

Peter's Epistles #25

Personal Tribulation

(also available on-line at Ichthys.com)
by Dr. Robert D. Luginbill

Faith →  → Salvation

Translation of 1st Peter 1:6-9:

In anticipation of this ultimate deliverance, your joy overflows, though at present it may be your lot to suffer for a time through various trials to the end that your faith may be shown to be genuine. This validation of your faith is far more valuable than gold, for gold, though it too is assayed by fire, ultimately perishes. But your faith, when proven genuine in the crucible of life, will result in praise, glory and honor for you at the glorious return of Jesus Christ. Though you have never laid eyes on Him, yet you love Him. And though you cannot see Him at this present time, yet you have faith in Him. For this reason you rejoice with an inexpressible joy that bespeaks the glorious future to come, when you shall carry off in victory *the ultimate prize – the deliverance of your lives* – which is the very purpose and objective of this faith of yours.

Introduction: Before leaving this second paragraph of First Peter chapter one behind, we need to address two further issues which are inextricably linked to each other: (1) *personal tribulation* (the intensification of the “various trials” mentioned above in verse six), and (2) *personal salvation* (the “ultimate prize” of verse nine, and the *result* of faith). Our primary concern in this lesson will be the first point, personal tribulation, but *since the goal of personal salvation is reached by the passage of our faith through personal tribulations*, it will be helpful to give a brief account of the ultimate prize before we address personal tribulation directly.

The Ultimate Prize of Personal Salvation: Salvation, “the deliverance of your lives” (as Peter declares above in verse nine) is, as the apostle Paul confirms, every believer’s primary purpose and ultimate objective:

Don't you know that all the runners in the stadium run the race, but that only one receives the prize? Run in such a way so as to achieve what you are after. And again, everyone involved in competition exercises self-control in all respects. Those athletes go through such things so that they may receive a perishable crown of victory, but we do it to receive an imperishable one. So as I run this race of ours, I'm heading straight for the finish line; and as I box this bout of ours, I'm making every punch count. I'm "pummeling my body", one might say, bringing myself under strict control so that, after having preached [the gospel] to others, I might not myself be disqualified [from receiving the prize we all seek].

1st Corinthians 9:24-27 (cf. Phil.3:12-16)

And how is the prize attained? How is the victory won? As in our passage, by *faith*:

This is the victory which overcomes the world: *our faith*.

1st John 5:4

To achieve the ultimate prize of salvation, this final "crown of victory", *our faith* must continue to endure, safely negotiating the trials of life and coming through the fiery furnace of this world without being destroyed. To be ultimately victorious, *our faith* must be refined rather than incinerated by the experience of life. This prize of salvation we shall surely have the means to attain *if we but continue to follow the Lord with a genuine faith*, be it as tiny as a mustard seed when we first take up our cross to follow Him. For He will faithfully supply all our other needs in this life and death struggle:

My God will supply all of your needs according to His glorious wealth in Christ Jesus.
Philippians 4:19

Don't worry. Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.
Matthew 6:31-32

In an earlier lesson (#22), we have examined the biblical teachings concerning the believer's testing in time. Testing, as we have seen (1Pet.1:6-7 above), is the lot of all true followers of Jesus Christ, proving the genuineness of their faith, and is a constant in the life of faith:

Indeed, all who wish to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.
2nd Timothy 3:12

Yet there are times in the lives of all believers when that testing becomes so severe that it seems to pass beyond the level of mere testing. Such “fiery trials” of Christian testing and suffering we may legitimately term “tribulation”, for they are truly periods of intense spiritual conflict which may challenge our faith to its very roots.

Beloved, don't be alarmed at the fiery ordeal which has befallen you and is putting you to the test – as if something out of the ordinary were happening to you.

