

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA. 55:10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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THE GREAT TRIBULATION

In the study of NEW TESTAMENT TIME PERIODS (SEED AND BREAD, Issue No. **SB023**) "the great tribulation" was set forth as being a time period that follows the kingdom of God and which precedes the thousand years of His parousia (personal presence). More accurately this time period should be called "Israel's Seventieth Week," since it is the final seven-year period of that long span of time concerning which God said through Daniel, "**Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city**" (Dan. 9:24). And to be yet more exact, the great tribulation covers only the last three-and-one-half years of this seven-year period. The fact that this occurs after the kingdom of God comes as a shock to many who have been taught that this introduces it. They cannot comprehend why "this terrible time of wrath" should come at the close of the serene and glorious days of God's government.

That God will intervene and establish His government over the earth and its inhabitants is a truth that is held by most men who know and believe the Bible. However, almost without exception, it is also believed that this blessed condition will never come to pass until there has been a divine outpouring of wrath that will eclipse anything that mankind has ever experienced before. This is declared to be "a time of God's fierce anger." In it He is set forth as displaying a fiendish and foolish cruelty which will far exceed all the cruel and unusual punishments that men have ever created in the long and sorrowful record of man's inhumanity to man.

This time of wrath is usually called "the great tribulation:" a term that has been lifted from the Word of God (Matt. 24:21), embellished with every possible crude idea of sadistic torture, then used in a mystical manner to support every wild statement made by present-day prophets of doom. This

concoction of wrath is then directed toward Israel as being God's punishment of them for their long rejection of Jesus as the Messiah, and as a means to bring them to their senses and to an acceptance of Him.

The teaching that a great display of fierce anger is the first work of God, when He resumes His prophetic program, is illogical, unreasonable and unscriptural. An honest consideration of the prophecies concerning the future of Israel will show this.

If a study is made of every prophecy related to the future of Israel (a task I have undertaken numerous times), it will be seen that the future of the seed of Abraham is one of great blessing, not one of cruel punishment. And while it is true that certain individuals will need to be purged from among them (Ezek. 20:38), this is far different from indiscriminate wrath being poured out on all of them. The divine prophecies concerning Israel tell of a long dispersion (an accomplished fact) followed by a regathering; of punishment followed by a blessing. Today, we can review the history of Israel and say: Israel has been dispersed, the next thing is for Israel to be regathered; Israel has been punished, the next thing is for Israel to be blessed; Israel has been long out of her land, the next thing is for Israel to be restored to her land. These facts are made clear by many prophecies. One in Ezekiel 34 is an example of this.

For thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I, even I, will both search My sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out My sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. And I will bring them out from the peoples; and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel. I will feed My flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God. Ezek. 34:11-15.

From this passage it can be seen that Israel is in a state of dispersion and disorder when this work of God. in their behalf begins. And He does not begin by tearing them to pieces as a wolf would do when it is among the sheep. A divine order is established by this prophecy. Note the words: searching, seeking, delivering, bringing, feeding, binding, resting, and

strengthening. This passage is sufficient to demonstrate that the next thing in view for the seed of Abraham is regathering, restoration, and blessing.

Today, the average teacher and preacher of prophecy will hear to none of this. They see no immediate future for the seed of Abraham. According to the present popular and somewhat antisemitic interpretation of prophecy, Israel's present expectation from the hand of God is a frightful and fiendish torture, more cruel and unusual than Satan or man has ever yet devised. As said before, this time of torture is usually described as 'the great tribulation:'

This time is described by one teacher as being, "a time of unprecedented suffering that is to come upon the world in general and Israel in particular." Another calls it, "the hour of earth's matchless agony"; and still another describes it by saying, "In character it is absolutely without parallel as to its destructive and terrifying effects, and it is world wide."

The Book of Revelation, chapter 16 to 18, is held by these men to describe this time of divine torture in exquisite detail, and it is to this portion that they go for proof of its frightful character. From these chapters they gather such terms as famine, earthquakes, blood, fire, locusts, and scorpions; and this horrific potpourri is screamed out at audiences in the hope that someone will be frightened into rushing to Christ for deliverance from it. In fact vivid and lurid descriptions of the great tribulation have become a stock in trade of many so-called evangelists.

These men never stop to consider that a divine idiom is used throughout these chapters of Revelation which is mostly incomprehensible to us now, but which will be clearly understood when mankind stands on the threshold of the day of the Lord. And if any disagree with this, then let them explain. what is meant in Rev. 14:20 by, "**and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs**" (about 180 miles). Sixteen hundred furlongs is the length of Palestine.

It is a well-known fact of life that once men are committed to a certain position they are not inclined to give consideration to any facts that may militate against it. This seems to be especially true of those who through public declarations, both spoken and written have committed themselves to the idea that the next great work of God will be to remove all believers from the earth, then pour out upon those who remain all the pent-up wrath that He is supposed to have been accumulating over more than nineteen centuries. And yet, if men would carefully think upon this, they would realize that such

a display of wrath does not make sense. It would accomplish no good purpose, neither would it be just, inasmuch as most sinners have passed on and thus have escaped it.

The idea that God is going to accomplish His declared purposes for Israel and the world by plunging all mankind into a time of unprecedented torture, torment, and suffering is an idea that God Himself has declared to be senseless. **"Why should ye be stricken more? Ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint."** These are His words in Isa. 1:5. Thus, God Himself has declared that any further punishment of Israel would accomplish nothing so far as bringing them back to Himself is concerned. And it would go beyond the demands of divine justice since she has already received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins (Isa. 40:1). Whatever God may be doing now, whatever Israel may be experiencing now, they are not being punished for sins either past or present. In this the dispensation of God's grace, every act of His toward Israel is one of love and favor to the undeserving.

Since Israel's condition was then, and still is, a condition of the head and heart (Isa. 1:5), further punishment would result in their "revolting more and more." To punish them more would be the same as flogging a sick man because of his illness. Therefore, God must do more than exact a penalty for sins committed if they are ever to be brought into harmonious relationship with Him. In the declaration that follows, He tells what He is going to do.

And I will turn My hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin (alloy): And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, the city of righteousness, the faithful city. Isa. 1 :25,26.

In view of these facts, I insist that we need to restudy, to rethink, and to reevaluate the entire subject of "the great tribulation:" I would suggest the following truths as a help in so doing.

Whatever "the great tribulation" may be, it is **"the time of Jacob's trouble"** (Jer. 30:7). Because of this divine description, and because of the locale of the events described in Matt. 24, we have reason to believe that this will be limited to the land of Israel and to the nation there at that time. And since it is declared in advance that "he shall be saved out of it" (not decimated in it), we have no doubt as to its outcome.

It should also be noted that even though it is limited as to locale it is also described as, "**the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth**" (Rev. 3: 10). This description provides a definite clue to the meaning, nature, and purpose of the great tribulation. This will be considered in another study on this subject under title of THE GREAT TESTING.

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