

A Brief Outline of Things to Come

Compiled by Theodore H. Epp

Copyright @ 1952

Moody Bible Institute Chicago

Chapter Five -

THE TRIBULATION

H. A. Ironside

THOSE WHO ATTACK dispensational truth tell us that the Great Tribulation is in the past. They declare that the truth which we have been teaching people for years - that the dispensation of grace, now on the verge of closing, will be followed by the Great Tribulation - is all wrong. They say that it is just a fantastic notion that is unsupported by Scripture. Is the Tribulation in the past, or is it in the future? Let us turn to GOD's Word for the answer to this question.

First we must speak briefly of the seventy weeks of Daniel 9. Having been familiar with these things for thirty three years and having examined very carefully much that has been written contrary thereto, I am absolutely convinced that the seventieth week of Daniel is yet unfulfilled. It is the only view that, to my mind, harmonizes with all the prophecies in Scripture. It makes the Book of Revelation perfectly clear. It explains the difficult things in the Book of Daniel and other prophetic books.

Until one sees the break between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth week, all is confusion. The Great Tribulation is to occur in this seventieth week. I want to show that this is clearly taught in the Word.

Those who teach that the Tribulation was in the past are divided into several distinct schools.

- The Preterists maintain that the Great Tribulation took place at the time of the trouble which the Jewish people passed through when the Roman armies, under Titus, destroyed Jerusalem and wrought havoc throughout Palestine. The Great Tribulation, according to them, began in A.D. 70 and ended a very short time afterward. The Roman Catholic view which is ordinarily held refers to the two hundred or more years of persecution under pagan Rome, which ended with the church's triumph over the paganism of the empire.

- The other view, commonly known as the historical interpretation, holds that the Great Tribulation referred to the period of trial during which those who protested against the Romish dogmas were persecuted.

- Those who are called Futurists maintain that the Great Tribulation has never yet taken place and cannot begin as long as the Church of GOD (born-again believers) is in the world. It will not take place until we have been called to meet the LORD in the air. This is the view that I hold.

We shall now turn to some passages of Scripture and see whether or not it is logically possible to believe that the Great Tribulation is in the past.

In the opening verses of Jeremiah 30 we have a prophecy in regard to the restoration of Israel to the land of Palestine. Scripture shows that they are restored, still in unbelief, to the land of Palestine. Conviction and regeneration take place after the restoration to the land of Palestine, when the Church has been caught up.

In Jeremiah 30:3 - we read:

"For, lo, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the Lord: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it."

This does not refer to the temporary return under Ezra and Nehemiah. **"They shall possess it"** indicates that they will enter into possession of the land, not to surrender it again to any other people.

In verses 4-7 we have a description of the hour of trial that is coming upon the land.

"And these are the words that the Lord spake concerning Israel and concerning Judah. For thus saith the Lord; We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child? wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness? Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it."

Observe that this is not the time of the Church's trouble; it has nothing whatsoever to do with the Church. It is the time of Jacob's trouble. What must be the result? That Jacob is scattered and broken and practically destroyed? No, the very opposite! He is saved out of it. The Great Tribulation will end with the deliverance rather than the scattering of Israel. That does not fit in at all with what took place in the land of Palestine in A.D. 70 and the years that followed. Instead of being saved out of it, Jacob was scattered throughout the entire world as a result of it.

"For it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that I will break his yoke [the yoke of the Gentiles] from off thy neck, and will burst thy bonds, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of him" (Jeremiah 30:8).

They will no more make a servant of him, for he is the true son of David.

"Therefore fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the Lord; neither be dismayed, O Israel: for, lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid" (Jeremiah 30:10).

Daniel 11 gives us a very remarkable prophecy that reaches right down to the end of the Jewish

dispensation, to the "**time of the end**," which is a term used again and again. We read of Israel's sorrows and sufferings under the Antichrist.

There is a description of the Antichrist in Daniel 11:36-39:

"The king shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvelous things against the GOD of gods, and shall prosper till the indignation be accomplished."

We read in Daniel 12:1:

"And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book."