1st Peter 4:12

At such times of *personal tribulation*, we believers must call upon all our reserves of faith built up in our walk of faith. Otherwise we are in danger of suffering the fate of the one whose “plant of faith” has insufficient roots so that it withers in the face of “tribulation or persecution on account of the Word”:

And he who was sown on the rocky places, this is the one who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy. He (i.e. his faith; cf. Lk.8:13) has no roots, however, but lasts only a short time. So when tribulation or persecution occurs on account of the Word, he is immediately tripped up (cf. Lk.8:13: “becomes apostate”).

Matthew 13:20-21

Faith must move *through* such times to reach the promised deliverance. According to biblical Christianity (in contrast to paganism), our basis for confidence must remain not *our own* works, but our faith in Jesus Christ *and His work* on the cross for us. All God asks of us is that we continue to trust Him and follow Him. In times of acute pressure, in times of *personal tribulation*, however, the maintenance and perseverance of faith may require an unusual degree of fortitude.

Courage Under Fire: When we become Christians, we embark upon a wondrous new journey destined to change our lives forever:

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, that person is a *new creation*. Prior things have passed away. Look! *New things* have come.

2nd Corinthians 5:17 (cf. Gal.6:15; Eph.4:23-24)

By the power of God, we find ourselves instantly transferred out of this kingdom of darkness into the glorious kingdom of the Son of God (Col.1:13), becoming the very heirs of God the Father Himself (Rom.8:17; Gal.3:29; Eph.3:6; Tit.3:7). But this shift of status is positional. That is to say, the temporal effect of our new citizenship is not to be overtly felt or seen until the literal, physical establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven at the return of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. So as marvelous as our new status of “sons of God” truly is, it does not spell an end to our struggles here in the devil’s world. In fact in many ways our real struggle is only just beginning at the point in time in which we become believers in Jesus Christ. Here on earth, the

devil is still in charge, and by shifting our allegiance to Christ, we can expect to incur Satan's wrath (1Pet.5:8):

We know that *we* are from God, but that *this entire world* lies in the power of The Evil One.

1st John 5:19 (cf. Lk.4:5-6; Jn.16:11; 2Cor.4:4; Rev.11:15)

The Bible is clear. We can expect to encounter resistance if we attempt to follow Christ, and, at times, we should expect that opposition to be severe:

[They were] strengthening the hearts of the disciples, and encouraging them to remain in the faith, and saying "We must pass through many tribulations to reach the Kingdom of God".

Acts 14:22 (cf. Jn.15:20; 16:33; 2Tim.3:12)

Jesus told us to "count the cost", that is, to recognize before becoming His disciples that we should anticipate a very difficult time of things (Lk.14:25-43). As a matter of course, the devil and his minions oppose us and all our attempts *to daily pick up our cross* and follow Christ (Lk.9:23), which image clearly evokes the suffering for which His true followers are destined:

And if we are God's children, then we are also His heirs, even fellow heirs of Christ – that is *if we have indeed suffered with Him* so that we might also be glorified together with Him.

Romans 8:17 (cf. Acts 5:41; 2Cor.1:5; Phil.3:10; Col.1:24; 1Pet.4:12-13)

So we should not be surprised to find every single forward pace of spiritual growth met with resistance from our enemy. We must face the fact that for our entire Christian lives we are going to be under "enemy fire", and all the more so to the extent that we actually begin to lift our heads up out of our foxholes and move forward in the way Jesus has shown us by His example. Therefore if we do truly seek to grow spiritually and to help others to do likewise (through whatever ministries God has given us), we will surely have *personal tribulation* as a result. To survive such opposition requires "courage under fire", that is, a *strength of faith* capable of withstanding the satanic resistance we are destined to face:

And at all times take up *the shield of faith*, with which you will be able to quench all the fiery missiles of the Evil One.

Ephesians 6:16

Personal Tribulation: As we have noted often in the past, the testing of our faith is an essential ingredient for spiritual growth (see especially lesson #22). The issue (as we have seen) is discussed in detail by Peter in the context of the first paragraph of 1st Peter we are studying here, and it is Peter's treatment of the subject which has occasioned our study of this subject. The Greek word used in the New Testament for personal tribulation is *thlibo*, and means literally to

press hard and constrain within narrow limits, a definition which gives us a vivid preview of what is in store for those who profess faith in Jesus Christ.

