

# **The Coming Tribulation: a History of the Apocalypse**

## **Part 1: Introduction**

Revelation 1:1-20

(also available on-line at [ichthys.com](http://ichthys.com))  
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### **I. Definition and Overview of the Tribulation**

Secular history is, for obvious reasons, generally written about the past. As believers in Jesus Christ, however, we are blessed to have the future history of the earth's final years revealed to us through a select number of God's prophets who have recorded it in the holy scriptures for all time. It will be the purpose of this seven-part study to explicate what the Bible has to say about the final chapter of human history, an aim of no small consequence, for we live on the threshold of that apocalyptic time, and it behooves all who call Jesus Christ their Lord and Master to be prepared for His imminent return, as well as for the period of severe testing which will precede it.

And the voice which I heard from heaven was speaking to me again and saying, "Go and take the scroll which has been opened and is in the hand of the angel who has taken his stand on the sea and on the land." So I went over to the angel, telling him to give me the scroll. And he said to me, "Take it and eat it, and it will make your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey." So I took the scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it. It was like sweet honey in my mouth, but my stomach was filled [past capacity].

Revelation 10:8-10

The scroll, as we shall see in due course, is the future history of that approaching time, and the caveat implied in this very tangible experience given to the apostle John is one that should be taken to heart and kept firmly fixed in mind: studying the events of the end times is both enjoyable and profitable, but for those to whom it falls to live through them personally, the experience will be very bitter. It would be difficult to emphasize this point too strongly. When we read of any other period in human history, the experience can be both useful and pleasurable, but is necessarily concerned with the past. God's history of the last days is both enjoyable and spiritually edifying for us to study here and now, but, unlike any other history, entails the very real possibility, especially as those final days draw ever nearer, that we shall experience first-hand the very things we study, namely, the Great Tribulation, the most terrible period earth will ever endure. And so it is critical for all discerning Christians who contemplate these matters to remember that these things are real, that the pain and suffering, the horrendous apocalyptic events, the privation, persecution, and martyrdom, are not past events from which we have been separated by the passage of time, but imminently future occurrences, that may very well fall upon us in the full grim reality of bitter experience. If this be our lot, we shall at the end, when all has been said and done, be able to confirm first hand what John was told, that the final chapter of human history was sweet to learn about, but terribly bitter to experience in the flesh.

Our preceding five part series, The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation, is, as the name implies, an important prerequisite to the study of the end times which we are undertaking here. It is assumed that the reader has already digested the information contained therein, for much of what we are about to cover here (and in the six following parts) will not otherwise be completely coherent. For the events which the Tribulation will set in train, through and including the culmination of human history and the beginning of eternity, are all part of God's master plan for dealing with our adversary the devil, restoring the universe to a completely holy and righteous state, and replacing all that was lost through creature rebellion with something more wonderful than human hearts could ever hope or imagine. But without the extensive context of Satan's

Rebellion (part 1), God’s resultant judgment on the universe (part 2), the corruption and fall of Man, God’s surprise replacement for the devil and his angels (part 3), the world-wide system Satan has put in place to rule the earth wrested from mankind’s control (part 4), and God’s seven millennial day plan – history as constructed and conducted by God – designed to bring about perfect judgment, restoration and replacement (part 5), the events of eschatology (i.e., the biblical study of “last things”) can easily be misunderstood.

1. Scope and Methodology: The purpose of this seven-part series is to relate the last chapter of human history as the Bible records it. The key event of history’s culmination and termination, the great watershed in the future history of the earth, is, from the divine perspective, the return of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (i.e., His 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent). For Jesus Christ *is* the true focus of history, and from the point of His return onward, history’s course will be under God’s direct, overt control, with the Son of God Himself personally ruling over the earth until the day when history itself, along with death, is finally swallowed up for all time (Is.25:7-8; 1Cor.15:26; 15:54-55), and our God inaugurates the commencement of eternity with His creation of the New Heavens and New Earth. The return of Christ is thus the “blessed hope” toward which all we who believe in Him and wait for Him should ever direct our gaze (Tit.2:13), eagerly awaiting it (2Pet.3:11-12), just as we would the birth of a child (Jn.16:21-24), or the dawning of a new day (to which the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent of the true “Light of the world” is often compared in scripture: e.g., Is.60:1; Mal.4:2; Lk.1:78; Rom.13:11-14; 1Thes.5:1-10; 2Pet.1:19-20; 1Jn.2:8).

And just as the birth of a new child is preceded by intense pain, so it will be at the end of the present age when our victorious Lord returns and transforms our sorrow into joy (cf. Is.25:8; Rev.7:16-17; 21:4):

When a woman gives birth, she is in pain, for her time has come. But when she brings forth her child, she no longer remembers her *tribulation* (Greek: θλίψις, *thlipsis*) on account of her joy, for a [new] person has been born into the world.  
John 16:21

In this world you do have *tribulation* (Greek: θλίψις, *thlipsis*). But be courageous. I have overcome the world.  
John 16:33

And just as dawn is preceded by the darkest part of the night, so it will be at the end of the present age when our victorious Lord returns and turns our darkness into light (cf. Num.24:17; Is.9:2; 60:1; 60:19; Matt.2:2; 2:9-10; Jn.1:4-5; 8:12; 2Pet.1:19; Rev.2:28; 21:23; 22:16):

The sun will be turned to *darkness* (Hebrew: ;wx, *choshekh*) and the moon to blood, before the Day of the Lord, that great and terrible [day].  
Joel 2:31

For behold, *the darkness* (Hebrew: ;wx, *choshekh*) – it will cover the earth, even a deep gloom its peoples. But the Lord will rise over you, and His glory will appear above you. Nations will come to His light, and kings to the brilliance of His rising.

Isaiah 60:2-3

The wonder of the return of that One truly New Person, our resurrected Lord, will seem all the more wonderful in contrast to the pain of the Tribulation that precedes it. And the brilliance of the glory of His return will seem all the more brilliant in contrast to the darkness of the night that precedes it. For immediately preceding that grand and glorious day when the First Born of the Father assumes His rightful throne, the world will experience the most dire and cataclysmic period that history will ever record. It will be a time so terrible that it is most commonly referred to in scripture as *the Tribulation* (Greek: θλιψις, *thlipsis*; cf. the first pair of passages above), a time so bereft of the light of God's truth that it is most commonly characterized in scripture by the quality of darkness (Hebrew: ;wx, *choshekh*; cf. the second pair of passages above). The Bible leaves no doubt about the fact that the Tribulation will be earth's darkest and most trying chapter, terminating in God's severe judgment upon the world:

Blow a trumpet in Zion, and raise the alarm on My holy mountain. All the inhabitants of the earth are distressed, because the Day of the Lord is coming, because it is near at hand. A day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and deep gloom.

Joel 2:1-2a

That day will be a day of blackness, a day of constraint and pressure, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and deep gloom.

Zephaniah 1:15

Terror and pit and snare [have come] upon you, you who dwell on the earth! And it shall be that he who flees from the sound of the terror shall fall into the pit, and he who climbs out of the pit will be caught in the snare. For the sluice-gates on high have been opened, and the foundations of the earth quake. The earth is broken in pieces. The earth is split asunder. The earth totters violently. The earth staggers wildly like a drunken man and sways like a shanty. For its transgression weighs heavily upon it. So will it fall, and not rise up again.

Isaiah 24:17-20

Known as the Tribulation, this harrowing, seven year prelude to Christ's millennial rule, constitutes both the upcoming and the initial portion of God's conclusion to human history. Like the creation around us (Rom.8:19-22), we long to experience the coming of the Son of Man, to put off this sinful flesh for the perfection of the resurrection, and to revel in the reality of eternity with Him forever. But before this happy rebirth of our bodies, before the dawning of His brilliant light, must come a time of great pain and testing, a time of deep gloom and darkness. As in each individual life as it has always been for those who choose to follow God, the personal trial and tribulation of this life must precede the final victory of release and comfort with Him. So also in the final course of human history, the devil's world-rule, darkest and most terrible just

before the birth of the new age and the dawning of the light of the Son of Man, must precede that blessed time to come. In both cases (i.e., personal and historical tribulation), severe testing must be endured before the final blessing is attained. For this reason, it is of the utmost importance for every Christian, especially at this late hour in the history of the world, to be prepared for the Tribulation to come, in order that we may all reach harbor safely at Christ's return. And it is imperative that we give our full and close attention to what the Bible has to say about that final, dark chapter in the world's history, whether or not "the day" comes upon us personally. For whether or not it falls to our lot to experience personally the Great Tribulation, as Christians we cannot avoid in our own lives the experience of personal tribulation, and a proper appreciation of the Bible's perspective on each class of tribulation is essential preparation for both.<sup>1</sup>

In order to accomplish the essential purpose of this series, that of understanding and preparing for the coming Tribulation, many books and passages of scripture will need to be considered in some detail. References to and extensive treatments of the end times, of which the Tribulation forms the first and focal part, are prominent and ubiquitous in the Bible (for reasons to be considered below). Therefore the job of stitching together all the critical information scripture provides on this extensive subject could easily have been an unmanageable one, even an impossible one, had not God provided a ready means (in the form of the Book of Revelation) for solving this potential organizational problem. In studies of this sort, the Great Apostasy, antichrist, Babylon, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent of our Lord, along with other principal themes and events, are often covered exclusively in a topical way. It is this writer's opinion, however, that written history is best organized according to a chronological scheme. Since we are blessed to have in the form of the Book of Revelation exactly such a chronologically based outline of the Tribulation (along with the events that precede and follow it), it seems by far the best course to utilize Revelation as our primary outline for this study.<sup>2</sup>

The book of Revelation will therefore serve as our organizational "blue-print" in this present series (as it is clearly meant to be the believer's central text for understanding the end times), but we shall endeavor not to exclude other portions of scripture that treat the events we are about to study. Thus "The Coming Tribulation" series will be both *topical* (doctrinal, treating specific subjects and drawing material from other books of the Bible in the process) while at the same time *biblical* (following the book of Revelation verse by verse and treating the subject matter it contains at the appropriate place and in the appropriate order, including as many digressions as necessary, scriptural and topical, to properly complete the whole).

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<sup>1</sup> The important subject of personal tribulation is covered in the Peter series (a series devoted to the problem of the suffering of the believer), especially lessons 25, 26, 27. The reader is advised that a sound knowledge of what the Bible has to say about personal tribulation is a prerequisite to a proper understanding of *the* Tribulation.

<sup>2</sup> This methodology can also be gleaned from the overall outline of this seven-part series.

2. Definition and Terminology: The Tribulation is the cataclysmic seven year period which precedes the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. It comprises the final seven years of the Church Age,<sup>3</sup> and, as its primary name suggests, will be a period of intense judgment and severe trial – judgment from God against the unbelieving world, and persecution for believers at the hands of our adversary the devil and his earthly representative, antichrist. This combination of causes which will make the Tribulation such a terrible time in which to live are widely misunderstood. For while it is certainly true that the Tribulation will see the most intense satanic activity in the history of the world, God is far from uninvolved in the events of those seven years. Indeed, the Tribulation is first and foremost the beginning of the penultimate phase of God’s judgment upon the earth and its inhabitants. The fact that Satan (and his minion, antichrist) will be in control of human affairs as never before merely makes the issue all the more clear: in six thousand years of human history, mankind has, by and large, not only failed to choose *for* God, but has, for the most part, chosen for Satan instead, and this trend will reach its apogee during the Tribulation. The exception to this rule, the assembly of those (i.e., the Church) who have turned away from this world and its present ruler to follow instead God and His Anointed, will be, during the Tribulation, subjected to the most intense persecution in the history of the planet.<sup>4</sup> This is all the more reason for the divine retribution that is part and parcel of tribulational events:

Then I heard the angel of the waters saying,

“O You who are and [always] were, the Holy One, You are justified in rendering these [seven bowl] judgments. For [the inhabitants of the earth] have poured out the blood of [Your] saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink.

