

TRIBULATION - Can you escape it?

By

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Along with other sensational views of prophecy is one involving a “great tribulation.” Many debate the question: will believers have to endure this “great tribulation” or will they be “raptured” before it comes?

Jesus spoke of a time of great tribulation in his answer to questions concerning the fall of Jerusalem. The disciples were admiring the Temple, which was idolized by the Jews for its majestic beauty. Jesus shot down their idol with his statement, “Verily I say unto you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down” (Matt. 24:2). Then the disciples asked two questions; one about the time of the destruction of the temple, and one about his coming and the consummation of the age.

In answering the first question Jesus predicted the fall and destruction of Jerusalem and said, “For then shall be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be” (Matt. 24:21).

This prophecy was **completely fulfilled** in 70 AD, and is graphically described by Flavius Josephus, who was an eye-witness to the events and wrote a detailed account of them in his “*Wars Of The Jews*,” which was published about 75 AD while the events were still fresh in the memory of the survivors.

Goaded on by the militant Zealots, forerunners of modern Zionists, the Jews began widespread rebellion against Caesar in 65 AD. Cestius Gallus marched the Roman army into Judea, subduing a number of towns and laying siege to Jerusalem. When the Jews were already defeated and about to surrender, Gallus suddenly withdrew his troops, as Josephus says, “Without any reason in the world.” This withdrawal gave the Christians the opportunity to flee from the city, in compliance with Christ’s warning.

Jesus had told them that when they should “See the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place, then let them that be in Judea flee unto the mountains.” Luke’s record reads, “When you shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let the which are in Judea flee to the mountains” (Luke 21:20-21. See also Mark 13:14).

Christians recognized the Roman armies as the “abomination of desolation,” and when the armies temporarily withdrew, the Christians fled the city to Pella and other places beyond the Jordan. This advice to flee to the mountains was for those disciples living in Judea at that time and not to any Christians today.

Nero then appointed Vespasian to take command, but before he could do so other events took place and Vespasian was hailed as emperor of Rome, and his son, Titus, took control

of the armies. He immediately renewed the siege with vastly superior forces. It was then that the great tribulation began. The Jews who had never believed the prophets or Christ, that their nation would be taken from them because of unbelief and disobedience, suddenly found themselves under a total siege and with supplies completely exhausted.

The rebellion was widespread and Jews were being slaughtered all over the country. In Caesarea alone over 20,000 were killed in one day. Josephus wrote, "Galilee was all over filled with fire and blood."

In Jerusalem the Zealots were in violent conflict with the conservative element so that the city was filled with bloodshed among brethren. Zealots "fell upon the people as upon a flock of profane animals, and cut their throats" (Josephus). More than 12,000 prominent citizens died in this way. "The terror that was upon all the people was so great, that no one had courage enough either to weep openly for the dead man that was related to him, or bury him...those that mourned for others soon underwent the same death with those for whom they mourned" (Josephus IV 5:3).

Famine was so complete that "the lanes of the city were full of the dead bodies of the aged; a kind of deadly night had seized upon the city." Food was snatched from the hands of the aged by the children and from the mouths of babies by the mothers. The disagreeing factions invented horrible and unmentionable means of torture to discover where any food was hidden. One woman of prominence killed and roasted her own infant son, and there was evidence of other acts of cannibalism in the city.

The atrocities were a fulfillment of God's warnings given centuries before: "Jehovah shall bring a nation against thee from far...which shall not regard the person of the old nor show favor to the young...and they shall besiege thee in all thy gates until thy high and fenced walls come down...And thou shall eat the fruit of thy own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters..." (Deut. 28:49-57).

When the Roman armies entered the city they slaughtered the starving citizens without mercy. A soldier entered the temple with an unborn baby on the tip of his spear, and the temple was set afire. All the gigantic stones were thrown down in order to extract the gold that had melted and run into the cracks. There were over 1,100,000 that perished and 97,000 taken as slaves, many of them being sold in Egypt.

Thus was fulfilled the prophecy of Jesus concerning the great tribulation. Paul had written earlier of "the Jews who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us...to fill up their sins always: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost" (1 Thess. 2:14-16). History records no greater tribulation ever visited upon a city.

What made the suffering more horrible was the fact that the worst atrocities were committed by citizen upon citizen. According to Jesus, nothing in history was to equal the misery and suffering of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

But this doesn't mean that Christians can escape tribulation. The word translated "tribulation" is "thlipsis" (Greek). It is used some 45 times and in 32 of those references it refers to tribulation upon believers because of their faith in Christ. Jesus said, "In the world you shall have tribulation" (John 16:33). Paul wrote that "through many tribulations we just enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22), and that "we glory in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation works patience" (Rom. 5:3). Jesus spoke of those who receive the word but have no root, and "when tribulation or persecution arises" they give up (Matt. 13:21).

The same word (thlipsis) is often translated "affliction," which Christians are told to expect (Mark 4:17; 1 Thess. 1:6, 3:3). Paul also wrote that these afflictions are light, compared with the eternal weight of glory (2 Cor. 4:17).

Christians have been martyred for their faith from the beginning. Millions suffered and died under the tyranny of communism. Christians suffered and died under Hitler's regime. The press, largely owned or controlled by Jews, made up the fantastic number of 6,000,000 Jews said to have been slain under Hitler. But historians, including Jewish scholars, have shown that this could not have been the case, and the number of Jews after Hitler was about the same as before. The press continues to exploit the mythical number of six million with no evidence for it, but completely ignores the Christians and others who suffered in Nazi camps, and is completely silent about the millions who have been murdered by the Communists, as well as Christians still persecuted for their faith throughout the world. Tribulation goes on.

The "great tribulation" mentioned by Jesus is past, but tribulation will continue for those who live as "children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom (they) are seen as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15-16). Peter wrote of "fiery trials" which Christians undergo (I Pet. 4:12). Paul wrote that we are "appointed" to such afflictions because of our faith (I Thess. 3:3). The more we seek to live according to the will of God, the more we will be at enmity with the world and subject to tribulation, in which Peter said we are to rejoice "in so much as you are partakers of Christ's suffering," and "at the revelation of his glory you may rejoice with exceeding joy" (1 Pet. 4: 13). To those who live by faith, Christ gives peace in the midst of tribulation, and the strength to endure it, knowing that "if we suffer with him, we may also be glorified with him" (Rom. 8:17). Jesus promised: "In the world you have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (Jn.16:33).

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