As Christians, we are going to be *tested*.

As Christians, our faith is going to be put under *pressure*.

As Christians, we are going to be subject to the devil's *assaults*.

And while we can expect a certain degree of opposition on a more or less daily basis, it is also true that certain tests we will undergo will be extreme, often striking unexpectedly and with hurricane force. Such tests are truly in the category of tribulation, *personal tribulation*, and we need to be prepared to deal with these intense and extreme challenges to our faith.

Principles of Personal Tribulation:

1. Personal tribulation is **not unusual**:

Beloved, don't be alarmed at the fiery ordeal which has befallen you and is putting you to the test – as if something out of the ordinary were happening to you.

1st Peter 4:12

2. Personal tribulation is **survivable**:

You have not suffered any testing beyond normal human [experience]. And God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tested beyond your capacity, but will give you a way out along with the test so that you can bear up under it.

1st Corinthians 10:13

3. Personal tribulation has **no alternative**:

[They were] strengthening the hearts of the disciples, and encouraging them to remain in the faith, and saying “We must pass through many tribulations to reach the Kingdom of God”.

Acts 14:22

4. Personal tribulation is **necessary** to purge and refine our faith:

In anticipation of this ultimate deliverance, your joy overflows, though at present it may be your lot to suffer for a time through various trials to the end that your faith may be shown to be genuine. This validation of your faith is far more valuable than gold, for gold, though it too is assayed by fire, ultimately perishes. But your faith, when proven

genuine in the crucible of life, will result in praise, glory and honor for you at the glorious return of Jesus Christ.

1st Peter 1:6-7

5. Personal tribulation is a sign of spiritual **maturity** (and its lack a sign of immaturity):

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of compassion and all encouragement, the One who encourages us in all our tribulation so that we in turn may be able to encourage those in all types of tribulation by means of the very encouragement which we ourselves received from God. Because as our sufferings for Christ multiplied in service to you, so through Christ did the encouragement we received multiply to the same degree. So if we are experiencing tribulation, it is to provide you with encouragement and salvation. And if we are being encouraged, it is for the sake of the encouragement you have received, which is now at work in your successful endurance of the same sufferings which we also experienced. And so our hope for you is a solid one, since we know that as you have become partakers of suffering, in the same way will you also become partakers of encouragement.

2nd Corinthians 1:3-7

You have not yet resisted to the point of [having to shed your] blood in your struggle against sin.

Hebrews 12:4

6. Personal tribulation can even be a source of **joy**:

Then [the council] called the apostles back in. After they had them beaten, they released them, commanding them not to speak in the name of Jesus. So they went forth from the council rejoicing, because they had been deemed worthy to suffer dishonor on behalf of His name.

Acts 5:40-41

7. Personal tribulation often comes at the **worst possible time** (for the devil picks his spots):

Be sober and alert. Our adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, looking for someone he can devour. Resist him, strong in your faith, remembering that your fellow believers in this world are undergoing the exact same sort of suffering.

1st Peter 5:8

8. Personal tribulation makes us **stronger**:

Not only this, but let us also boast in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation develops endurance, and endurance results in proven reliability, and that such reliability brings with it hope [of eternal reward].