***They deserve it.***”

Revelation 16:5-6

Throughout human history, mankind has by and large chosen to reject God and serve the devil instead. This is a trend which is currently intensifying, and which will reach an extraordinary peak during the Tribulation. For, as in the unique experience of the Pharaoh of the Exodus whose heart God allowed to be hardened beyond human norms (Ex.11:9-10),<sup>5</sup> divine restraint

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<sup>3</sup> It is also the conclusion of the Jewish Age, “Daniel’s Seventieth Week”. See part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”, for a detailed discussion of the chronology of the Church Age.

<sup>4</sup> A proper understanding of the true nature of the Church and its composition (i.e., all believers from Adam to the second coming of Jesus Christ) is essential for grasping the concepts taught here. See part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”.

<sup>5</sup> See the series Exodus 14: Hardening Pharaoh’s Heart for the explanation of “God hardening Pharaoh’s heart” as allowing Pharaoh’s human will to transgress divinely set barriers beyond normal human limitations. The Exodus in general as a biblical paradigm for the Tribulation will be covered in part 7 of the present series.

upon the limits of evil will be greatly reduced during these last seven years of the Church Age (2Thes.2:6-8).<sup>6</sup> Let all who consider these things mark well the fact that while many of the horrors of the Tribulation are indeed wrought by Satan and his minion, the Man of Lawlessness (antichrist), even these events could not occur without the Lord having first given His leave. For all history is in His hands, and, in the end, even these excesses of creature evil merely serve to demonstrate His glory by way of contrast (also exactly as in the case of Pharaoh: Ex.9:16). During the final chapter of Satan's rule on earth, God will allow the floodgates of evil to open wide – to the end that the inhabitants of the earth, having already chosen to enthusiastically serve the creature rather than the Creator, might suffer the full consequence of their blasphemous choice (Is.6:10; Jn.12:40; Acts 28:26-27; Rom.1:18-32):

[These] have exchanged the truth of God for the lie [of the devil], **and have worshiped and served the creature** [Satan] in place of the Creator who is [worthy to be] blessed forever. Amen.  
Romans 1:25

Ultimately, God has given His creatures the choice of whether or not to serve Him. For those who persist in serving Satan instead of God, God eventually removes the divine restraints which would hinder them from doing so in full:

And just as they did not see fit to keep God in their hearts, God abandoned them to their unfit minds, to do things which are not fitting.  
Romans 1:28

During the Tribulation, these divine restraints upon the practice of evil will be removed as never before, so that mankind will serve the devil to an unprecedented degree, bringing down upon itself the unprecedented judgment of God. As a result, the Tribulation will be, truly, “the worst of times”, for in it the most intense temporal judgment of God will be leveled upon the most egregious human behavior in history (cf. Jer.25:31-32; Mic.7:13):

Behold, the Lord is about to empty the earth and lay it waste, and He will mar its face and scatter its inhabitants. And it will be the same for the people as for the priest; for the servant as for his masters; for the maidservant as for her mistress; for the buyer as for the seller; for the lender as for the borrower; for the creditor as for the debtor. The earth shall be thoroughly emptied and thoroughly plundered, for the Lord has pronounced this decree. The earth mourns. It wastes away. The world languishes. It wastes away. [Even] the celebrities of the earth languish. For the earth has befouled itself at the hands of its inhabitants. ***For they have transgressed the teachings [of God]; they have altered [His] statute[s]; they have violated the eternal covenant.*** Therefore a curse devours the

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<sup>6</sup> The removal of the “seals” in Revelation chapter 6. This issue will be addressed in part 2 of the present series.

earth, and its inhabitants are punished. Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are incinerated, and little of mankind remains.

Isaiah 24:1-6

Get out, My people. Go into your rooms and close your doors behind you. Hide yourselves for a little while until My indignation has run its course (i.e., until the Tribulation is over). For behold, the Lord is about to come forth from His place ***in order to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity***. And the earth will reveal the blood shed upon it, and conceal its slain no longer (i.e., the persecution of believers will be punished).

Isaiah 26:20-21 (cf. 2Pet.3:10b)

Behold the tempest of the Lord! In fury it goes forth, a swirling tempest, and it will swirl upon the heads of the wicked. ***The wrath of the Lord*** will not turn back until He has accomplished, until He has fulfilled, the intents of His heart. ***In the last days*** you will give thoughtful consideration to this.

Jeremiah 23:19-20 (cf. Jer.30:23-24)

Behold, I am making known to you what will take place during ***the final period of [God's] indignation*** (i.e., the Tribulation).

Daniel 8:19a

For [during that period] the king [antichrist] will consult only his own desire, and will exalt and magnify himself above every god, and against the God of gods he will speak astonishing things. He will have success until the [time of] ***indignation*** is complete, for [all this] has been firmly decreed to take place.

Daniel 11:36

The above passages and commentary must suffice for now to give the reader an overview of the general character of the Tribulation (see section III below). It remains here to set out in brief the most common terminology used in scripture to describe this period:

a. **The Tribulation**: Derived from the root *thlib* (θλιβ), meaning “to exert pressure”, the Greek word *thlipsis* (θλιψις) is used commonly in secular Greek for discomfort, extreme difficulty, and, in general, physical and emotional pressures of every sort. In scripture too, the word is not restricted to being a technical term for the final seven years of the Church Age, and often refers to personal tribulation (cf. Jn.16:21; 16:33). But *thlipsis* is the most common term employed to designate that final, intense trial, and its main reference (to extreme pressure) makes it a most apt and descriptive designation for that period we have come to call *the Tribulation*.

For at that time there will be a ***great tribulation*** such as has never occurred from the beginning of the world until now, and [such as] will never again occur thereafter.

Matthew 24:21



Immediately following *the tribulation* of those days, the sun will grow dark and the moon will not give out its light, and the stars will fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

Matthew 24:29

For those days will see a *tribulation* the like of which has never occurred from the beginning of God's creation of the world until now, and never will occur again.

Mark 13:19

But in those days, after *that tribulation*, the sun will grow dark and the moon will not give out its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers which are in heaven will be shaken.

Mark 13:24

The word used by our Lord for the coming apocalypse in the four passages above is, indeed, the Greek word *thlipsis* (θλιψις), and is, moreover, along with the other phrasing of these verses, a deliberate echoing of Daniel's prophecy in chapter twelve verse one. For the Greek version of the Hebrew Old Testament (i.e., the Septuagint, widely available in our Lord's day) also uses *thlipsis* to translate the Hebrew phrase "time of distress":

And it shall be a *time of distress* [Hebrew: 'eth tsarah (hrj ti); Greek: *hemera thlipseos* (ημερα θλιψεως)] such as has never occurred since people first existed on the earth until that time.

Daniel 12:1b

Of course the word *thlipsis* need not always be present when the Tribulation is in view in scripture (e.g., Rev.3:10). But, given the palpably descriptive nature of the word "tribulation" and the fact that the passages quoted above – some of our most important references to that future time, and given directly by our Lord – utilize that very word, the traditional choice of "the Tribulation" as the main technical term to describe the final seven years of the Church Age seems a sound one, and has been followed in this present study. Tribulation has one important additional advantage as the key word for describing the time of the coming apocalypse. It calls to mind the pressure and discomfort of the personal tribulation all Christians who are following their Lord and Master have to bear from time to time in this life,<sup>7</sup> and therefore acts as a poignant point of reference for the intensified pressure and discomfort which all those called to live through the coming Tribulation will have to endure (cf. Matt.13:21; Rom.5:3; 2Cor.4:8; 4:17; Col.1:24; 1Thes.3:3; 2Thes.1:6; Heb.11:37-38):

How narrow is the gate (i.e., there is only one way to God, through Christ), and how *constrained* (lit. "tribulated") is the road (i.e., the way of Christ is filled with tribulation) which leads to [eternal] life, and few are those who find it!

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<sup>7</sup> See the [Peter's Epistles](#) series.

Matthew 7:14

[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

And we sent Timothy to you, our brother and co-worker in the gospel of God and of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that none of you might waver in the midst of these *tribulations*. For you yourselves know [very well] that we have been appointed for this (i.e., to endure pressure in this life). Indeed, when we were with you I was warning you that we [all Christians] were destined to be persecuted (lit., *tribulated*).

1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 3:2-4

By studying the Tribulation, we gain perspective on the personal tribulations that all Christians must endure in this life. And by understanding the central place our personal tribulations have in God’s plan (as essential tests of faith), and growing spiritually through them (Rom.5:3-4), we also prepare ourselves for that great day of testing.

b. The Great Tribulation: A further distinction often employed and adhered to here is the distinction between the Tribulation as a whole (i.e., the entire seven year period of the apocalypse) and “the Great Tribulation”, which properly refers to the second half of this period (i.e., the final three and a half years before the return of our Lord Jesus Christ). The Great Tribulation will be the time of greatest pressure and intensity of persecution in human history, for it will be in that second half of the Tribulation proper that apostasy turns to persecution.

And he said to me, “These are the ones who are going to come out of (i.e., be martyred in) the *Great Tribulation*, and they have washed their robes and made them white with the blood of the Lamb”.

Revelation 7:14

For at that time there will be a *Great Tribulation* such as has never occurred from the beginning of the world until now, and [such as] will never again occur thereafter.

Matthew 24:21

c. The Apocalypse: The book of Revelation is sometimes entitled “the Apocalypse” (see Rev.1:1 in part V below), since “apocalypse” is an English transliteration of the Greek word *apokalypsis* (αποκαλυψις) meaning “revelation”. It is well to note the singular number of the noun here, for the full Greek title of the book is “the Revelation of *Jesus Christ*”. There is only one Christ, and only one revealing of Him to the world at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent (*n.b.*, so there is no book of “revelationS”). The Greek word “apocalypse” means, literally, an unveiling, a making manifest of that which was previously not seen. So it will be at the end of the Tribulation when our Lord returns to earth in glory. Now the book of Revelation, our guide in this series, includes in its coverage the *entire* Tribulation, making it very clear that in prophetic terms the Tribulation

constitutes a vital prelude to that return, to that unveiling, and to that “revelation” (along with the judgments which accompany it). Therefore the common understanding of the apocalypse as synonymous with the end times is fine as far as it goes, but we must be careful not to exclude from our understanding of the word “apocalypse” that element which is most essential to its meaning: the return in glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, made manifest to the entire world on that day along with His bride, the Church. And when Christ is fully revealed to the world at His return (Lk.17:30; 1Cor.1:7; 2Thes.1:7; 1Pet.1:7; 1:13; 4:13; Rev.1:1), we, His bride, will be unveiled with Him (Rom.8:19; cf. Rom.16:25-26; Gal.3:23; Eph.3:5-6). The apocalypse is therefore only introductorily tribulational. In its deepest sense it is the very *hope* for which we so earnestly yearn:

. . . so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you await the *revelation* (lit., “apocalypse”) of our Lord Jesus Christ. God will also make you to stand firm without reproach until the end on that day of our Lord Jesus Christ (i.e., the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent).  
1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1:7-8

. . . and to give you who are being distressed (lit., “tribulated”) relief along with us at the *revelation* (lit., “apocalypse”) of our Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful angels.  
2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 1:7

