

The Tribulation

The Day of the Lord

The Day of the Lord is a major term in prophetic Scriptures, occurring nineteen times in the Old Testament and four times in the New Testament. In addition, the more general phrase "that day" or "the great day" is found over seventy-five times in the Old Testament.

The Day of the Lord is primarily associated with the judgment of the tribulation period (cf. Zephaniah 1:14-18). Zechariah 14:1-4 shows that the Day of the Lord also includes the second coming of Christ. 2 Peter 3:10-13 seems to include the entire millennial age with this period.

The Day of the Lord therefore includes the tribulation, the second coming and the millennium. (Isaiah 2:12-22; Jeremiah 30:7-9; Joel 2:28-32; Amos 9:11; Zephaniah 3:11-20; Zechariah 12-14; 2 Peter 3:10). However, the Day of the Lord may sometimes refer to a portion of this entire period and not the entire time. It will begin suddenly and unexpectedly (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:2), precluding all date-setting and encouraging us to be prepared for His imminent return.

Source of the Tribulation

While God may use Satanic forces or evil men to carry out the wrath, the Scripture teaches the tribulation is ultimately the wrath of God (Zephaniah 1:18; Revelation 6:16-17; 14:10; 15:7; 16:1). Therefore this period differs from all other tribulation not only in intensity but also in its source - from God Himself.

Description of the Tribulation

This period will include tribulation unprecedented in history (Matthew 24:21). The Scripture describes the tribulation as a time of:

- Wrath (Zephaniah 1:15-18; 1 Thessalonians 5:9; Revelation 6:16-17)
- Judgment (Revelation 14:7; 15:4; 16:5-7; 19:2)
- Indignation (Isaiah 26:20-21; 34:1-3)
- Trial (Revelation 3:10)
- Trouble (Jeremiah 30:7; Zephaniah 1:14-15; Daniel 12:1)
- Destruction (Joel 1:15; 1 Thessalonians 5:3)
- Darkness (Joel 2:2; Amos 5:18; Zephaniah 1:14-18)
- Desolation (Daniel 9:27; Zephaniah 1:14-15)
- Overturning (Isaiah 24:1-4, 19-21)
- Punishment (Isaiah 24:20-21)

Purposes of the Tribulation

- To prepare Israel for her Messiah (Jeremiah 30:7).
- To purge unbelieving Israel (Ezekiel 20:37-38).
- To pour out judgment on the unbelieving Gentiles (2 Thessalonians 2:12; Revelation 3:10).
- To bring a conclusion to the times of the Gentiles (Luke 21:24), which began when Jerusalem fell into the hands of the Gentiles in 586 B.C.

The Time of the Tribulation

The time and duration of the tribulation period can be seen from Daniel 9:24-27, where a chronology of Israel's history is predicted in the prophecy of the seventy weeks.

1. The Importance of Daniel 9:24-27

It establishes literal interpretation of prophecy, for the first sixty-nine weeks were fulfilled literally. This a strong argument for the final week being similarly fulfilled. Also, it affirms the truthfulness of Scripture, in that the first sixty-nine weeks were accurately fulfilled.

2. The Length of the Tribulation

The tribulation period will be seven years long from Daniel 9. The "sevens" or "weeks" refer to years because:

- Daniel previously thought about years (9:1-2).
- Any normal interpretation of 9:24 shows these events could not transpire in only 490 days.
- The word used for "sevens" or "weeks" is used elsewhere in Daniel 10:2-3 where it clearly means three "weeks" of days. In this instance the author goes out of his way to identify these as days.
- Genesis 29:27-30 - a week is said to be seven years.
- The fulfillment of the first sixty-nine weeks with the Messiah occurs in 483 years.

3. The Timing of the Tribulation

There is a gap between the 69th and 70th week of Daniel 9:24-27 because:

- The text says the death of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem is to come after the 69th week (9:26). There must be a gap even with those who say that the tribulation or seventieth week refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.
- The events in 9:24 are unfulfilled in history, for sin still abounds.
- It is common in the Old Testament for an unseen gap to occur in prophetic time. Examples are Isaiah 9:6; Zechariah 9:9-10; Luke 4:16-21 quoting Isaiah 61:1-2.

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- In Matthew 24:15 Christ places the abomination of desolation just before His second coming, but Daniel places it in the middle of the 70th week. Therefore the 70th week is still future.

The final decree by Artaxerxes for the restoration of Jerusalem by rebuilding the cities walls (cf. Daniel 9:25) was issued on March 5, 444 B.C. (Nehemiah 2:1-8). Therefore, the first sixty-nine weeks covers from this decree until triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem.

