

What Does the Bible Say about 7 Years of Tribulation?

Introduction:

- I We are engaged at this time in a study of Premillennialism. While there are a few different brands of premillennialism, the most popular one today is called Dispensational Premillennialism. This brand of premillennialism is what we are exposing in this series of lessons as being false. We first asked the question, "What Does the Bible Say about the Millennial Kingdom?" We discovered that the Bible says nothing about it. Last week we asked, "What Does the Bible Say about the Rapture?" Again we discovered that, so far as a premillennial rapture is concerned, the Bible says nothing about it. Now in this lesson we ask the question, "What Does the Bible Say about 7 years of Tribulation?" Dispensationalists believe that the Bible says a whole lot about this period of time. In fact, they believe that this period is the most active period of their whole premillennial program.

"The Bible has more to say about the tribulation than any other prophetic time period. During these seven years, the Antichrist will emerge, persecution of new Christians and the Jewish people will ensue, and the great battle of Armageddon and the second coming of Christ will transpire" (Thomas Ice & Timothy Demy, Prophecy Watch).

- II. Before we look at the passages Premillennialists used to support their doctrine, let's get a clear picture of what they believe. Just who are going to be the main players in this tribulation drama?

- **The Jews**

"The first great purpose of the tribulation is to prepare the nation of Is-rael for her Messiah. The prophecy of Jeremiah (30:7) makes it clear that this time that is coming has particular reference to Israel, for it is 'the time of Jacob's trouble'. God's purpose for Israel in the Tribulation is to bring about the conversion of a multitude of Jews, who will enter into the blessings of the kingdom and experience the fulfillment of all Israel's covenants..." (Dwight J. Pentecost, Things to come).

- **The Gentiles**

"During the tribulation frightful judgments will be poured out upon the Gentiles, resulting in utter destruction of their cities and civilization and leading to their complete doom at the time of the return of Christ. During the tribulation, a world government will come into being headed by a dictator of unprecedented evil and guilty of utter blasphemy against the true God. For a time he will hold the entire world in his power, a satanic imitation of the true reign of Christ in the millennial (John Walvoord, The Millennial Kingdom).

- **Tribulation Saints**

“It is also God’s purpose to populate the millennium with a multitude of saved Gentiles, who are redeemed through the preaching of the believing remnant. This is accomplished in the multitude from ‘all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues’ (Revelation 7:9) and in the ‘sheep’ (Matthew 25:31-46) that enter the millennial age” (Dwight J. Pentecost, Things to come).

These are Gentiles who respond to the gospel as preached by converted Jews. Hal Lindsey tells us that during the tribulation period there will be 144,000 Jewish Billy Grahams who engage in evangelistic activity unlike this world has ever seen.

“It is logical to ask at this point, how is he going to make war with the saints when they are gone from the earth? The saints are the people who are going to believe in Christ during this great period of conflict. After the Christians are gone God is going to reveal Himself in a special way to 144,000 Jewish Billy Grahams turned loose on this earth... (Hal Lindsey, The Late Great Planet Earth).

In these statements by leading premillennialists, we see the purpose of the tribulation and those who will be around during this terrible period of time. The horrors of this time period all centers around the Antichrist, who is supposed to be some world dictator in control of the world for a short period of time. We will have more to say about the Antichrist in a future lesson. It is said of him, that he makes a covenant with Israel that lasts for 3 ½ years (the first half of the tribulation period), and then the real trouble begins when he breaks that covenant. He begins to persecute the Jews, causing the Jewish sacrifices to cease (Daniel 9:27), and the saints who are converted to Christ by the preaching of the *144,000 Billy Grahams*. This persecution is going to be, according to millennialists, the worse this world has ever seen. The reason for the persecution is because the Jews and Christians who have turned to Christ refuse to deify the Antichrist, whose true colors are now being revealed to the world.

“All who oppose the deification and worship of the world dictator are subject to persecution. Both Jew and Christian become the objects of this satanic oppression, and many are martyred. The elect are delivered by the return of Christ at the close of the tribulation period.

The Scriptures which present the revelation of this coming tribulation constantly reiterate that it will be a time of trouble without precedent in the history of the world... (John Walvoord, The Millennial Kingdom).

Lesson:**Passages Used to Support the Tribulation Doctrine**

As is the case with so many other pet theories of dispensationalism, the great tribulation doctrine is based on misapplied and misinterpreted passages. Any passage that uses the word *tribulation*, *trouble* or *distress* immediately becomes a potential “great tribulation” passage. Let’s look at some of the passages used by premillennialists to support their teaching of a great tribulation period and see if they can make their case.

A. Deuteronomy 4:30

When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the Lord your God and obey his voice.

“According to this first reference, the tribulation is the occasion for some in Israel turning to the Lord and constitutes a divine preparation for the kingdom which will follow” (John Walvoord, The Millennial Kingdom).