But your faith, when proven genuine in the crucible of life, will result in praise, glory and honor for you at the *revelation* (lit., “apocalypse”) of Jesus Christ.  
1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:7

The *revelation* (lit., “apocalypse”) of Jesus Christ which God gave to Him to show His servants what must happen soon.  
Revelation 1:1a

d. The Time of Jacob’s Trouble: This phrase in Jeremiah 30:7 is a clear reference to the Tribulation as the context indicates. It will be a time like no other (v.7), but one followed by liberation (v.8), the rule of the Messiah (v.9), and the regathering of the nation (v.10).

e. Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> Week: The final “seven” in the vision of the seventy sevens (or “weeks” of years) given to Daniel (Dan.9:20-27) is, in fact, the Tribulation. In the middle of the final week of years, for example, the “abomination of desolation” is set up in the temple by antichrist (“the prince who is coming”, v.26; cf. Matt.24:15; Mk.13:14).<sup>8</sup>

f. The Sea of Trouble: Prior to using this phrase to describe Israel's deliverance through the Tribulation (in a manner reminiscent to her deliverance from Pharaoh through the Red Sea), Zechariah chapter ten discusses the apostasy of the tribulational period (v.2), the unholy

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<sup>8</sup> For an overview of Daniel, see section IV.2.a below. The details of Daniel’s prophecies regarding the Tribulation are covered in depth in parts 3A, 3B, and 4 of this series.

leadership of Israel during the Tribulation (v.3), the Jewish resistance prior to the Lord's return at Armageddon (vv.4-7), and the regathering of Israel after the Second Advent, all of which clearly establish the meaning of this phrase as a reference to the Tribulation:

For she (i.e., Israel about to be regathered in vv.8-9) will pass through *the sea of trouble* (i.e., the Tribulation) . . .  
Zechariah 10:11a

g. The Hour of Testing: Because of their faithful service, the Philadelphia generation of the Church would not pass through the Tribulation.<sup>9</sup>

Because you have kept my command to persevere, I shall also keep you from *the hour of testing* which is about to come upon the world of mankind to put the inhabitants of the earth to the test.  
Revelation 3:10

h. Other Passages: There are also many other places in scripture where the Tribulation is referenced without the use of specific terminology. In Genesis 49:18, for example, where Jacob, in prophesying about the future of Israel says in reference to Dan (just having been compared to a serpent) “I look for thy deliverance, O Lord”, he is speaking prophetically about the Tribulation, and the fact that antichrist will come from the tribe of Dan.<sup>10</sup> Passages and contexts of this sort generally possess the common feature of looking forward to the conclusion of God’s plan for history (which conclusion begins, as we have seen, with the Tribulation):

And [the angel] said to me, “Understand, O son of man, that the vision refers to the *time of the end.*” . . . “Behold, I am making known to you what will take place during *the final period of [God’s] indignation* (i.e., the Tribulation), for [this will happen] at *the appointed time of the end.*”  
Daniel 8:17b & 19

At *the end of days* (or, “in the last days”), the mountain of the temple of the Lord will be established as the chief of all mountains, and it will be raised higher than all [other] hills, and all the nations will flow to it.  
Isaiah 2:2 (cf. Ezek.38:16)

“The Lord says in regard to *the last days* (introducing a quote from Joel 2:28-32) . . .”  
Acts 2:17

The Spirit explicitly says that *in the end times* certain men will rebel from the faith, giving their allegiance [instead] to deceitful spirits and demonic doctrines.

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<sup>9</sup> The seven churches of Revelation (chapters 2-3) is covered in part 2A of this series.

<sup>10</sup> See part 3B of this series for details.

1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 4:1

So be aware of this, that in *the last days* there will be difficult times.

2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3:1

Your gold and your silver has rusted away, and its residue will give testimony against you and will eat your flesh like fire. [This is what] you have treasured up for yourselves *in the last days*.

James 5:3

(3) Keep this foremost in your mind: in *the end times* cynics will ridicule [the truth], acting out of their own selfish lusts (4) and saying, “Where is that ‘return’ He promised? Everything is the same now as it was since the beginning of the world, since the time our forefathers passed on.” (5) But it escapes their notice in asserting this, namely, that there were heavens long ago too, and an earth, which was [re-]established out from under water (i.e., the “waters below”) and through [the midst of] water (i.e., the “waters above”) by the Word of God – (6) [and that it was] through these two [sets of waters] that the world of that time (i.e., in Noah’s day) was [again] deluged by water [from above and below] and destroyed. (7) Now the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire by that same Word (of God), preserved for *the day of judgment* and the destruction of godless men.

2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3:3-7

But you, beloved, remember the words of the apostles of our Lord, spoken to you before, that at *the end of the age* (lit., “time”), there will be mockers who behave after the manner of their own unholy lusts.

Jude 17-18

3. The End Times and Motivation: As is evident from the list above, scripture frequently makes use of the coming of the end times to encourage the believer’s alertness, to pique his motivation for putting God first in his life, and to direct his focus off of the here-and-now and onto the more important future realities. Clearly, once we accept, believe and fully internalize (i.e., correctly apply) the reality of the Tribulation and the very real possibility that we may live to experience it, we cannot help but be better motivated to make optimal use now of the resources God provides to grow spiritually and help others do likewise (cf. Eph.5:16; Col.4:5). For such growth is our only genuine means of preparation for those terrible days to come: stockpiling canned goods in the cellar is largely pointless, but stockpiling God’s Word in our hearts is of the utmost value, whether or not we are called upon to endure the Tribulation first hand:

I mean this, brethren: *there is not much time left* (lit., time has been “reefed short” like a sail). So in the future, let those who have wives be as those who do not have them, and those who weep as those who don’t weep, and those who rejoice as those who do not rejoice – and those who make use of this world as those who do not take full advantage of

it. For this world in its present form is passing away. And I want you to be free of worries.

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7:29-32a

Let us not put Christ to the test, as some of them [of the Exodus generation] did and were killed by serpents. And let us not complain, as some of them complained, and were killed by the Destroyer. These things happened to them as an example to us, and were written to warn us – ***we who live at the culmination of the ages***. So let him who thinks he stands firm beware lest he fall. 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.

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 10:11-13

Let your reasonableness be known to all men – ***the Lord is near***.

Philippians 4:5

But you, brothers, are not in darkness that ***the day [of the Lord] should catch you*** like a thief. For you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness. So let us therefore not sleep like the rest [of unbelieving mankind], but be awake and alert.

1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5:4-6

And let us give careful attention to one another[‘s ministries] as motivation for [our own] love and good works, not abandoning your mutual assembling (as some have made it their practice to do [and which makes this impossible]), but rather encouraging each other [to persevere in this work of the Lord], and doing so to an ever greater degree to the extent that you see ***the day [of the Lord] drawing [ever] closer***.

Hebrews 10:24-25

So then you too exercise patience [like the farmer of v.7], [and] steady your hearts, because ***the return of the Lord has drawn near***.

James 5:8

***The end of all things has drawn near***. Therefore exercise discretion and sober self-control for [the benefit of your] prayers.

1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4:7

Children, it is ***the last hour***, and just as you have heard that antichrist is coming, even now many “antichrists” have arisen, whence we know that it is in fact ***the last hour***.

1<sup>st</sup> John 2:18

And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for ***the time is near***.”

Revelation 22:10

Before moving on, it is unfortunately necessary to note at this point that this important and legitimate element of scriptural motivation has, in many contemporary Christian circles, been severely hamstrung by the false doctrine of the pre-tribulational rapture.<sup>11</sup> Obviously, were it true that contemporary Christians had no chance of ever experiencing the Tribulation (as that false doctrine teaches), the enormous amount of material the Bible contains on the subject would immediately be rendered merely “academic”, and a very large body of highly motivational material rendered essentially abstract (and so largely meaningless in practical terms). In fact, the motivation provided by the knowledge that this most serious test to our faith may indeed potentially come upon us helps us to prepare for those tests which we *do* have to face, whether or not we ever live to experience the Tribulation itself. Therefore the teaching of the pre-tribulational rapture not only constitutes a danger to those believers who will nevertheless find themselves some day in the midst of the Tribulation, but also robs (and has robbed) many of a large share of the important and legitimate motivation the Bible provides to prepare for trial and testing. Make no mistake. Our Lord Jesus Christ will not return until the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent, and the proper conclusion to draw from this clear teaching of scripture is that believers need to take what the Bible has to say about the seven years of the Tribulation which precede that blessed event very seriously indeed (Matt.25:1-30; Lk.21:25-28; 1Cor.1:7; 15:20-28; Phil.1:6; 1Thes.4:5-18; 5:1-11; 2Thes.1:3-12; Tit.2:13; 2Pet.1:19).

So we ask you, brothers, in regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ [discussed in chapter one, verses 3-12], and our assembling together to Him [in resurrection at His return (cf. 1Cor.15:51-54)], that you not be so easily moved from your correct understanding [of these matters], nor disturbed [by doubts about what you should know to be true] – not even if [this “new information” purports to come] through a spirit, or an [inspired] word or a letter supposedly from me, declaring that the Day of the Lord is already upon us. Do not let anyone deceive you in any way. ***For [the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent cannot come] unless*** the Apostasy [the great falling away of the faithful *in the first half of the Tribulation*] has already occurred, and the man of lawlessness [antichrist] has been revealed [an event also occurring *in the Tribulation*], that “son of destruction” (i.e., characterized by, author of, and doomed to destruction), the one who will oppose and exalt himself against every so-called god and object of worship to such a degree that he will take his seat in the temple of God and represent himself as being God. Don’t you remember that while I was still with you I was explaining these things to you?

2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 2:1-5

## II. The Tribulation in Context: Satan’s Rebellion and the Plan of God

God has always existed and always will exist. Only within the temporal, material universe (entirely His creation along with the creatures who inhabit it) is there any need to discuss a “Plan of God”, for God Himself is perfect and infinite and in no need of change or development of any

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<sup>11</sup> This subject is given extensive coverage in the Peter series, lesson #27.

kind. This same status quo of perfection (albeit to a finite degree) was also the case in the original creation of the universe with its angelic inhabitants. For God originally created a perfect system in an Eden-like environment without need or necessity. Satan's rebellion changed all that. With the defection of the universe's top-ranking angelic creature along with a full third of his fellows, creature history began, a history that has nonetheless been shaped and directed by the Plan of God from its inception. Of course, the devil's treachery did not "surprise" the omniscient, eternal God, infinite in His nature. God was no more surprised by the devil's rebellion than by the fall of Adam and Eve. Structured into His organization of the universe both initially (in His original creation of the universe and the angels) and subsequently (in His re-creation of the universe and mankind) has always been this overall Plan of God, shaping, guiding, directing events as only the planning of a God of infinite wisdom, infinite power, and infinite knowledge could do. So certain is His plan, so unalterable in every detail, that all events of history, angelic and human, have been foreknown by Him and foreordained by Him (cf. Rom.8:29-30).<sup>12</sup> And central to this plan, the foundation, the cornerstone, and the agent of it, has always been our Lord Jesus Christ (Jn.1:1-5; Heb.1:1-3):

Everything in the heavens and on the earth was created by Him (Jesus Christ), things invisible as well as those visible – whether thrones, authorities, rulers or powers, everything was created through Him and for Him. And He Himself is before everything, and everything subsists in Him.