Romans 5:3-4

Historical Examples of Personal Tribulation: Past, present and future eras provide ample illustrations of the severe persecution of believers in Christ. As far as individuals are concerned, we can say with assurance from the evidence of the four Gospels that no man suffered more on account of devotion to God than did our Lord during His earthly ministry:

As predicted in Psalm 22:12-18:

(12) [Like] many bulls they have encircled Me. [Like] strong bulls from Bashan they have surrounded Me. (13) They open their mouths against Me [like] roaring lions about to pounce on their prey. (14) I am poured out like water, and all My bones are being stretched apart. My heart has become like wax. It is melting inside of Me. (15) My strength is evaporating like a broken piece of pottery, and My tongue is sticking to the roof of My mouth [with thirst]. For You (cf. vv.1-2) have set Me ablaze in the dust of death. (16) For they have surrounded Me [like] dogs. [This] congregation of evil-doers has encompassed Me. They have pierced My hands and My feet. (17) I can count all My bones. [While] they look on and stare at Me, (18) they are dividing up My clothes for themselves, and for My garments they are casting lots.

As predicted in Isaiah Chapter 53:

(1) Who has believed our report? And to whom has the Arm of the Lord (i.e., the Messiah) been revealed? (2) For He grew up before Him like a suckling plant, like a root [springing up] from dry ground. He had no [particular] handsomeness that we should take note of Him, no [obvious] charisma that we should be taken with Him. (3) [On the contrary,] He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with suffering. Like a person people hide their faces from, He was despised, and we did not hold Him of any account. (4) For He bore our sicknesses and He carried our weaknesses. And yet we considered Him as [the One who had been] punished, smitten and afflicted by God. (5) But [in fact] He was made subject to torment on account of our transgressions, and He was crushed because of our collective guilt (lit., “guilts”). The punishment [required] for making peace [with God] on our behalf [fell] upon Him. Because of His wounding, we have been healed. (6) We have all gone astray like sheep. Each of us has turned to his own way. And the Lord caused the guilt of us all to strike Him. (7) Though He was oppressed and afflicted, like a lamb led to slaughter He did not open His mouth, and like a ewe before her shearers He did not open His mouth. (8) By repressive judgment He was taken away, and who gave any thought to His posterity? For He was cut off from the land of the living. He was punished for the transgression of my people. (9) And they assigned Him a grave with the wicked (pl.) and with a rich [man] in His deaths (sic). Not for any violence that He had done. Nor was there any deceit in His mouth. (10) For it was the Lord's good pleasure (i.e., “will”) to crush Him, to subject Him to torment. But though you make His life a guilt offering, He will see His seed, He will lengthen His days, and the good pleasure (i.e., “will”) of the Lord will prosper in His hand. (11) [Released] from the trouble [inflicted] upon His life, He will [again] see [the

light of life] and be satisfied (i.e., in resurrection). My righteous Servant will provide righteousness for the great [of heart] (i.e., believers) through the[ir] acknowledgment of Him, and He Himself will carry their guilt (lit., “guilts”). (12) Therefore I will allot to Him [the plunder] among [His] many [brothers], and He will apportion plunder to the mighty [among them]. Because He lay bare His life unto death, and was dealt with as transgressors [are], so that He bore the sin of the many, and substituted [Himself] for the transgressors.

As we follow in His footsteps and imitate His example, we can expect to come in for similar opposition. When Paul tells us to be imitators of him as he is of Christ (1Cor.11:1), he is certainly not excluding our “sharing in the sufferings of Christ”, and, besides our Lord, no man suffered more for his Christian faith than did the apostle Paul:

As explained in 1st Corinthians 4:9-13:

Now I think that God has made us apostles appear to be the lowliest of men, as though we had been condemned to death, for we have become a sort of public amusement for the whole world, both for angels and for men. On account of our service to Christ we are regarded as imbeciles, while you are regarded as clever merely for belonging to Christ. We are seen as weak, you as strong. You have your share of honors, while we are dishonored. Right up to this very moment we continue to suffer hunger and thirst and nakedness and beatings and homelessness, though we work hard, laboring with our own hands. We ask God’s blessing on those who curse us. We bear with those who persecute us. We comfort those who slander us. It is as if we have become the trash of the world, everyone’s rubbish to this very moment.

