin to realize that it is really a divine necessity. As the rebellion runs its failed course, judgment must finally come from the hand of a just and righteous God!



In Closing

Today's content, the issue of the coming Tribulation, applies to every single person reading this lesson.

For Those Who Believe. For those who have a personal relationship with the Father through the Son, those who know that they are part of the family of God and have assurance of an eternal home with their heavenly Father, what are you waiting for? This is not me speaking, but God through His Word:

Do you not say, "There are still four months and then comes the harvest?" Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest. And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together." John 4:35-36

When is the Lord coming? When is the Tribulation going to begin? I don't know, but I do know we are not yet in this dark and terrible time—and it should give us a sense of urgency to be about the Lord's work while it is still daylight—for the night is coming and terrible it will be.

Do not say, "I'll tell my neighbor, friend, family about the Lord when I get around to it, or when it is comfortable to do so. . . 'Look at the fields for they are already white for harvest."



For Those Who Don't Know the Lord. And then there are those who, although they might be very familiar with religion, don't know for sure whether or not they are a child of God. Or those who are trusting in the good works they have done coupled with their sincerity for their salvation. Look at what John has to say and see if you can find even a hint of works or sincerity anywhere.

"I write this to those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God that they may know they have eternal life."

1 John 5:13

Believe what? Believe that Jesus is the Son of God come to save. He died on the cross in my place and in your place. This satisfied God so that you could be reconciled to Him—could be rescued from the dominion of darkness, Satan's kingdom, and be brought into the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Will you come, in humility of soul, and trust Him? Does it seem like I am imploring you? You are right. For we live in a time of God's gracious restraint—but be aware a time of the unleashing of God's judgment is coming that is going to be like nothing the world has ever seen. Listen to what the Word whispers to us:

"Do not receive the grace of God in vain—in an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you.

Behold, now is the accepted time;

behold, now is the day of your salvation."

2 Corinthians 6:2

You can make it so in the quietness of your own soul by pushing aside whatever you might be trusting in and instead placing your faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Don't lay your head on your pillow tonight until you have been reconciled to your heavenly Father!

Vistoso Community Church

OUR PURPOSE

The purpose of Vistoso Community Church
is to bring glory to God by completing
the work He has given us to do.

John 17:4

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to be used by God to help
the lost receive eternal life,
and those with eternal life to grow
in grace and knowledge.

OUR CORE VALUES

- Christ is the only Lord and Savior. Acts 2:36
- The Bible is the inspired word of God.
II Timothy 3:16-17
- We honor God through traditional worship.
Psalm 19:14
- Our loving fellowship strengthens us.
Hebrews 10:24-25
- Seeking the lost is our commission. Matthew 28:19-20
- The principles of divine establishment are God given.
Nehemiah. 4:14



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