Colossians 1:16-17

Even though this subject, the Plan of God, has been covered elsewhere in depth (see the previous note), and, in terms of its specific application to the Satanic rebellion, has recently been treated in great detail (in part 5 of the previous series of that name), it is crucial to note here that our present subject, the Tribulation along with the events which follow it, represents on the universal level the *conclusion* of that plan. The Tribulation, therefore, is no small occurrence on the overall schedule of history as defined by God, but is, in fact, a pivotal, momentous development, for it represents *the* major period of God's judgment upon the earth during the whole of human history. God's judgment upon the original heavens and earth following the devil's revolt, and God's final judgment wherein the present heavens and earth will be incinerated are equally major, equally significant judgments (these three together constituting respectively parts II, I, and III of the judgment phase of the Plan of God).<sup>13</sup> But as we human beings were not around to experience the first phase of judgment (which produced the Genesis gap and necessitated the

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<sup>12</sup> For more detailed discussions of the Plan of God, see the Peter series, lessons 3, 8, 9 and 13, and especially section II of part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series.

<sup>13</sup> These are delineated in part 5 of the previous series, The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement".



subsequent seven day re-creation of earth),<sup>14</sup> and as the final phase of judgment (phase III) will not occur until the conclusion of history as we know it, the Tribulation looms even larger in significance as *the* preeminent judgment-event in the collective experience of mankind (only the world-wide flood rates comparison: Matt.24:37-38). At no time before or since will mortal man witness the wrath of God displayed to such an awesome degree. At no time before or since will the issue of choice – between God and the devil – be made more manifestly clear to the human race. At no time before or since will humanity nevertheless embrace Satan more closely. At no time before or since will those whose allegiance belongs to the One True God be subject to more intense pressure and persecution. And at no time before or since will the devil be in more direct control of events on planet earth. The Tribulation will be the time of greatest leeway given by God to human and demonic will, and for precisely this reason will be the most horrible time humanity has ever experienced. It is also precisely for this reason that the Tribulation will be the time of God’s greatest temporal judgment upon the creation, encompassing the earth, unbelieving humanity, and the fallen angels alike, for evil only uses freedom to intensify evil, and intense evil is always and inevitably answered by intensified divine judgment (as befits a God of perfect righteousness). The Tribulation is the last period of human history wherein mankind (nominally) and the devil (in reality) will play a major role in the direction of human affairs (subject, of course, to the overarching Plan of God which has been moving inexorably forward to its ultimate goal since the instant of creation).<sup>15</sup> How appropriate that God, while allowing within these seven years the widest discretion ever in the voluntary exercise of evil by reprobate creatures, has ordained for the Tribulation the most devastating response to evil in the form of unprecedented divine judgment! And how appropriate that this most appalling period of human history, so terrible precisely because it is most fully under creature control, will be directly followed by the most wonderful and sublime period of human history, the millennial reign of our Lord Jesus Christ, where God in the Person of the God-Man will exert a more direct control over human affairs than has ever yet occurred since the fall of Adam (with the devil and his minions safely incarcerated for a thousand years: Rev.20:1-3)!

We can learn much from this eloquent juxtaposition of the inevitable degeneracy of creature rule on the one hand, growing ever worse as divine restraint is relaxed (and bringing down upon itself the inevitable judgment God’s justice requires), and the beneficent nature of God’s rule through His Son on the other, a reign of perfect justice wherein the evil nature of mankind will be properly restrained and blessings will flow from every quarter. This is a principle of contrast (between “our” way and God’s way) that has been repeated since the dawn of creature history and will continue in one form or another until the close of history shortly after the end of the Millennium: when men (or angels) follow their own will, horrible things result, and divine judgment is inevitably and necessarily invoked, so that the end is worse than the beginning;

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<sup>14</sup> See part 2 of [The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation](#), “The Genesis Gap”.

<sup>15</sup> The “Gog-Magog rebellion” (which immediately precedes the end of history) is the one significant exception (Rev.20:7-10): see part 6 of this series.

when, however, God's will is done, the result is blessing, and out of judgment comes restoration (of whatever was damaged) and replacement (of whatever was lost) so that the end is better than the beginning.

The threshing floors will be filled with grain and the wine-presses will overflow with new wine. For I will restore to you the years that the locusts have consumed.<sup>16</sup>  
Joel 2:24-25

This cycle of the consequences of will versus Will is essentially the same whether it occurs in the life of a single individual, a family, a group, a nation, a civilization, or in the entire scheme of history writ large, and in each and every case the point of division in the choice of (self) will versus (God's) Will is obedience to Jesus Christ. The issue is always Jesus Christ, for He is the Truth (Jn.14:6), He is the First Born and Heir of all creation (Col.1:15-21; Heb.1:2-3; Rev.3:14), the One for whom, by whom and through whom all things exist, the One who has been directing the Father's plan since the beginning, the One who will shortly return to earth in glory to begin His rightful reign, and the One without whose death on our behalf there would be no salvation, no restoration. On every level, whether large or small, Jesus Christ divides the universe on the issue of will: to reject Jesus Christ is to reject the Will of God; conversely, to choose His Will, is to follow Jesus Christ:

I am the way: the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.  
John 14:6

Do not think that I have come to hurl peace upon the earth. I have not come to hurl peace upon the earth but a sword (of divisiveness). For I have come to divide, [so that] 'a man [will be set] against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; [with the result that] a man's enemies will be the members of his own household' (Micah 7:6). Whoever loves his father or mother above Me is not worthy of Me, and whoever loves his son or daughter above Me is not worthy of Me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. Whoever has found his life will lose it, and the one who has lost his life for My sake will find it.  
Matthew 10:34-39

### **III. General Character of the Tribulation**

Man is made in the image of God, according to His likeness (Gen.1:26-27), and created for His glory (Is.43:7).<sup>17</sup> Therefore it should not be accounted strange that every aspect of human

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<sup>16</sup> I am indebted to Dr. Carmen Hardin for this reference. Compare Zech.9:12.

<sup>17</sup> See section I (the Purpose of Man), and section II.1 (the Image and Likeness of God) in The Satanic Rebellion Part 3: The Purpose, Creation and Fall of Man.

existence revolves around our attitude about Him, or that in whatever we choose, we really are only choosing for or against Him (especially in the case of believers: 1Cor.6:19-20; Gal.5:17). Just as king Rehoboam “did evil because he had not set his heart on seeking the Lord” (2Chron.12:14), so every instance of not responding to Him inevitably leads to (and equates with) responding instead to evil. Our only true choice in life is whether to prefer being servants of God or pawns of the devil. This is true in all things, great and small. For this reason, human history (the cumulative choices of mankind) is not occurring in a vacuum, but rather is being played out against the backdrop of Satan’s rebellion. This principle will be more obvious during the Tribulation than in any other previous period. For just as the issue of choice will never be clearer than in the Millennium in terms of positive motivation (under the direct righteous rule of Jesus Christ), so the issue and consequences of human free-will will never be clearer in terms of negative motivation than in the Tribulation (with the world under its most direct satanic control in the person of antichrist). Over the course of this seven-part series, we shall have much to say about the events and trials of that great period of testing to come, however it is important to stress here that the Tribulation’s general character is neither accidental nor peripheral but is rather the direct result of the intensification during its seven years of this issue of choice between God and His Son on the one hand, and the devil and his surrogate on the other. In no other era of history will the consequences of the question “which side are you on?” be more obvious and immediate. The Tribulation will be a great time of testing precisely because humanity will be forced to choose between two clear extremes, between good and evil, without the luxuries of privacy and time for circumspection that have been taken for granted in the past. For the middle ground of quiet agnosticism (and all its equivalents) made possible by God’s invisible restraint of evil through law and nationalism will be removed to a very large degree.<sup>18</sup> This is why, dear reader, our subject is of such pressing importance. Should it be our lot to endure that great conflagration to come, our faith will be tested as never before, for during the Tribulation the devil will pressure all mankind to accede to his will beyond anything the world has yet experienced.

Woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come to down to you, having great anger, because he knows that he has [only] a short time [remaining].  
Revelation 12:12

The greater the devil’s direct control over the earth and its inhabitants, the more the pressure to reject God and His Son. And the more evil done on earth, the greater the divine judgment upon that evil. From these twin essential traits of the Tribulation (demonic control and divine retribution), unique in terms of their unprecedented intensity, flow most of the other characteristics associated with that cataclysmic period. Along with the division they create (i.e., the necessity of choice for Christ or antichrist) these two main traits and their collective results will combine to make the Tribulation the time of the most severe testing ever experienced by believers. It will be the great crucible of our faith.

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<sup>18</sup> See section II.7, “Law and nationalism as restrainers of satanic influence” in part 4 of The Satanic Rebellion, “Satan’s World System”.

But when the Son of Man returns, will He find faith on the earth?  
Luke 18:8b

The Tribulation, whose very name communicates unprecedented distress (as we have seen above in section I.2) will thus be the great “hour of testing” which will put mankind “to the test” (Rev.3:10). It will be 1) a great smelter that separates silver from dross, 2) a great threshing floor that separates wheat from chaff, and 3) a long “dark night” requiring the utmost perseverance to endure (Is.21:11-12; Amos 5:18-20; Jn.11:9-10):

And [during that time of the end] many will purify and cleanse themselves, and will be *refined* (lit., “smelted in a crucible”). But the wicked will act wickedly, nor will any of the wicked understand. But those who give [these matters] careful attention will understand.  
Daniel 12:10 (cf. Dan.11:33-35)

His winnowing fork is in His hand, [ready] to cleanse His *threshing floor* and gather the grain into His barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.  
Luke 3:17

We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day. *Night is coming*, when no one is going to be able to work.  
John 9:4

As believers, it is this issue of maintaining our faith – no matter what – upon which we must take the greatest care to keep our gaze directed. For amidst the universal war, famine, plague, worldwide disasters and tremendous divine punishment upon the earth’s unbelieving inhabitants, *maintaining faith* (firmly fixed on our hope and expressing itself in love: Gal.5:5-6; cf. Col.1:4-5) will be the central issue for all believers in that most intensive refining process called the Tribulation. For in all the troubles to come, He will be faithful to those who remain faithful to Him . . .

In spite of wide spread apostasy (2Thes.2:3; 1Tim.4:1; Matt.24:9-14):

Now we see that they (i.e., the Exodus generation) were unable to enter into this [place of rest] because of their unbelief [lack of faith]. So let us beware lest any of you should seem to fall short [on this score], by casting aside [God’s] promise [in a similar way]. For we have had the gospel preached to us just as they did. But the word they heard did not profit them, for, though they heard it, they did not mix it with faith. Therefore it is we *who believe* who enter into this rest [not those who abandon their faith], just as He has said . . .  
Hebrews 3:19 - 4:3a

In spite of severe economic dislocation (Rev.6:6):

And if God dresses the wild plants in such a way – here today but thrown into the oven tomorrow – will He not all the more do so for you, *O you of little faith?*  
Matthew 6:30

In spite of warfare, plague and catastrophe (Is.13:12; Ezek. chap. 38-39; Dan. chap.7, 9, 11; Rev.6:2-8; chap. 13):

You will not be afraid of terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of the pestilence that goes about in the darkness, nor of the plague that destroys at noonday. A thousand may fall at your side, even ten thousand at your right hand – you it will not approach.

Psalm 91:5-7

In spite of the extreme divine judgments that will drastically change conditions on earth (Rev.6:12ff.; 9:1ff.; 16:1ff.).

Thus you shall say [to Baruch]: “Thus says the Lord. Behold, I am about to tear down what I have built, and uproot what I have planted – and this [will befall] the entire earth.<sup>19</sup> So should you request for yourself big things (i.e., blessings far out of line with a time of general cursing)? Do not make such a request. For, behold, I am about to bring evil upon all flesh, says the Lord. Now I have granted you your life as a spoil in the places where you shall journey.