As explained in 2nd Corinthians 11:23-28:

These men are servants of Christ? I must be deranged to say so. But even if that is their claim, mine is stronger. I have served through severe difficulties, too numerous to mention. I have been imprisoned too often to recount. I have been beaten excessively, and have often been in danger of losing my life. On five occasions I received from the Jews the “thirty-nine lashes”. On three others I was beaten with the [Roman] lictor’s rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked – once left to float in the water for an entire day and night. I am constantly journeying and continually in danger – dangers from river-crossings and dangers from bandits, dangers from my own people and dangers from all other nationalities, dangers in cities and dangers in the country, dangers on the sea and dangers from pseudo-Christians. My lot has been one of laboring and toiling, often doing without sleep, of going hungry and thirsty, and often lacking any sustenance whatsoever, of braving the cold, though lacking adequate clothing – and on top of all these external things there is this pressing concern I constantly feel for all the churches.

Though we shall all not be called upon to “share the sufferings of Christ” (2Cor.1:3-7) to the degree that Paul did, we too must be ready to face our own challenges, challenges which may be quite difficult to bear. *Personal tribulation* belongs to all believers, not just the exceptional believers of Paul’s ilk. To prepare for the trial of *personal tribulation* and to endure its assault, a consideration of the experiences of other, every-day groups of believers who have faced opposition before us may prove helpful. After all, as the writer of Hebrews makes abundantly clear, believers of the past often faced severe persecution for their faith:

Now what shall I say more? For time would fail me, were I to go on and relate the stories of Gideon, Barak, Sampson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through their faith defeated kingdoms, accomplished acts of righteousness, received the fulfillment of promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, fled the mouth of the sword, were made strong in weakness, were made powerful in war, defeated enemy armies – women even received back their dead. Some were tortured, refusing release, preferring resurrection as a better result. Others endured ridicule and beatings, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, sawed in half, killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goat hides. They were deprived, persecuted, abused. The world was not worthy of them. They wandered the deserts and the mountains, making their homes in caves and fissures in the earth.

Hebrews 11:32-38

The Recipients of 1st Peter: Occasionally in the history of believers on the earth, *personal tribulation* has fallen upon entire communities of the faithful in periods of general persecution. This was certainly the case for the first century community of Christians in Asia Minor who comprised Peter’s audience. As we mentioned at the very beginning of this series (lesson #1), the persecution of the Christians at Rome undertaken by Nero in ca. A.D. 64 would not have been without its effect upon the provinces of the Roman Empire. The Roman historian Tacitus describes that awful pogrom in vivid terms. Attempting to deflect responsibility for the great fire which burned for several days and destroyed much of the city of Rome, Nero, seized upon the Christians as scapegoats, subjecting them to an obscene variety of inhuman tortures. For their faith alone, believers were crucified, burned alive, and thrown to wild dogs while wrapped in animal skins.

While the scant historical references which have survived from antiquity give few details about the systematic, Empire-wide persecution that followed the troubles at Rome, it is probable that the suffering mentioned in 1st Peter was indeed a direct result of those horrible events which occurred in the capital, events about which Peter would have had first-hand knowledge. For, as we have seen, 1st and 2nd Peter were probably written from Rome about the same time (with Peter himself likely being martyred after this savage round of persecution, sometime toward the end of Nero's reign in A.D. 68).

The Example of the Jerusalem Church: Though we may lack specific details of the course and extent of the Nero's persecution of the Church in the provinces of the Roman Empire, there is ample testimony in the book of Acts (in addition to many references to persecution in the epistles such as the ones we are in the process of studying) of the difficult path that 1st century Christians had to tread. The community of believers based in Jerusalem offers a prime example of the effects and course of such persecutions at the original center of Christianity:

- The Jerusalem believers were shunned and subjected to economic isolation and persecution (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35; 11:28-30; 24:17; Rom.15:25-28; 1Cor.16:1-4; Gal.2:10).
- Their leaders were beaten (Acts 5:41-42), imprisoned (Acts 12), stoned (Act.7:57-60), and otherwise executed (Acts 12:2-3).
- The believers themselves were later grievously persecuted, driven from Jerusalem, dragged from their homes, imprisoned and executed (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1, 9:13).
- The faith of many of them was severely challenged by these events (Jas.1:2-7; cf. Gal.3:4; 1Thes.2:14). Some years after the crises had passed, the writer of Hebrews recalled the severe testing they had undergone:

Remember the days gone by, when you first saw the light, when you persevered through that terrible trial of abuse. For you were publicly exposed to humiliation and persecution, and shared the lot of others who experienced the same. You supported those in prison, and accepted the confiscation of your belongings with joy, because you knew you possessed a more valuable estate, and a more lasting one. So don't throw away this conviction of yours – it leads to a great reward. You need to keep persevering so that you may carry off in victory what has been promised – after you have accomplished God's will. For yet a little while, how short, how [short the wait], and He who is coming shall come, nor will He delay. "Then shall my righteous one live by his faith, but if he shrinks back, My heart takes no pleasure in him." Now we are not possessed of cowardly apostasy which leads to destruction, but we have faith which leads to [eternal] life.
Hebrews 10:32-39

The Challenge of Living in a Pagan State: The experience of the Jerusalem believers gives us some idea of the difficulties involved in living as a Christian in a state whose very foundation is intrinsically linked with idolatry and the worship of demons. The problems extended beyond the Jerusalem church. Indeed, from the description given by John in Revelation chapters two and three of the pressures upon the seven churches of Asia Minor, it seems clear that most first century Christians faced potential persecution every day.

That these early believers were in constant danger of being treated as criminals for their faith is born out by the letters of Pliny the younger. We have preserved for us from antiquity one

particularly interesting letter of Pliny (while he was governor of the Roman province of Bithynia in Asia Minor) to the emperor Trajan. Writing ca. 112 A.D., Pliny was requesting instructions about how to deal with the Christians in his province. Specifically, Pliny asked the emperor if merely acknowledging the name “Christian” was a sufficient offense for legal action, a question that indicates clearly enough the perils of being a believer in that time and place. Trajan replied that while Pliny should not actively seek out the Christians, once any persons had been identified as such *they should be executed* if unwilling to recant and make proper sacrifice to the emperor.

This vulnerable situation left the early Christians open to persecution for any number of malevolent motives, whether personal (as in the case of the jealousy evoked by the response of Gentiles to the Gospel: Acts 17:1-5), or economic (as in the case of the persecution of Paul and Silas at Philippi, Acts 16:19; and also in the case of the riot at Ephesus for fear that the new faith would undermine the trade in statuettes of the goddess Artemis, Acts 19:23-41). Nor was it easy to avoid the all-pervasive pagan influence of Roman society. To give but one example, if a person were involved in business or a trade, it would be very difficult to remain uninvolved in the appropriate local *collegium*. The *collegia* (from which we get our English word “college”) were trade and business organizations that served a wide variety of functions including those met in our society today by local business clubs (like Rotary, Kiwanis, Chamber of Commerce), professional organizations (like AMA for doctors, or the Bar for lawyers) and labor unions. Inasmuch as they combined these varied functions, it is easy to see why a Christian businessman or craftsman who didn’t belong to the applicable *collegium* would have a difficult time being successful, and an even harder time remaining inconspicuous. The problem is that all such *collegia* were dedicated to the relevant pagan god in each case, and the rites of membership included sacrifice, sacred meals, and other forms of idol worship, all of which are strictly forbidden for Christians (cf. Ex.23:13; Jos.23:7; Ps.16:4).