Is it not true that there has never been a time of more dreadful suffering than that which Israel endured under Rome? Read what Josephus says about the horror which the people of Israel endured in those days. Many think that this might be the time referred to. But notice the last part of the verse:

"And at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book."

They were not delivered at the time of the Roman persecution; instead, they were scattered everywhere through out the world. It is dear that this continues until the kingdom.

"And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2).

Some do not think that this is the literal resurrection. It may be the picture we have in the Book of Ezekiel of the dry bones of Israel springing into life, coming up from the dust of the earth (from being scattered among the Gentiles), some to everlasting life, and those who are apostate, to shame and everlasting contempt.

They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever" (Daniel 12:3).

To what time does this refer?

"But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased" (Daniel 12:4).

One sign of the time of the end is that people will run to and fro throughout the world, and there will be an increase of knowledge.

Commenting on these words more than one hundred years ago, Sir Isaac Newton said,

"Personally, I cannot but believe these words concerning the end of the times. One sign of the end will be a remarkable increase in methods of getting about. Men will travel from country to country in an unprecedented manner. There may be some inventions which will enable people to travel much more quickly than they do now." Sir Isaac Newton believed it possible that, as the end drew near, somebody might invent a means of locomotion which would enable people to travel at the astonishing rate of fifteen or twenty miles an hour.

Voltaire said, "See what a fool Christianity makes of an otherwise brilliant man? Here a scientist like Newton actually writes that men may travel at the rate of fifteen or twenty miles an hour. Has he forgotten that if a man would travel at the rate of fifteen miles an hour, he would be suffocated? His heart would stand still."

It was not long until man traveled at the speed considered fatal by Voltaire. He survived. Now men travel at astonishing speeds.

The last part of Zechariah, from chapter twelve to the end, seems to deal almost entirely with this period of great trouble. In chapter 14 we read that Jerusalem itself will be affected.

"Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city."

The Preterist interprets this by a system of accommodation, saying, "Were not the Roman armies the representatives of all nations, all fighting under the banner of Caesar?" That is not what we have here. Here we have the definite armies of all the nations of the world gathered together against Jerusalem in that last great effort. When this takes place, **"then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle."**

Notice the order here - Jerusalem surrounded by the armies of the nations, a time of great distress and trouble, the people crying to GOD for help, and the LORD going forth to destroy the armies (we also see Him in battle in chapter 19 of Revelation) and coming down to earth. **"His feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives"** (Zechariah 14:4).

The Preterist tells us that this has already been fulfilled - that His feet stood on the Mount of Olives before He went up into Heaven. But here He descends at the close of this period of trouble, and His feet stand on the Mount of Olives. What happens? **"And the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south."**

Some years ago there was a great earthquake in Palestine. The Mount of Olives was badly shaken, and many buildings were leveled. Some English scientists investigated this. After making an examination of the geological strata in Palestine, they said, "We have found the occasion of the earthquake. There is a geological fault running through the mountains of Lebanon. It is particularly evident in the Mount of Olives. There is a great shifting of strata; and some of these days there will undoubtedly be a greater earthquake in Palestine, as a result of

which the Mount of Olives will be torn in two."

We not only knew about that long ago, but we also know just what will make it break in two. The blessed feet of our Saviour will again touch this earth, and the moment He takes His stand on the Mount of Olives there will be a great earthquake. The Mount of Olives will be torn asunder at the close of the Great Tribulation. Then Israel will be delivered.

Let us now turn to the New Testament (Matthew 24:21), where we read of events that will take place before His second coming:

"For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be."

How manifestly He chose to use almost the identical language that the angel used in speaking to Daniel in order that we may understand that it refers to exactly the same event!

"And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened. Then if any man shall say unto you, lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matthew 24: 22-24).

Men look for the return of the Lord, and all sorts of false theories are proclaimed.

"For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together" (Matthew 24:27, 28).

The "carcass" will be Jerusalem, the apostate part of Israel found in the land of Palestine. There the vultures, the armies of all nations, will come; and while things are in this condition, the Son of Man will appear.

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect [the elect of Israel] from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matthew 24:29-31).