Jeremiah 45:4-5

In spite of the hostility of a worldwide, monolithic, pagan religion (Rev.13):

Beloved, don't be amazed at the fiery ordeal of testing you are now undergoing, as if something out of the ordinary were happening to you. But to the degree that you are [truly] participating in Christ's sufferings, be joyful about it, so that at His glorious revelation, you may also rejoice with great gladness. If you are indeed being reproached on account of Christ's name, you are truly blessed, for the Spirit of glory, even the Spirit of God, rests upon you. Now let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or a meddler, but if [anyone should suffer] as a Christian (i.e., a “Christ-person”), let him not be ashamed of it. Let him rather glorify God under that name. For it is time for the judgment to begin, starting with God's household. And if it first begins with us, what will be the end of those who do not believe God's gospel? For [as it says], “If the righteous man is barely saved, where will the ungodly and sinful turn? (Prov.11:31)”. Therefore let all those who are suffering according to the will of God entrust their lives (while doing what is good) to a Creator *who is faithful*.

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<sup>19</sup> Or “land” of Israel. It is no accident that the Hebrew word *`arets* (/rX) can be taken in either sense, for this prophecy, like so many involving Israel, has a wider application as well. See section IV.1 below, “Hermeneutic Issues”.

In spite of widespread martyrdom of true believers in Christ (Rev.6:9-11):

Do not be afraid of any of the things which you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. *Be faithful* unto death, and I shall give you the crown of life.  
Revelation 2:10

Based upon the above general characteristics of the Tribulation, it is tempting to see this cataclysmic seven year period as the great and final confrontation between God and the devil, with believers caught in the middle. However, such a characterization, while improving upon many contemporary views that leave the Lord out of the picture entirely, is wrong on two crucial counts:

1) It falsely puts the Lord and Satan on the same level. In truth, Satan is able to launch his “final offensive” only because God allows it (2Thes.2:6-8; Rev.5:1-5). Furthermore, the issue of God’s complete victory is never in the slightest doubt, the entire course of the Tribulation merely serving His righteous ends (as we have seen in section I above).

2) It falsely portrays believers as mere “victims”, when, in fact, we shall have a critical role to play in God’s demonstration of His righteousness and faithfulness in the midst of this most difficult period in human history. In the face of wide-spread apostasy in the first half of the Tribulation, those who do not stumble will constitute a remnant of the faithful and a base for that three and a half year period’s miraculous evangelism. In the face of world-wide persecution during the second half of the Tribulation, the Great Tribulation, those who stand firm in their faith – even unto death in many cases – will be an unprecedented witness to the truth and mercy of God that will contradict Satan’s universal lies.

It is certainly true as we have noted above, however, that the war in heaven and consequent expulsion of the devil and his angels to the earth (Rev.12:7-9) will result in more intensive, more immediate pressure for mankind to choose for or against God than has yet been the case in the human experience. And choosing *for* God will entail a heavier price world-wide than has yet been the case in human history, especially in the general persecution of the Great Tribulation. God’s merciful, world-wide evangelism of the Tribulation’s first half, and His judgments upon the unbelieving inhabitants of the earth (for their idolatry and persecution of believers) in the second will further clarify the issue, making the Tribulation an era of little or no middle ground between good and evil: more than at any other time, it will be a period where all are likely to be either zealous followers of Jesus Christ or committed partisans of antichrist, and the intensive pressures that characterize the Tribulation (the devil’s operations on the one hand, and God’s righteous response on the other) do much to explain this polarity. As believers, we should take such information to heart, and determine in advance not to be lukewarm, but to be boiling hot in our faith now (lest we grow cold under those future pressures when the middle ground largely falls away). In the Tribulation, mankind will be confronted with the immediate choice of going

God's way or the devil's way (as is ultimately the case in every life, but often with time for deliberation) – “halting between two opinions” in the midst of the Tribulation will only lead to personal disaster vis-à-vis one's faith (1Kngs.18:21; cf. Rev.3:15-16).

As we saw in the final part (5) of our previous study, The Satanic Rebellion, it has been a trend of the Plan of God since the expulsion of Adam from Eden to proportionally expand the number of believers in all four ages of human history, so that what began with a trickle in the Age of the Gentiles will finish in full flood during the millennial kingdom of Jesus Christ.<sup>20</sup> In a similar and related way, knowledge of this issue of self-will versus the Will of God (as focused on the person of Jesus Christ) has also clearly been trending upward, a fact most clearly seen in the transition from the shadows of the Law of Moses to the revealed reality of the Person of Jesus Christ (Col.2:17; Heb.8:5; 10:1). This trend too will hit its temporal peak in the Millennium which begins with the revelation of Him to the world in His glorified state, and encompasses a thousand years of extreme blessing wherein God will be known in the very face of Christ more intensely and obviously than ever before in the history of humanity (Is.2:1-5; Acts 1:11; 1Cor.13:12; Rev.1:7):

They shall not harm nor destroy on all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.  
Isaiah 11:9

“For” says the Lord, “this is the covenant which I shall make with the house of Israel after these days: I shall put my precepts in their minds and write them upon their hearts, and I shall be their God, and they shall be My people. They shall not teach each one his fellow and each one his brother, saying ‘Know the Lord!’, because all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest of them. For I shall have mercy upon their unrighteous deeds and shall remember their sins no more.”  
Jeremiah 31:33-34

Immediately preceding this millennial peak lies the Tribulation, a period wherein God's truth in Christ, made more widely and clearly available than at any time prior to the Millennium (through the ministries of the “two witnesses”, the 144,000, and direct, divine proclamation), will also be opposed more violently and effectively than ever before in the historical experience of mankind (e.g., Rev.13:5-17). The Church Age has seen the beginning of this two-fold trend already. On the one hand, the areas and opportunities for human obliviousness to the choice between Christ and the devil have been shrinking as the world has become progressively “smaller” while the message of the gospel has become more generally available, constituting a major change from the previous dispensation of His grace:

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<sup>20</sup> See section II.8.c, “The Jewish Ceremonial Calendar” in part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement” (especially chart #3 and its discussion).

And they said, “Men, why are you doing this? We too are human beings subject to the same mortality as you, *giving you the good news* to turn away from this pointless [idolatry] back to the living God, who made heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, *who in the generations gone by allowed all the nations to go their own ways* – although [even then] He did not leave Himself without a witness, giving you rains from heaven and productive seasons, filling you[r bodies] with sustenance and your hearts with joy.

Acts 14:15-17

On the other hand, it is also true that these past two millennia have seen a corresponding increase in satanic activity – not overt demon possession and idolatry per se, but the steady laying of the ground-work for the next “Tower of Babel”, morally, politically, socially, indeed, in every aspect of the “world system” which the present ruler of this kosmos has established.<sup>21</sup> That system is not merely a static device for present world rule, it is also the devil’s organizational base for his ultimate offensive, de facto world domination through the person of his antichrist. It is thus a base of operations which he is doing his best to develop in specific preparation for that day. This is the accelerating “mystery of lawlessness” (only too visible in our own day) which is aiming toward that final gambit to be played out in earnest during the Tribulation:

Even now you know what it is that restrains [antichrist] so that he will be revealed [only] in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness (*anomia*) is already at work – it is only the Restrainer [who keeps things in check, and will] until He moves out of the way. And then the lawless one (*anomos*) will be revealed . . .

2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 2:6-8a

By linking lawlessness to the revelation of antichrist in the context above, and by using near identical cognate vocabulary to describe the two (antichrist is “the lawless one” – *anomos-ανωμας*, while lawlessness itself is *anomia-ανομια*), Paul makes it crystal clear that this lawlessness (which we are already experiencing) is a prerequisite preparation for the coming of the lawless one (i.e., antichrist). That preparation (the devil’s progressive inroads into human society at all levels and in all places) is “already at work”, but cannot be entirely completed until the Spirit’s restraint is allowed to wane as the Tribulation begins (part of the divine plan to demonstrate Satan’s true intentions and ultimate impotence).<sup>22</sup> We find a similar meaning in the apostle John’s comments about the “spirit of antichrist” which he describes as already active in his day, even though antichrist himself will not be revealed until the Tribulation begins (1Jn.4:3). Moreover, the very fact that many “antichrists” are active in the present age is proof positive that we are on the threshold of the Tribulation:

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<sup>21</sup> See part 4 of the Satanic Rebellion series, “Satan’s World System”.

<sup>22</sup> See “Law and nationalism as a restrainers of satanic influence”, section II.7 of part 4 of the Satanic Rebellion series, “Satan’s World System”.



Children, it is [now] the final hour, and just as you have heard that antichrist is coming, even now many “antichrists” have arisen – that is how we know it is the last hour.

1<sup>st</sup> John 2:18

The Church Age, therefore, finds the devil restrained from launching his final, supreme offensive, but in full preparation mode for rapid implementation of his plans just as soon as the opportunity is presented (with the breaking of the seals of the Book of Revelation and removal of divine restraint: Rev.5:1-5; 2Thes.2:6-8). The removal of divine restraint, without which action on God’s part Satan’s tribulational operations would be impossible, is a topic that will be covered in detail in the next part of this series. Suffice it to say for now that this fact alone (i.e., no Tribulation without divine permission) proves that the Tribulation, far from being “an accident”, is, on the contrary, an essential period in God’s construction of the ages, in the course of which the devil’s wickedness and true intentions will be laid completely bare (cf. Rom.7:13), while God gains surpassing glory in subduing the creature in preparation for the glorious reign of His Son (Ps.110:1; Heb.10:13; cf. Ex.14:4; Is.63:12-14). Apropos of our immediate purpose here is the fact that this removal of restraint (coupled with the devil’s exploitation of this unique opportunity) does much to explain the outrageous and unprecedented events that will take place during the Tribulation. For at other times in human history, “breaking the bonds” that God has set for human (or angelic) behavior has resulted in predictable divine judgment of a preventative nature (cf. Ps.2:3; Jer.5:5). This is true whether the offenders who overstep the ultimate bounds of divine restraint be angels (witness the imprisonment of the demons involved in cohabitation with human women in Genesis 6),<sup>23</sup> or men (compare the swift and complete destruction of Sennacherib and his army for defying God: Is.36-37). The preceding parenthetical examples constitute extreme cases of the general principle of just judgment upon any and all who set themselves against God’s truth and overstep the clear limits He has imposed:

God’s wrath is about to be revealed from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness – on men who suppress the truth [about God] in their unrighteousness.

Romans 1:18

In the Tribulation, however, previously restrained lawlessness will reach unprecedented heights – the full flowering of the “mystery of lawlessness” already operative, but destined to reach full flood in the Tribulation. The experience of the Pharaoh of the Exodus provides us with a useful parallel for understanding the processes involved here. Specific divine relaxation of normal human limits was required in order for Pharaoh to be able to “harden his heart” to the degree that he did in such high-handed opposition to God in the face of such miraculous displays of His power.<sup>24</sup> However, the result of all Pharaoh’s stubborn resistance was only a greater degree of

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<sup>23</sup> See part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”, section III.1, “Satan’s antediluvian attack on the purity of the human line (the Nephilim)”.