The first seven weeks or forty-nine years (Daniel 9:25) is somewhat obscure but possible refers to the time the rebuilding of Jerusalem was finally completed (c. 395 B.C.).

For more information see Harold Hoehner's Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ.

People of the Tribulation

1. The 144,000

In Revelation 7 the 144,000 are set apart by God for a special ministry at the outset of the tribulation. It is likely that the multitude of Gentiles come to faith through their ministry (Revelation 7:9-17). In Revelation 14 the 144,000 are pictured at the end of the tribulation when the kingdom is established. They are called "the first-fruits of God and to the Lamb", preserved through all that the earth experiences so that they will be the first of the harvest to enter the kingdom and populate the millennial earth.

2. The Two Witnesses

Revelation 11:3-12 describes the ministry of two witnesses. Some have believed these two people are Moses, Elijah or Enoch. However, it seems that the Scripture does not identify them other than as two men raised up by God as special witnesses, to whom sign-working power is given.

3. Elijah

Malachi 4:5-6 predicts that before the Messiah will come Elijah will come first. This is why Jesus said that John the Baptist was Elijah but they did not recognize or accept him (Matthew 11:2-14; 17:11-13). We can expect this prophecy to be fulfilled as promised in Malachi.

4. The Beast

The beast is the head of the ten kingdom Gentile federation. He will appear at the beginning of the Day of the Lord to rule all nations. He will conquer Jerusalem and set himself up as a god. His end will be the lake of fire upon the second coming of Christ (Ezekiel 28:1-10; Daniel 7:7-8, 20-26; 8:23-25; 9:26-27; 11:36-45; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-10; Revelation 13:1-10; 17:6-14).

5. The False Prophet

In close association with the beast will be the false prophet (Revelation 19:20; 20:10), called the second beast in Revelation 13:11-17. He also is moved by Satan and is under the authority of the beast, promoting worship of the beast. He has economic power as well a religious power, controlling commerce and performing signs and miracles.

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6. Antichrist

The word "antichrist" appears only in the epistles of John (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7). The emphasis is not on a future revelation of an individual, but rather on the present manifestation of false doctrine and opposition to Christ. This opposition, resulting in a lawless system which has been developing throughout the church age, will provide the environment for the beast to rise to power upon the rapture of the church.

The word "antichrist" is in contrast with "false Christs" in Scripture. False Christs (Matthew 24:24; Mark 13:22) affirm themselves to be the Messiah, whereas antichrist has opposition to Christ in mind more than replacing Christ.

Events of the Tribulation

- The seven year tribulation period will begin with the signing of the false covenant (Daniel 9:27) by the man of sin (2 Thessalonians 2:3). This will be preceded by the translation of the church (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; 1 Corinthians 15:52).
- The trials of the first half of the seven years will include false peace, famine, plagues, wars, earthquakes (Revelation 6; Matthew 24:4-8). Also, the two witnesses (Revelation 11:3-13) who enjoy a spectacular ministry will be put to death.
- The midpoint of the tribulation will see great persecution (Revelation 12:12-17; Matthew 24:9), due to the desolator of the temple (Revelation 13:1-10; Matthew 24:15; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-7), who will cause Israel to flee from the land (Matthew 24:16-20).
- This abomination which causes the desolation is the man of sin or antichrist (Daniel 7:23-26; 9:25-27; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-9; Revelation 13:1-15). He will be established in Israel as the political and religious ruler. He will break his covenant (cf. Daniel 9:27) and proclaim himself to be God (Matthew 24:15; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4; Revelation 11:2).
- Unbelieving Israel will be deceived by the false prophet (Revelation 13:11-18; Matthew 24:11) and fall away from the faith (Matthew 24:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:11). However, believing Israel (the 144,000 of Revelation 7) along with the Gentile converts, will carry the gospel of the soon coming Messiah to the world (Matthew 24:14). Many of these messengers will be martyred (Revelation 6:9-11).
- The tribulation period will climax with the battle of Armageddon (Revelation 16:13-16), where the armies of East and West will battle around the mountains of Megiddo. The Messiah will return with the armies of heaven to conquer the armies of earth (Revelation 19:11-21) and to bring an end to the period of tribulation (Matthew 24:30-37).
- In accordance with Old Testament prophecies (Deuteronomy 30:3-4; Ezekiel 20:37-38; 37:1-14) there will be a regathering of Israel to the land (Matthew 24:31). This will occur as the Lord returns to restore the redeemed nation (Isaiah 59:20-21; Ezekiel 20:33-44; Zechariah 13:8-9; Romans 11:25-27). The Gentiles will be gathered before the Lord (Joel 3:2) and the "sheep" (saved) will be separated from the "goats" (Matthew 25:31-46).