

## What's the Point?

First, not needing purification, no purpose is served by the Church enduring the Great Tribulation. Second, the focus of the Great Tribulation is Israel and God's focus seems to be either Israel or the Church, never both. (This was explained by James in Acts 15:12-18.) If you take the view that the Battle of Ezekiel 38-39 occurs before Daniel's 70th Week begins, and realize that one outcome of that battle is that Israel turns back to God, (Eze 39:28-29) then you know the Church's days on earth are numbered.

Then there are passages of Scripture that indicate the Church won't be present for any of the end times judgments. Look at these examples: In Romans 5:9 and 1 Thes. 1:10 Paul promised that the Church will be rescued from God's wrath. The Greek preposition translated "from" in both these verses means "from the time, place or any relation to the event." Jesus Himself confirmed this in Rev. 3:10. Speaking through the Church in Philadelphia, He said, *"Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth."* 1 Thes. 5:9 says the Church was not appointed to suffer wrath, and with the seal judgments of Rev. 6 His wrath will have begun. Therefore the rapture of the Church will have to precede Rev. 6.

Also, the 2nd letter to the Thessalonians only makes sense if Paul had taught them the pre-trib rapture view. A careful reading shows that they had received a forgery claiming the Day

of the Lord had come (2 Thes. 2:2) . If Paul had taught a post-trib view their response would have been something like, "The next 7 years will be very difficult, but then the Kingdom will come." Instead it was alarm, such as they would feel upon learning they had missed the Rapture.

## Other Hints of a Pre-Trib Rapture

The period of the Great Tribulation is the most thoroughly documented from a time standpoint of any Biblical event. From various verses it's described as 3 and 1/2 years, or 42 months, or 1260 days long. These are all equivalent times. It begins the day the anti-Christ stands in the Temple in Jerusalem and proclaims himself to be God and it ends 1260 days later. How do you have a "secret rapture" at the end of the Great Tribulation when any knowledgeable believer will be able to mark the day of its end on his calendar?

The Sheep and Goat Judgment of Matt 25:31-46 clearly portrays events following the Second Coming as the Lord establishes His Kingdom on Earth. The sheep are symbolic of believers and the goats of non-believers. The judgment concerns people who have survived the Great Tribulation. Sheep go into the Kingdom (Matt. 25:34) and goats go into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41). There couldn't be any sheep on Earth for this judgment if all believers had just been taken away.

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*(Written by Jack Kelley)*

Those who ignore the study of end times prophecy are fond of quoting this famous line which appears in various forms in Matt. 24:36, Matt. 24:42,44, Matt. 24:50 and Matt 25:13 as their justification. But earlier in the same passage, the Lord had admonished all who would read His words of prophecy to understand them (Matt 24:15) and elsewhere the Apostle Paul wrote that the events leading up to the end of the age should not take believers by surprise (1 Thes. 5:4) implying that we should have done enough homework to see them coming.

Since the Bible cannot contradict itself, these passages must have been aimed at different audiences. And sure enough, a closer look reveals that to be the case. In Matt. 24:36, Matt. 24:42,44, Matt. 24:50 and Matt 25:13 the Lord was only speaking to people remaining on Earth at His Second Coming, while in Matt. 24:15 he was issuing a warning to those who would be living in Israel early in Daniel's 70th Week. We know this because He mentioned a Temple which doesn't exist yet. Of course in 1 Thes. 5:4 Paul was addressing the Church.

What Paul was saying is that while we won't know the exact timing of things, we should

understand the sequence of events leading up to the Day of the Lord. And perhaps no event in the sequence is more important than the Rapture of the Church, especially as it relates to the Great Tribulation. That being the case, it seems to me that the first thing we should do in trying to understand all this is to clarify two things. One is the purpose of the Great Tribulation, and the other is the nature of the Church.

### **The Purpose of the Great Tribulation**

The phrase Great Tribulation makes reference to a defined period of time, not a general condition. While the Lord warned the disciples that tribulation (trouble) would be characteristic of life in this world (John 16:33), He clearly identified the Great Tribulation as having a specific beginning and end. It will begin when the abomination that causes desolation predicted by Daniel is erected in the Temple (in the middle of the last 7 years of history) and will end just prior to the Lord's return, three and one half years later (Daniel 9:24-27, Matt. 24:15-21).

Daniel's prophecy is pointedly Jewish in its perspective and so is the Great Tribulation. Until the Lord coined its New Testament name in Matt 24:21 it was referred to as the Time of Jacob's Trouble in the Old Testament, and the Old Testament is where its purpose is explained.

In Jeremiah 30:1-11 the event is foretold and in the last verse its purpose is explained.

*"Though I completely destroy all the nations among which I scatter you, I will not completely destroy you. I will discipline you but*

*only with justice; I will not let you go entirely unpunished."* The idea is that Israel has to be purified to receive their coming King, and the nations who rejected the King and persecuted His people must be destroyed.

The timing of the passage is also made clear. It will take place after Israel is re-gathered in the land, and will result in David becoming their King again (Jere. 30:8-10). There have been two re-gatherings since the passage was written, but the first, beginning in 535 BC, didn't result in David becoming their King. In fact they have had no legitimate King at all since about 600 BC. Neither were all the nations completely destroyed then.

The second re-gathering began after World War 2 and continues to this day. Though the population of Israel keeps growing, so do the Jewish populations of all the nations to which the Jews have been scattered. In fact there are about as many Jews outside of Israel as there are in the land. All that will change when the Lord calls all His people to return to their Promised Land following His victory in the Battle of Ezekiel 38-39 (see Ezekiel 39:28).

Because of this amazing victory the Jewish people will restore their national covenant with God, build a Temple in which to worship Him, and Daniel's missing 70th week will begin.

So the purpose of the Great Tribulation is two-fold; discipline (purify) the people of Israel so they'll be prepared for the coming Messiah, and completely destroy the nations to which they had been scattered.

### **The Nature of the Church**

According to Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, the Church is nothing less than a new race of mankind, coming from among both Jews and Gentiles but sharing a destiny with neither (Eph. 2:15-16). The problem had always been that God could not dwell in the midst of His creation. The sins of the people eventually drove Him away. At the cross, He reconciled all things to himself, things in heaven and on earth (Col 1:19-20). This meant that He can now be at peace with His creation for the first time since the Fall of Man. He accomplished this by paying the price for all the sin of mankind. Now, for anyone who would accept it, a full pardon for behaviour past, present and future is available, free for the asking (Matt. 7:7-8).

Accepting this pardon qualifies any person, young or old, Jew or Gentile, good or bad to become a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). And it permits God to look upon this person as if he or she is without sin altogether; and in fact as if he or she had never sinned to begin with. It also required the division of mankind into three groups: Jew, Gentile and Church. (1 Cor. 10:32)

It's critical that we understand God's perspective. To Him the Church is without sin, holy and blameless, and has been since the cross (Ephes. 5:25-27). Whatever sins we as individuals have committed (or will commit) have been forgiven and forgotten. It's as if they never happened (Eph. 1:4-8). At the cross, the Church became as pure and holy as God Himself (2 Cor. 5:21), so finally God has a people with whom He can live in peace.