<sup>24</sup> See the series: Exodus 14: Hardening Pharaoh's Heart.

glory for God, as uncommon persecution was followed by uncommon judgment and miraculous deliverance (Ex.14:4; Is.63:12-14):

Indeed, for this very reason I have raised you [Pharaoh] up, namely, to demonstrate My power to you and to proclaim My Name in all the earth.  
Exodus 9:16

This similarity (between the removal of restraint in the individual case of Pharaoh and general removal of restraint in the Tribulation) is not accidental: the entire history of the Exodus (as we shall have occasion to see in part 7 of this series) provides an important teaching paradigm or parallel model for the experiences of the Tribulation. In the Tribulation, intensely blind hardness of heart will be endemic, allowing the majority of mankind to serve the devil as never before. Greatly accelerating the danger of this trend will be the fact that the bulwarks of law and nationalism will also be eroded as never before, largely eliminating any safe-haven of neutrality for those who are not interested in choosing for God, but who, under normal conditions, would refrain from enlistment in the cause of evil. Taken together, all these factors (removal of divine restraint, the fruition of the “mystery of lawlessness”, the implementation of Satan’s final offensive, and the corresponding divine judgment upon it) will combine to make the seven years of the Tribulation a singularly terrible experience that will truly be “bitter in the stomach” (Rev.10:9-10; cf. Ezek.2:8 - 3:3).

While the Tribulation may be a time of terror for unbelievers, for believers it is more properly seen as a time of testing. Given this most essential characteristic of the Tribulation (the essence of what we have delineated above), it should be clear at this point that the proper focus for believers in contemplating it (not to mention preparing for it) is not fear, but faith and confident hope in God’s ultimate deliverance. The information scripture provides about tribulational events before the fact is not designed to terrorize Christians into inaction. Rather its purpose is to give them fair warning in order that they may both make maximum *spiritual* preparations ahead of time, and also be able to put these events in a proper faith perspective, when and if they are called upon to endure them.

During the Tribulation, Satan will reveal more clearly than ever before his true malignant intent towards mankind (Rev.12:12; 13:5-10), and in righteous response God will cover Himself with glory in just judgment of evil upon the earth (Is.24:1-23). In the midst of such a maelstrom, human beings will not easily be able to remain neutral. The question “which side are you on?”, though being asked today, is often put off. In the course of the Tribulation, however, all mankind will be forced to give an answer, and to stand by the answer they give.

And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of this book’s prophe[tic message], for the time is near. Let the unrighteous continue to act unrighteously, and him who is filthy continue in his filthiness, and let the righteous continue to produce righteousness, and him who is sanctified continue in his sanctification”.  
Revelation 22:10-11

For those who remain faithful to Jesus Christ, despite dungeon, fire and sword, victory is assured, along with a glorious place in the Kingdom to come.

And it will be said on that day, “Behold, this is our God! We put our hope in Him that He would deliver us. This is our Lord. We put our hope in Him. Let us rejoice and be glad in His deliverance!”

Isaiah 25:9

#### **IV. The Biblical Sources for the History of the Tribulation**

More than any other topic in scripture, the study of eschatology (i.e., the “last things”) and specifically, of the Tribulation requires some prerequisite work on methods and sources. This is true in the case of the latter issue (sources), because few subjects are more widely dispersed throughout the Bible in Old and New Testaments alike. It is also true in the case of the former issue (methods), because one absolutely has to understand something of how prophecy (especially Old Testament prophecy) is constructed in order to be able to extract doctrinal information from it in a valid way. Furthermore, understanding something of the latter (i.e., *how* we are gathering our material) will also help to explain our approach to the former (i.e., *where* we are gathering our material). So before conducting an overview of the books where most of the important information about the Tribulation resides, we need first to consider some of the basics of the process, the manner, and the *method* of biblical prophecy (which is by definition, after all, divinely provided information about future events).

##### **1. Hermeneutic Issues**

It is fair to say that biblical prophecy, especially as it is found in the Old Testament prophets, can often be challenging (even difficult) to understand. This is not entirely accidental, for much (if not all) Old Testament prophecy was directed towards a population that, in the main, was not interested in hearing what was being said. Therefore, in the same way that Jesus spoke in parables to an audience that gladly accepted His miracles but not His message, so God gave the recalcitrant recipients of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Minor Prophets prophecies that would “make their ears tingle” but which would not necessarily be patently obvious at first as to their meaning. That is to say, because of its unique function (of warning to a rebellious population), prophecy’s overt meaning often requires interpretation to be understandable: one has to demonstrate an interest in the message before the message becomes accessible. Therefore we may legitimately compare the analysis of prophecy to the translation of a foreign language. For prophecy, just like a foreign language, must first be properly “translated” (interpreted) in order to be understood. The task of effectively “de-coding” a text in a foreign tongue requires experience with the language in question, and, ideally, some formal training. Any visitor to a foreign land whose language he does not speak can readily testify to the need for some sort of dictionary or language aid. Knowledge of even a few basic rules of grammar, a handful of phrases, and a few key vocabulary items, can, in such cases, make a trip much more enjoyable. Such is the case in treating biblical prophecy as well. Unfortunately, the rules for proper interpretation are seldom

spelled out and explained. Therefore a short foray into a few key areas of prophetic interpretation here will be most helpful in preparing us for our survey of the biblical sources of the Tribulation which we are about to consult. The writer is keenly aware that these issues are not commonly addressed and will be found by some to be more onerous and less titillating than one would generally expect from a study with the “end times” as its subject matter. Understanding these principles is, however, essential, even foundational, to the proper development of the evidence upon which our study will be based. The reader’s patience is therefore earnestly besought while we examine these critical issues.

### **a. Prophetic Foreshortening**

When one views an extensive mountain range from a distance, the eye often sees a particular version of events from long range that would be significantly altered by a change in perspective. Move closer, and what had looked like one homogeneous ridge line, may reveal itself to possess more depth, diversity and distinction than had previously been assumed. Move to the side, and a more clearly three-dimensional picture emerges. Move overhead, and the individuality of certain mountains, valleys, or groups of peaks may come to light. This does not mean in any way, it is important to note, that the first perception was *wrong*, merely that it was one particular perspective only, valid from its own point of view, and, when taken in conjunction with other perspectives, even essential for “getting a feel” for what this mountain massif “is like”.

A similar phenomenon occurring in prophecy is often termed “prophetic foreshortening”. One classic and rather well-known example of prophetic foreshortening in the Old Testament is to be found in the case of the Messiah, who was destined to come not only as the Glorious King, but also as the Suffering Servant (cf. Is.52:13 - 53:12). Even the prophets themselves were “eager to discover the precise time the Spirit of Christ within them was signifying as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow” (i.e., the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent and Millennium: 1Pet.1:10-11; cf. Lk.10:24; Jn.8:56).<sup>25</sup> In producing all of this wonderful prophetic material, not completely understood at the time (at least as far as the distinction between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Advents was concerned), the prophets of old were “not so much serving themselves as they were you” (i.e., believers of the present, post-First Advent age: 1Pet.1:12). Today, even new initiates into the Christian faith are generally well aware of the difference between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Advents of Christ – we now “speak the language” of Christology, the distinction being demonstrated by the first coming of Jesus (which did not include the commencement of His millennial reign), and explained in detail throughout the New Testament epistles (where the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent is explained and anticipated). With the suffering of Christ now a historical reality, put into complete perspective by Paul, Peter and John, we now see the two advents from a side-long perspective, so to speak, clearly articulated in their individuality (instead of as one massive “mountain” of prophecy, indistinguishable from the Old Testament perspective). But to the prophets and believers of the past, viewing these discrete occurrences through prophecy only and from the

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<sup>25</sup> A similar prophetic foreshortening occurs in the case of the doctrine of the Trinity in the Old Testament. See section II.C of Bible Basics Part 1: Theology: The Study of God.

distant fore-ground of the actual events, the two “peaks” seemed to blend indistinguishably close together. Indeed, in Jesus’ day, the necessity for the Messiah to suffer on behalf of all mankind was lost sight of entirely, with His contemporaries, in their hardened unbelief willing to accept only the glories of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent, while failing to understand that these had to be based upon the humiliations and sacrifice of the 1<sup>st</sup> Advent (cf. Lk.19:11).

Instances of this phenomenon of prophetic foreshortening also abound in the area of general eschatology (i.e., prophecies about the end times). To take but one brief example, Isaiah chapter sixty-six ends with the following:

“For just as the new heavens and new earth which I am about to make are going to continue before Me”, says the Lord, “so your seed and its name will continue. And it will come to pass that from month to month and from Sabbath to Sabbath all flesh will come to worship before Me”, says the Lord. “And they will go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who rebelled against Me, for their worm will not die and their fire will not be quenched and they will be abhorrent to all flesh”.

Isaiah 66:22-24

This passage, which, as we know clearly both from New Testament descriptions of the new heavens and new earth (2Pet.3:13; Rev.21:1), as well as from the description of condemned unbelievers (cf. Mk.9:48), must describe the Eternal State (after the close of human history), follows immediately on the heels of a description of events in the newly instituted millennial kingdom of Christ (Is.66:18-21). With the framework of eschatological teaching supplied from the New Testament, these passages can be fit precisely into the scheme of future events. From a strictly Old Testament perspective, however, the sections, treating events at the outset and conclusion of the Messiah’s thousand year rule, are difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish, blending together in a way nearly identical to analogous treatments of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Advents (e.g., compare Is.9:6a, “unto us a child is born”, with 9:6b-7, “He will reign on David’s throne”, where the birth and return of Christ are indistinguishably linked). In treating prophecies of this sort, it will be important to keep in mind that such blending together of events (or foreshortening) is an extremely common phenomenon in prophecy.

One may be forgiven for asking why such a technique (at least potentially confusing) was even employed? In response, we may note first of all that with the help of all the information the New Testament provides in these matters, Old Testament prophetic material now *is* accessible to us (when “rightly divided”, that is). Therefore what we have here is an analogous situation in the case of this foreshortening of prophetic information about the end times to that of the similar treatment of details contained in the prophets about the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Advents of Christ, wherein they were “not so much serving themselves as they were” us (1Pet.1:12), though earnestly “eager to discover the precise time” of such events (1Pet.1:10-11; cf. Lk.10:24; Jn.8:56): however much of a mystery this conflation of information was at the time, we are *now* in a position to construct a detailed history of future events with the help of further New Testament revelation (the Book of Revelation in particular).

Secondly, all the information contained within the prophetic books has always been useful and important, from the time of writing, right up until the present hour (and for as long as history may continue). Much of the benefit these prophecies have always provided is to be found in the *encouragement* to be taken from the knowledge they provide about the eventual reestablishment of divine control over the world on the one hand, and the salutary *warnings* they deliver from close consideration of the tremendous divine judgments that will precede this on the other. These are indeed benefits that could be gained from reading the prophets before the coming of Christ and without a complete understanding of the chronological scheme of the eschatological events in question (or, for that matter, of any of the specific distinctions we can now discern). Furthermore, it is a benefit that all Christians can glean from reading the prophets today as well, even without a firm grasp of eschatology. For even cursory consideration of the depiction of the events of the end times in prophecy has value from the standpoint of analogy: the day will come when **God will judge** the world, so what manner of believers ought we to be now (2Pet.3:11-12)? And the day will come when **God will rule** the world, so should we not be encouraged to serve Him properly now (2Pet.3:13-14)?