Thus believers of the first century not only had to cope with all the pressures and temptations of a society every bit as depraved as the one in which we live today, but they also had to be ever on their guard against the constant danger of persecution on the one hand, and compromise on the other. In such an environment, personal tragedies and setbacks would have been all the more onerous: ***only strong, positive faith would be able to endure such severe distractions to spiritual growth.***

For these early believers, the phrase *personal tribulation* would have had added significance. The irony is that those formative years were some of the most vibrant and electrifying that the Church of Jesus Christ has ever experienced, giving proof to the famous adage of Tertullian that “the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church”. This was certainly the case for the church at Jerusalem, for Luke tells us that the persecution they suffered had a direct, positive effect on the growth of Christ’s church:

And so they were scattered, and went off in different directions, giving the gospel wherever they went.
Acts 8:4

The Pattern of Future Persecution in the Tribulation: It is, of course, wrong to assume that the *personal tribulation* we shall encounter as believers will never again be part of a general persecution for our faith. Foxe's Book of Martyrs, for instance, gives a very graphic account of the terrible persecution suffered by many believers during the Reformation. And martyrdom still goes on today. In totalitarian countries (such as China) and in theocratic states (such as the Sudan) believers are at this very time suffering persecution and even death for their faith in Jesus Christ. We would also be wrong to assume that such things could never happen in our own country. For when God removes the current divine restraints on lawlessness, the entire world will be plunged into great tribulation (2Thes.2:6-12; Rev.6-8).

For those days will be a **Tribulation** such as has never been before since God's creation of the world even until now – and shall never be again.

Mark 13:19

This “tribulation” is a translation of the same Greek word (*thlipsis*) we have been translating as *personal tribulation* in our study heretofore:

In the world you do have **tribulation**. But be courageous. I have overcome the world.

John 16:33

The character of the future Great Tribulation (Matt.24:21; Mk.13:19) – a period which all of us alive today may potentially be called upon to endure – serves warning of the degree of stability of faith required to weather the apocalyptic storm: Some of the trends prophesied for that harrowing last chapter of history show that it will be a time of

- Great “apostasy” as believers fall away from Lord in unprecedented numbers (Matt.24:9-14; 2Thes.2:3; 1Tim.4:1).
- Intense military conquest (Dan. chap.7, 9, 11; Ezek. chap. 38-39; Rev.6:2; chap. 13).
- Civil disorder (Rev.6:4).
- Severe economic hardship (Rev.6:6).
- General famine, plague and assorted natural disasters resulting in catastrophic loss of life (Rev.6:8; Is.13:12).
- Monolithic pagan religion, hostile in the extreme to biblical Christianity (Rev.13).
- Widespread martyrdom of true believers in Christ (Rev.6:9-11).
- Extreme supernatural judgments upon the earth (Rev.6:12ff.; 9:1ff.; 16:1ff.).

The Great Tribulation period will be so intense, and the challenge it presents to the faith of those believers who experience it so difficult, that our Lord was moved to remark, “when the Son of Man returns, will He find faith on the earth?” (Lk.18:8 in the context of Lk.17). However, there are those who will continue in the faith despite the fiery storm of the tribulation, their faith being purged and refined by the experience (Dan.11:35; 12:10; compare with the translation of 1Pet.1:6-9 at the beginning of this lesson).

The Great Importance of Perseverance: So whether we are called upon to face the Great Tribulation, or “merely” tribulations of a personal nature (which may present challenges to our faith which are just as “great”), the importance of persevering in our faith *through* such difficulties cannot be overemphasized. We need to be aware of the potential these crises have of testing our faith to the limit. Given the severe tribulation the Bible predicts for us personally and perhaps generally (if it be our lot to live through that predicted future period)

Can we afford to ignore the importance of preserving our faith?

Can we afford to miss a single opportunity for strengthening our belief?

Can we, in summary, afford to do anything that will risk even the slightest loosening of our grip on the faith that is our victory over death in Jesus Christ our Lord (1Jn.5:4-5)?

With these questions in mind, we shall revisit the principles of perseverance next time, and consider the process of apostasy whereby some believers fall away from the faith under the pressures of personal and general tribulation, moving on from these topics to the subject of personal salvation, the goal of perseverance, in the following lesson.