There is nothing in this passage that suggests there is going to be an age or dispensation after the present one in which Jews will suffer great tribulation. Everything Moses warned the Israelites about has already come to pass. They turned from God and were consequently punished for it. God drove them out of the land that He had given them. When did the Jews lose the land that God had given them? The northern kingdom of Israel was officially taken captive with the fall of Samaria in 722/21 B.C. The Southern kingdom fell around 586 B.C. The Jews were scattered and served other gods in the land of captivity. Why should we look for a future fulfillment of this? The premillennialists say it is because these things were to happen in the *latter days* when the Jews were in *tribulation*. First, the reference to *latter days* doesn’t demand a time future from us. The word *latter* simply meant sometime in the future. In Deuteronomy 30:2, Moses spoke of the Jews returning from the captivity under consideration if they would obey the commands that he had given them. Those commandments were, of course, a part of the Law of Moses; thus, the return under consideration would have to take place during a period of time when the Law of Moses was still in effect. That rules out a day future from us since the Law of Moses has long since been taken out of the way (Ephesians 2:14-15; Colossians 2:14). The truth is there are many passages that speak of *latter days* that clearly have no reference to the end of the world (Genesis 49:1; Deuteronomy 31:29; Acts 2:16-17). Second, the word *tribulation* in Deuteronomy 4:30 simply pointed to the difficulty that the Jews would experience during the captivity. There is no scriptural evidence whatsoever that the distress this passage speaks of is anything other than the suffering the Jews endured during Babylonian captivity.

B. Jeremiah 30:7

Alas! For that day is great, So that none is like it; And it is the time of Jacob's trouble, But he shall be saved out of it.

“In the preaching of Jeremiah there is also reference to the tribulation. Not only did Jeremiah predict the Babylonian captivity of the Jews, but he also foretold of a time of yet future trials for Israel. We read of this time in Jeremiah 30:5-9, which is often known as ‘the time of Jacob’s trouble.’”

What is the time of Jacob’s trouble? The whole book of Jeremiah concerns itself with Israel going into Babylonian captivity. This is the clear reference in Jeremiah 29:10-20. The premillennial source quoted above (Thomas Ice & Timothy Demy, *Prophecy Watch*) even admits as much, then without proof or provocation, he refers to Jacob’s trouble as an event sometime in the yet future. What evidence is offered to prove the events under consideration are yet future? None! Contextually, the time of Jacob’s trouble simply refers to the sufferings of the exiled people of Israel in Babylonian captivity. Jeremiah does speak of the two-fold deliverance the Jews would experience: first from the physical sufferings of Babylonian captivity and then a greater deliverance under David their king. David is clearly a reference to the Messiah, that is, David’s descendant who would deliver the Jews from the yoke of the Gentiles and become King of the Jews (Luke 1:32-33, 68-80). Still, in order to get a 3 ½ year period of great tribulation sometime in the future out of Jeremiah 30:7, one has to have a great imagination and ignore the facts concerning the context of the book of Jeremiah.

C. **Matthew 24:21**

For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.

In these passages Jesus does refer to a great tribulation. However, the context shows clearly that the period of time leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem is the period of time under consideration. Denominational scholars have for years misinterpreted this passage as referring to the end of the world. However, the context is clearly referring to the destruction of Jerusalem (**Matt. 24:34**).

Matt 24:34

Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

There are two things that are clear from this verse. First, everything that comes before it was fulfilled in the first century. There is no way getting around it. If language means anything, whatever Jesus is referring to was fulfilled before the generation of people Jesus was talking to passed away. Period. Premillennialist try to get around this by saying that the word *generation* just means race and as long as the Jewish race has not passed away, these can still be in the future. First, the Greek word for generation is never used like that in any of the gospel accounts.

*"Get out your concordance and look up every New Testament occurrence of the word generation (in Greek, genea) and see if it ever means 'race' in any other context. Here are all the references for the Gospels: **Matthew 1:17; 11:16; 12:39, 41, 42, 45; 16:4; 17:17; 23:36; 24:34; Mark 8:12, 38; 9:19; 13:30; Luke 1:48, 50; 7:31; 9:41; 11:29, 30, 31, 32, 50, 51; 18:8; 17:25; 21:32.** Not one of these references is speaking of the entire Jewish race over thousands of years; all use the word in its normal sense of the sum total of those living at the same time. It always refers to contemporaries. (In fact, those who say it means "race" tend to acknowledge this fact, but explain that the word suddenly changes its meaning when Jesus uses it in Matthew 24! We can smile at such a transparent error, but we should also remember that this is very serious. We are dealing with the Word of the living God) " (David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation*, p. 3).*

The second thing that is clear from Matt. 24:34 is that *all these things* refers to the destruction of Jerusalem (**Matt. 23:36; 24:2, 3, 6, 33, 34**).

Matthew 24:21 is just another passage that millennialists take out of context to fit their theory. Well, let's look at one more.