Finally, there is also an element of deliberately constructed enigma in such prophecy (as suggested at the outset). God has not chosen to make those scriptures which delineate the future a readily open book on all counts. As with many of the truths of the Word of God, they are accessible only through diligent study and laboriously constructed theology. This state of affairs is not without its benefit either, for it serves to distinguish between those who truly want to know Him and those whose interest is merely ephemeral (cf. Matt.13:20-21; 13:34-35; Mk.4:16-17; 4:33-34; Lk.8:13). For this reason Jesus spoke in parables to the enthusiastic crowds who would soon be shouting for His crucifixion (Matt.13:10-17; cf. Ezek.33:30-32; Hos.12:10), and advised all of us who follow Him to be careful about “throwing pearls before swine” (Matt.7:6). There are no pearls of greater price than the truths of the holy scriptures, and it is greatly worth our while to diligently seek God’s truth, even if it means wrestling with the likes of prophetic expression (as we are doing here). For the only alternative is to find ourselves in the same predicament as much of Isaiah’s audience who were not really interested in what he had to say:

And He said to me, “Go and say to this people, ‘Hear well, but do not comprehend. See well, but do not understand’. Harden the heart of this people, make their ears heavy, and blind their eyes, so that they may not see with their eyes, nor hear with their ears, nor understand with their hearts, nor repent and be healed”.

Isaiah 6:9-10

## **b. The “Day of the Lord” Paradigm**

Aside from the foreshortening of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Advents, the most common Old Testament prophetic blending is the combination of a great deal of currently unfulfilled eschatology (i.e., prophetic information about the end times) into a single whole under the name “The Day of the Lord” (or other equivalent phrases; see below). This comprising of the bulk of the end times into a single, unifying name, though creating interpretive difficulties, does have a very sensible rationale: beginning with the Lord’s termination of the Tribulation at the glorious and victorious

return of His Son, and ending with the commencement of eternity, the “Day of the Lord” truly is that period in which God Himself openly asserts His direct control over human history, first in judgment (at the conclusion of the Tribulation), then in restoration (throughout the Millennium), and finally in replacement of temporal history with something far better (at the commencement of the Eternal State). Starting with the very end of the Tribulation (i.e., with the events that signal and encompass the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent and Armageddon), this really will be an era in which God’s clear and demonstrable orchestration of history’s events will be undeniable (as opposed to the present time where God’s control of history, complete and foreordained though it unquestionably is, must be observed through the eyes of faith: cf. 2Cor.4:18; 5:7; Heb.11:1). For this reason, that future time to come will be even more clearly His “day” than all of the rest of the historical millennial days which have preceded.

In the final part of our previous series, we devoted much time to the biblical teaching of millennial days – specifically, the molding of all human history by God into seven discrete millennia (Ps.90:4; 2Pet.3:8).<sup>26</sup> The “Day of the Lord” is essentially coterminous with the seventh millennial day, the Sabbath of human history, wherein Christ will reign for a thousand years, beginning with His return and the judgments which accompany it, and concluding in a final cycle of judgment that will segue directly into the Father’s Eternal Kingdom (1Cor.15:24; Rev.21:1). The “Day of the Lord” technically begins with Armageddon and the events that betoken its proximity. However, given that all divine judgment during the Tribulation serves to warn of this impending “day of judgment”, this phrase in prophecy is often also inclusive of events that will actually occur during the Tribulation.

Howl, for the *Day of the Lord* is near, all destroying from the Almighty. Therefore will every hand hang slack and every human heart melt, and they will be dismayed. Convulsions and pain will seize them, and they will writhe like a woman about to give birth. They will look at each other in astonishment, their faces ablaze. Behold, the *Day of the Lord* is coming, a mighty day of anger and intense wrath, to make the earth desolate and remove her sinners from upon her. For the stars of heaven and the constellations will not flash forth their light. The sun will grow dark on its course and the moon will not pour out its light. Then will I punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity. I will bring an end to the arrogance of the proud and bring down the haughtiness of the ruthless. I will make men more rare than gold, and mankind than the choice bullion of Ophir. Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will quake from its place on account of the anger of the Lord and on *the day of His fierce wrath*.  
Isaiah 13:6-13

The reduction of worldwide population described above is a trend that runs throughout the Tribulation (Zeph.1:2-3; cf. Mic.7:13), but culminates in the Armageddon judgments. These judgments, along with the glorious return of the Messiah, form the point of emphasis for the

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<sup>26</sup> See section II.7, “The Seven Days of Human History”, in part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”.

phrase “the Day of the Lord”, but that this “day” runs the entire length of the Millennium can be seen from the following:

And the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire by that same Word (of God), preserved for the day of judgment and the destruction of godless men. Let not this one fact escape your attention then, beloved, namely that one day is like a thousand years in the Lord's eyes, and a thousand years like one day (i.e., the “day” will span a millennium). The Lord is not delaying in the fulfillment of His promise (as some think); rather He is exercising patience for your sake, being unwilling for anyone to perish, but desiring all instead to come to repentance. For ***the Day of the Lord*** will come like a thief, ***a day in*** (i.e., over the course of) ***which the heavens will depart*** with a roar, the very elements will ignite and dissolve, and the earth and everything which has been done upon it will be laid bare [for the Lord's inspection]. Since all these things are destined to disintegrate in this way, [consider] what sort of [Christians] we ought to be, [devoted to] holy and godly conduct, as we wait with eager expectation and apprehension the advent of ***the Day of God***. For on ***that day*** the heavens will burst into flame and dissolve, and the elements will catch fire and melt. But we are awaiting new heavens and a new earth just as He promised - [a world] where righteousness dwells.

2nd Peter 3:7-13 (cf. Rev.21:11 - 22:3)

The “Day of the Lord” commences with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent and concludes, as the passage above shows, with the “advent of the Day of God”, that is, the beginning of the Eternal State, the Kingdom of the Father, at the termination of human history when all rebels have been destroyed and all foes of God eternally judged. For the “Day of the Lord” will be the period of the subjection of the enemies of God, a process that begins with the tribulational judgments and Armageddon, but which runs to the end of the Millennium (including, for example, the suppression of the Gog-Magog rebellion: Rev.20:7-10), and the Last judgment (Rev.20:11-15):

But each [will be resurrected] in his own echelon. Christ [is the] first-fruits (i.e., the initial person and echelon of resurrection). Next [will be] those belonging to Christ at His coming [all believers at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent]. Then the end [of human history – the resurrection of millennial believers], when He will hand the Kingdom over to the Father, ***after He has brought an end to all rule***, all power, and all authority (i.e., hostile human and angelic control). For He must rule until He has ***placed all His enemies under His feet***.

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:23-25 (cf. Psalm 110:1)

Some of the names for this “day” in the Old Testament including a partial list of important occurrences include:

1. **The Day of the Lord**: The term proper is often one of judgment, referring in large measure to the retribution that will be wrought upon God's enemies at Christ's 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent (Ezek.13:5; 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1; 2:11; 2:28-32; 3:14; Amos 5:18-20; Ob.1:15; Zeph.1:7-13; Zech.14:1-21; Mal.4:1-5):



The great ***Day of the Lord*** is near, very near and coming quickly. The sound of the ***Day of the Lord*** will be one of warriors roaring bitterly. That day will be a day of blackness, a day of constraint and pressure, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and deep gloom, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the high corner-towers. For I shall bring distress upon mankind, and they will walk about like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord. And their blood will be poured out like dust, and their innards like excrement. Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the ***day of the anger of the Lord***. And all the earth will be devoured by the fire of His jealousy. For He will bring all the inhabitants of the earth to a complete, yes, a terrifying end.  
Zephaniah 1:14-18

2. **“The Day of Vengeance”**: This term links the general judgment described above with God’s personal retribution on behalf of His oppressed people (Is.61:2; 63:4; Jer.46:10):

For the Lord has a ***day of vengeance***, even a year of retribution for Zion’s cause.  
Isaiah 34:8

The “year” mentioned here is a season of recompense upon all of God’s enemies and the enemies of His people, and is thus also synonymous and coterminous with the “Day of the Lord” (cf. Is.61:2; 63:4). As such, it is also called “the day of wrath” (Is.13:13; Ezek.7:19; Zeph.1:18), and “the day of reckoning” (Is.10:3). It should be noted that the theme of God’s vengeance on this day is also often present in prophecy where the word “day” is not specifically used (e.g., Deut.32:40-43; Is.34:1-7; 35:4; 59:17-18; 63:5-6; Ezek.25:12-17; Joel 3:4-16; cf. 2Thes.1:5-10).

3. **“That Day”**: So common (and at the time of writing commonly understood) is the prophetic title “Day of the Lord” that it is also often referred to by the simple phrase “that day”, it being taken for granted that the reader will understand by this “the Day of the Lord” (Is.2:10-21; 3:7; 3:18; 4:1-2; 5:30; 7:18; 10:20; 10:27; 17:4; 17:7; 17:9; 24:21; 25:9; 26:1; 27:1-2; 27:13; 31:7; Jer.46:10; Hag.2:23):

On ***that day*** men will throw their idols of gold and their idols of silver which they have made for themselves to worship to the moles and to the bats, and go into holes in the rocks and crevices in the cliffs for fear of the Lord, and from the splendor of His majesty when He arises to shake the earth.  
Isaiah 2:20-21 (cf. Revelation 6:15-16)

New Testament usage is similar, being distinguished only in that it benefits from a more complete revelation of prophetic information. New Testament usage entirely confirms what we have said about the “Day of the Lord” so far. Some of the names for this “day” in the New Testament include:

1. “The Day of the Lord”: In addition to a focus on judgment (1Cor.5:5; cf. Acts 2:20), Paul uses the phrase in 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians to describe the timing of the resurrection of the Church and to explain that the ingathering of living believers will follow the resurrection of departed believers on the “Day of the Lord” (1Thes. 4:13 - 5:3). In 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians, Paul’s use of the “Day of the Lord” shows unequivocally that the core meaning we have noted from our study of Old Testament passages, namely, that its primary focus is upon the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent, matches his understanding of the term as well, for “that day” will not arrive before the prophesied events of the Tribulation have preceded it (i.e., the “Day of the Lord” follows the Great Apostasy in the Tribulation’s first half, and the reign of antichrist in the second: 2Thes.2:1-4). Peter’s use of the term at 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3:10 most clearly demonstrates the all-inclusive nature of the “Day of the Lord”, clearly extending from the return of Christ unto the destruction of the universe at the conclusion of His millennial reign (quoted with commentary at the beginning of this section).

2. “The Great Day”: The book of Revelation refers to the “Day of the Lord” twice as “the Great Day”, characterizing it further once as a day “of wrath” (Rev.6:17), and once as a day “of God Almighty” (Rev.16:14).

3. “The Day of Christ”: With the New Testament’s clear identification of the Messiah as our Lord Jesus Christ, Paul often refers to this future age-day under the title, “the Day of Christ”, a term that usually focuses specifically upon the judgment and reward of Christ’s Church at His return (Phil.1:6; 1:10; 2:16; cf. 2Cor.1:14; 1Thes.2:19):

[God] who will also keep you firmly grounded until the end, irreproachable on *the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*.

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1:8 (cf. 3:13)

4. Other Terms: As in the Old Testament, the familiarity of the theme means that often the idea of the “Day of the Lord” (including the pre-2<sup>nd</sup> Advent judgments, the return of Christ, His millennial rule, and the end of human history) can be in view without using any specific technical term. Without exhausting the topic, we shall round out our survey here with some other terms which do occur that are also synonyms for the “Day of the Lord”, stressing one or another of the aforementioned aspects of this familiar theme:

- a. “The day He comes to be glorified” (2Thes.1:7-10).
- b. “That day” (2Tim.1:12&18).
- c. “The day of judgment” (Matt.10:15; 11:24; 12:36; Acts 17:31; 2Pet.2:9; 3:7; 1Jn.4:17; Jude 6).
- d. “The last day” (Jn.6:39-54; 11:24; 12:48).