The Preterists interpret our LORD as depicting the desolation of Palestine under Rome, but did the events here predicted follow the desolation? The historical interpreters tell us that these events took place during the persecution of the Christians under the papacy for something like twelve and a half centuries. When the persecution to an end after the terrible Spanish Inquisition, did events take place? Any student of history knows the answer, which is an emphatic negative.

But let us suppose that everything in verse 29 could be spiritualized

- the darkening of the sun and moon, an eclipse,
- the falling of the stars, a shower of meteorites,
- the shaking of the powers of Heaven;

or suppose that the entire verse could refer to the subduing of a great imperial power. What about verse 30? This verse tells us that the return of the SON of Man will be visible. **"Then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven. . . and they shall see the Son of man. . . ."**

While it is still possible to spiritualize this event, making the return of CHRIST some great spiritual experience, like a revival, we believe that this verse is much more difficult to be twisted and adapted by those who do not want to accept the plain, literal meaning. The simplest possible interpretation is to accept it just as it is.

Now turn to Luke's account and notice a very important distinction there between the Great Tribulation and the sorrows of Palestine under the Romans.

"And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh" (Luke 21:20).

Here, unquestionably, our LORD predicted the destruction of Jerusalem under Titus. This prophecy has been fulfilled with the strictest literality.

We can judge the future only by the past. If prophecy has had only a spiritual fulfillment in the past, it will have only a spiritual fulfillment in the future. But if prophecy has had a strictly literal fulfillment in the past, it is absolutely certain that it will have a strictly literal fulfillment in the future.

Here our LORD prophesied what will come to Jerusalem.

If you are familiar with the history of the fall of Jerusalem, you will know how definitely the events predicted came to pass. We read, **"Jerusalem compassed with armies,"** and in accordance with this, three Roman armies besieged Jerusalem.

"Then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto" (Luke 21:20, 21).

You remember that when Titus was to make his final onslaught, he first proclaimed an armistice and allowed any one who desired to do so to leave the city. He appointed Pella, a mountain city, as a place of refuge for them. Everyone who believed in the LORD JESUS CHRIST and honored His name left the city. There was not a Christian left in that siege. Our LORD gave them instructions: **"When ye shall see [this] . . . flee,"** and they went to Pella for protection.

"For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of

the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled."

Did this tribulation under Titus result in the deliverance of Israel? No, it resulted in the scattering of Israel. Israel was led captive of all nations. Very well, what about the centuries since?

"Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled."

Here is a long period during which Jerusalem, the land or Palestine, and the people of Israel are under Gentile dominion. That period is known as "**the times of the Gentiles**," and it will run until its fulfillment. Then what? How will they know when they have come to the end of that period?

"And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring . . . And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory" (Luke 21:25, 27).

So the Tribulation will come at the end of the times of the Gentiles and will close with the descent of the LORD from Heaven.

What will characterize the time of the Tribulation? It will be the day of Antichrist. The Thessalonians were perplexed and troubled because of the sufferings through which they were passing, and they feared that already they were in the time of the Great Tribulation, which is called "**the Day of the Lord's vengeance**." Paul wrote in II Thessalonians 2:

"Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us [someone had evidently forged a letter from Paul telling them that the Tribulation was already upon them], as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called GOD, or that is worshipped; so that he as GOD sitteth in the temple of GOD, shewing himself that he is GOD."

Someone might say, "The Great Tribulation began when Gregory declared himself to be the head of all the churches of Christendom; therefore, it refers to the papal persecution." However, we have seen that the Great Tribulation will end with the deliverance of Israel and the visible return of our LORD to this earth, a return so literal that His feet will stand in that day on the Mount of Olives. Surely this cannot refer to the papacy, "**who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.**"

If this referred to the papacy, the pope would have to sit in the temple of GOD. I do not believe that St. Peter's Cathedral is the temple of GOD. It is a temple of idolatry. Nor do I believe that the Roman church is the temple of GOD. It is an apostate system. But the temple of GOD is the temple frequently spoken of by the prophets as the temple yet to be built. The Antichrist sits

there and declares himself to be GOD.

"Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? 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" (II Thessalonians 2:5-7).

Some think this meant that the Roman Empire would be dissolved first. Paul was talking about something here that every Christian ought to know, because the Bible reveals it. What hinders full development of evil in the world? The SPIRIT of GOD restrains now. The SPIRIT of GOD is here in the Church of GOD, restraining the full development of evil. Some day the Church will be gone, and the SPIRIT of GOD will no longer be active on earth as a divine Person in the Church of GOD.

"And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders" (II Thessalonians 2:8, 9).

These signs and lying wonders are pictured in Revelation 13.

What will be the outcome when the Tribulation comes upon the earth? A large part of Revelation evidently has to do with the Great Tribulation, ending with the personal appearing of our LORD JESUS CHRIST. It fits so perfectly with what we read of the Great Tribulation that I am sure It is the same time. Not all of Israel are really Israel. It must be regenerated Israel in that day to be really Israel and to be so counted, just as today the Israel of GOD are those who are regenerated.

In the first part of Revelation 7 you have the remnant of Israel.

"And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living GOD: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our GOD in their foreheads [the four angels who are seen sealing the servants of our GOD before the Great Tribulation begins]. And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel."

In the fourteenth chapter of Revelation the Saviour actually appears, and we find that the 144,000, delivered out of the Tribulation, are waiting to receive Him. They form what we might call a royal bodyguard in the coming day when He will establish His glorious millennial kingdom. Israel is sealed by GOD at the beginning of the Tribulation (chap. 7). Israel is preserved for the kingdom at the end of the Tribulation (chap. 14).

The 144,000 are out of every tribe of Israel. No one can possibly be misled about this. Look at the latter part of chapter 7. I do not know whether or not the number 144,000 can be taken

literally.

"After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands" (v. 9).

"And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I [John] said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb" (vv. 13, 14).

"And have washed their robes, and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb."

How are people to be saved in the Tribulation day? Just exactly as they are saved today - through the same precious Blood of CHRIST. Every soul saved in any dispensation, from the day of Abel down to the end of the Millennium, owes all of his blessing to the precious, atoning Blood of the SON of GOD.

"Therefore are they before the throne of GOD, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (vv. 15-17).

The company saved in the Tribulation will remain on earth to share in the millennial kingdom. In Isaiah 49:8-12 we have a prophecy that refers to this very same company:

"Thus saith the Lord, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; that thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Show yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places. They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them. And I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted. Behold, these shall come from far: and, lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim [the ancient name for China].

There will be a vast throng of Gentiles to whom the light will come in those dark days of the Tribulation to prepare them for the glorious kingdom of the LORD JESUS CHRIST.

So I think that the Scriptures looked at, and there are many more than could have been added, are sufficient surely to show us that the Great Tribulation did not take place when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, nor did it take place under either pagan or papal Rome. It will occur immediately before the appearing of the LORD JESUS CHRIST to establish His glorious kingdom in this world. It will not take place before the Church has gone to Heaven. Five proofs of this are listed below:

1. The Tribulation cannot take place before the Lamb opens the book with seven seals. When the seals are broken, troubles begin to come (Revelation 5).

2. The Lamb does not receive the seven-sealed book from the hand of the FATHER until the crowned saints are seen in Heaven. In Revelation 4 and 5 we have the twenty-four elders seated about the throne wearing crowns of gold upon their heads.

3. No saints will be crowned in Heaven until the apostle Paul receives his crown. "**Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing**" (II Timothy 4:8).

4. The apostle Paul and other saints with him will not receive their crowns until the Judgment Seat of CHRIST. It is referred to as "**that day.**"

5. The Judgment Seat of CHRIST is immediately after the Rapture of the Church. JESUS says, "**Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.**"

The conclusion, therefore, is that there will be no Great Tribulation before the Church has gone to be with the LORD. The Rapture must take place before the time of the Great Tribulation can begin here on the earth.

(Reprinted from *The Lamp of Prophecy*, by H. A. Ironside, by permission of Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan)

~ end of chapter 5 ~