D. Revelation 7:13-14.

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" 14 I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Premillennialists believe that the majority of the book of Revelation is describing for us this terrible period of time.

*"Though other Scriptures allude to the period, the major New Testament revelation is found in the last book of the bible, Revelation, chapters 4-19. Approximately fifteen chapters of the book are used to describe this time of trouble" (John Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*).*

Premillennialists use the book of Revelation extensively. They take *the Futurist* interpretation of the book of Revelation. This means that they hold the position that the events revealed in the book refer to things that will be fulfilled close to the second coming of Christ. In other words, most of the book points to things which were way out in the future from the time it was written. There are several reasons why this method of interpretation is flawed. First, John declared that what was being revealed were things that would come to pass shortly (Revelation 1:1, 3). Any interpretation of the book of Revelation that puts fulfillment of it thousands of years removed from the time John wrote it is at best questionable. Second, if premillennialists are right in their futuristic interpretation of the book, it had very little meaning to the saints of John's day. At the very least, that would be contrary to the nature of every other book in the New Testament. What other book in the New Testament was not written to people of the New Testament?

Such an interpretation is strange indeed. When one starts off with a wrong method of interpretation of the book of Revelation, it is unlikely that he will get to the truth God is revealing in the book.

What tribulation is under consideration in Revelation 7:14? At the present, I am leaning towards the *Historical background* approach to the book. This method keeps in mind that John wrote his message primarily for the encouragement of the Christians of his day and for the most part is historical in nature. The events revealed in the book of Revelation were fulfilled in connection with the fall of the Roman Empire and refer to the persecution of Christians under the reign of the Roman emperors of the first four centuries. The message to the Christians of John's day is that the saints of Christ will have the ultimate victory and God will in the end destroy their persecutor, the Roman Empire. With that in mind, the tribulation referred to in Revelation 7:14 appears to be persecution inflicted upon saints by the evil Roman Empire.

In chapter seven we find that the forces that bring destruction upon Rome are restrained until God's people on earth are sealed (vers. 1-4). The number 144,000 is not to be taken literally. It's figurative in nature. 144,000 is a multiplication of 12 and 1000 (12x12x1000). 12 is a number that symbolizes God's covenant people (12 patriarchs, 12 tribes, 12 apostles, etc.). 1000 is a number that points to completeness (a multiplication of 10). Thus, 144,000 figuratively represent all of the redeemed on earth that are sealed for protection. This sealing does not mean that 144,000 would escape death. It means that they would endure through persecution and be more than conquerors in Christ.

Next, we have in chapter seven a picture of a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, kindreds, people and tongues standing before the throne (ver. 9). Most everyone agrees that these represent all the saved, i.e., the church. It is actually the same group pictured before (144,000) in a different position. The 144,000 are the saints of God on earth sealed for protection during times of persecution and the innumerable multitude are the saints having come out of that persecution pictured in heaven before the throne of God (vers 14-17). Later on in the book of Revelation, 144,000 are also pictured before the throne of God (Revelation 14:1-4), verifying that they are the same as the great multitude.

Now the point of interest to us in this study is determining out of what tribulation the great multitude is coming. As stated above, it appears to me contextually that the tribulation under consideration refers to persecution administered to saints by the Roman Empire. In his commentary on the book of Revelation, Homer Hailey writes:

"...the great tribulation" took place in the Roman period through which the saints contemporary with John were passing, beginning with Nero's persecution (A.D. 64) and continuing until the edict of Constantine (A.D. 313). Those saints are now beyond this life, before the throne of God, having gained the victory. Word of such victory offered tre-

mendous assurance and encouragement to men and women facing trials and death, and likewise encourages all since who face similar tests of faith. The great persecution of this passage was thus confined to the Roman period covering 249 years of Roman-Christian conflict. This view is preferred, since it is in harmony with the theme of the book.” (Homer Hailey, *Revelation, An Introduction and Commentary*).

There are other alternatives. Some believe that the tribulation is a reference to the trouble that would take place just before the destruction of Jerusalem. Those who take that position believe the book of Revelation was written prior to that event around A.D 68. Others believe that the tribulation under consideration is just the general tribulation that saints are told that they will experience (John 16:33; Acts 14:22; 2 Timothy 3:12). But one thing we know for sure, this passage is not alluding to something that would come to pass thousands of years after the people addressed had died. It is not referring to some 7 year tribulation period that takes place sometime in the 21st century.

Conclusion:

So then, what does the Bible say about a future seven-year period of tribulation? NOTHING! Yes, the Bible speaks of tribulation that we all as Christians must experience. Yes, the Bible speaks of tribulation that people had to endure in times past (the Jews and Babylonian captivity, the destruction of Jerusalem and Roman persecution). However, the Bible says nothing about a future dispensation of tribulation caused by the evil rule of the Antichrist. This concept is more speculation made by premillennialists and is without any scriptural support whatsoever.