The particular hermeneutic “problem” we are confronting here concerns mainly Old Testament usage of the phrase “the Day of the Lord”. The “Day of the Lord”, is, in addition to being a very specific prophetic term for the end of human history (following the Tribulation), also used quite frequently in the Old Testament prophets *as a paradigm* for contemporary (or near contemporary) events. Just as Paul, in the book of Hebrews, can under divine inspiration look

backward and compare the backsliding of contemporary Christian residents of Judea to the behavior of the Exodus generation (i.e., utilizing an “Exodus paradigm” for purposes of comparison: 1Cor.10:1-13; Heb.3:7-19), so Old Testament writers of scripture under the same inspiration of the Spirit often look forward, comparing events taking place (or soon to take place) to the events which will transpire at the end of history. This is why “that day” often seems to (and often actually does) leap forward rapidly from descriptions of ongoing events to a dramatic discussion of occurrences which must refer to the “end times” exclusively, frequently without any clear signal in the text that such a spectacular shift is going to take place. This rapid-fire shifting between present and future events, although potentially confusing at first, is, when properly understood, an incredibly effective way both to encourage the faithful to persevere, while warning the recalcitrant of the dangerous path they are treading. For God’s ultimate destruction of the wicked and deliverance of the righteous “on that day” serves as a pattern, an example, and a paradigm of how He always acts at such times of crisis, in terrible justice to the wicked, and in absolute faithfulness to the righteous.

The critical factor which often escapes the notice of readers of the Old Testament prophets is that once one understands the *pattern* of the “Day of the Lord”, one can then be shown how that same *pattern* has always and will always repeat in human history. The “Day of the Lord” is the ultimate episode of the divine “cycle” of judgment, restoration and replacement (studied in detail in the last installment of our previous series).<sup>27</sup> This is true not only in broad-stroke outlines, but even down to fine details. To broaden the analogy slightly, this prophetic paradigm often includes first the degeneration of the nation, followed by warnings to it, judgment upon it, judgment upon the foreign instrument of that judgment, divine deliverance of a remnant from the foreign oppressor, the joy of the redeemed in deliverance, the restoration of God’s blessing, and the substitution of the redeemed in place of the previous sinful populace.

For this reason, an Old Testament prophet who was led by inspiration of the Holy Spirit to predict the coming of a conqueror to Palestine to punish the apostasy of the people always had an excellent, God-given analogy ready at hand in the ultimate occasion of such an event at the threshold of history’s end (cf. Ezek.33-39; Joel 1-3). And if such a prophet were tasked with encouraging the faithful regarding God’s eventual deliverance from the coming scourge, there would be no better parallel than the coming of the Messiah to destroy the enemies of God and restore the fortunes of Israel forevermore at the commencement of the “Day of the Lord” (cf. Is.10-11). This frequent Old Testament use of the “Day of the Lord” *as a paradigm* for putting contemporary events (or near term prophesied events) into the proper *divine* way of looking at things so as to teach, encourage, warn and explain, needs to be grasped in order to properly interpret those scriptures which anticipate the tribulational events and the “Day of the Lord” that follows. The “Day of the Lord” paradigm stresses God’s control and final disposition of all history (since the point of analogy is that “day” when His control will become absolute), and, as such, it is greatly encouraging for believers to realize that as He will do ultimately, so He will do imminently in every phase of history (to include His righteous resolution of the crises of the

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<sup>27</sup> See part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”.

present). Despite testing and temporal disaster, the righteous will always be able to look forward to the time of deliverance and rejoicing, while the wicked have only the fiery judgment of God to anticipate.

Oh, the raging of many nations – they rage like the raging of the sea! Oh, the uproar of the peoples – they roar like the roaring of great waters! Although the peoples roar like the roar of surging waters, when he rebukes them they flee far away, driven before the wind like chaff on the hills, like tumbleweed before a gale. In the evening, sudden terror! Before the morning, they are gone! This is the portion of those who loot us, the lot of those who plunder us.

Isaiah 17:12-14 NIV (generalizing conclusion to an oracle against *Damascus*)

### c. The Cycle of Judgment, Restoration, Replacement

Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course. All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again. All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing. What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 1:4-9 NIV

Human history is repetitive, as the best secular historians have always recognized.<sup>28</sup> History is cyclical, because God has made it that way – to teach mankind a few basic but important lessons about the true nature of life on this earth. Just as all men learn about the existence and reality of God from observing His creation (Rom.1:18-20), so through an objective observation of the human condition and human behavior through time (i.e., history), the utter pointlessness of all human endeavor is plain enough for anyone to see (anyone, that is, who is willing to face the unvarnished truth about human existence).<sup>29</sup> This principle becomes even more perspicuous when we turn to the scriptures. Examination of history strictly from God’s point of view reveals a cycle of divine judgment, restoration and replacement which has been repeating predictably since He created universe (and will, until the present universe comes to an end). This is true at all times, from pre-human angelic history to the end of time as we now know it, and on all levels, from the lives of the most obscure human beings to the rise and fall of the greatest empires. In both angelic and human experience, history began with creature rebellions which set in motion God’s assertion of control in judgment, restoration and replacement – a cycle of divine direction

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<sup>28</sup> Notably the fifth century B.C. Greek historian Thucydides in his History of the Peloponnesian War.

<sup>29</sup> See especially “The Vanity of Life”, section I.2 of part 4 of the Satanic Rebellion series, “Satan’s World-System: Past, Present and Future”.

of the historical process which not only redresses wrong, but also demonstrates God's inimitable grace, bringing a healing closure wherein the end is better than the beginning (the outcome of renewal being reserved for those who respond to His grace, while those who reject it are confirmed in condemnation).

Since the dawn of history, we see this cycle repeated not only on the national level, but also in every human life. Man is born in sin, condemned by the justice of God (Rom.3:23; 5:8; 7:14-20; 1Cor.15:22). But by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, Man is offered restoration to God (through faith). For all those who respond to God's magnanimous offer, an incomparable new life, an eternal life replaces the pathetically short and painful mortality that is now our common lot. For all those who reject the costly sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the original judgment of death is confirmed, with the sentence of death to be executed at the end of history (i.e., judgment day, at the "Great White Throne": Rev.20:11-15).

The cycle of judgment, restoration and replacement for the repentant (and of confirmation and condemnation for the resistant) can also be seen in the life of nations. We can only speculate about the details of cases that are not specifically commented upon by scripture, but it is easily within the ability of anyone with even a rudimentary grasp of history to supply examples of nations which have been destroyed for godless behavior (cf. Babylon by God's agent, Cyrus), or severely chastised and later restored upon repentance from their evil (cf. Assyria in the Book of Jonah). That God conducts Himself in such a way towards the nations of the world is certainly taught in scripture:

If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or a kingdom is to be built up and planted and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.

Jeremiah 18:7-10 NIV

The main difference in this cycle for nations is that God's chastising judgments (as well as recovery from judgment) are necessarily collective in nature. That is to say, all the inhabitants of a nation find themselves "in the same boat" in times of divine retribution, so that even a Jeremiah suffers from association with a nation under the most severe punishment of God, let alone less prominent believers like you and me (Ezek.14:13-20; and compare the "message to Baruch" in Jer.45). Conversely, nations which repent and are pardoned (or do not fall afoul of the awesome divine standard in the first place) certainly have their share of "wicked" who benefit by association with a populace that is largely God-fearing (or at least adheres to base-line standards of law and morality). What concerns us in the present context, however, is less the process of judgment and the standard applied (Jer.18:7-10 quoted above puts the principle in quite general terms – God will decide what is intolerable evil and what is rewardable good) than it is the historically repeating cycle itself.

The cycle of events we are discussing here finds its archetype in the events of the Tribulation and the subsequent “Day of the Lord”. For this reason, these celebrated eschatological events provide the key analogy we have been discussing found throughout the Old Testament prophetic books. That is to say, the specific pattern of judgment, restoration and replacement which will occur in conjunction with that ultimate “Day”, is the very pattern to which the Old Testament prophets continually made reference, and, further, is exactly what is being used as an analogy in their treatment of contemporary events: whenever some part of the cycle of divine judgment, restoration and replacement was imminent, it was most often these ultimate future events to which the prophets turned in divine inspiration for descriptive examples of what was soon to be unleashed in their own times. While our purpose here is in one respect the same as theirs (i.e., drawing lessons of warning and providing encouragement in anticipation of ultimate divine deliverance from the terrible events to come), in another respect it is “inside-out”: while Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and the Minor Prophets often use the “Day of the Lord” paradigm to explain events that were soon to take place, we shall be analyzing not only the clearly eschatological portions of their writings but also their contemporary applications to provide, by reverse analogy, information about the coming Tribulation and the glories to follow. Put another way, if a prophet explains a contemporary event by describing it in terms of what will happen on the “Day of the Lord”, we can be assured that the analogy works both ways: the contemporary event, *because* it is analogous to what will happen on the “Day of the Lord”, therefore *gives us information about* the “Day of the Lord”.

To take a rather well known example of how we need to be aware of this “multiple application” of prophetic scriptures in order to properly glean all pertinent information about the Tribulation from scripture, the reader is asked to recall our discussion of Isaiah chapter 14 (in part 1 of the preceding Satanic Rebellion series). In that chapter, what begins as a near contemporary prophecy about the end of the Babylonian captivity (still future at the time of writing) quickly segues into a description of the king of Babylon, an account which has been widely (and rightly) taken to refer to Satan, tracing his career from his original fall to his ultimate destruction (at the end of the “Day of the Lord”). Given that the details at the end of the discussion are valid *both* for the near term and for the ultimate cycle (the Tribulation and the “Day of the Lord”), we would not be amiss in seeing the description of Israel’s restoration at the beginning of the chapter as being likewise applicable to that final day even as it is to the near contemporary restoration it predicts (i.e., the end of the Babylonian captivity). Indeed, in this particular case, there is in fact not a single detail given in Isaiah 14:1-4a (the introduction to the taunt against the king of Babylon) which cannot be affirmed by independent verification of other scriptures as being applicable *both* to contemporary events *and* to the future “Day of the Lord”:

v.1a: *“The Lord will have compassion on Jacob and will again choose Israel and will settle them in their own land.”* NIV

Commentary: It is the prophesied resettlement of the Jews in their own land here that is the concrete result of God’s compassion and choice (in restored favor) of Israel. The immediate applicability of this verse is to the return of the exiles from the Babylonian captivity (cf. Jer.3:18;

16:15; 23:8), an event roughly contemporary compared to the distant end times (though still nearly two centuries away at the time Isaiah recorded this prophecy).<sup>30</sup> However, the regathering of Israel from throughout the world and the resettlement following the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent of the Jewish survivors of the Tribulation in the land of Israel is also prophesied many times in scripture (Is.10:21-22; 11:10-16; 35:8-10; 43; 49:8-26; 60:4; 66:20; Jer.3:18; 30:10; 31:8; 33:15; Ezek.11:17; 20:41; 34:13; 37:21-28; 39:25-29; Amos 9:11; Zeph.3:20; Zech.8:7-8; 10:10).

v.1b: *“Aliens will join them and unite with the house of Jacob.”* NIV

Commentary: There had always been some gentiles who had joined themselves to Israel out of a desire to seek the Lord (cf. Ex.12:19; 12:38; Num.9:14; 15:14; 35:15; Deut.1:16; 31:12; Josh.8:33-35). Therefore in terms of contemporary events this most likely refers to the return of non-Jews who were nevertheless part of the community (cf. Ezra 2:43-59; Neh.7:46-52). From an eschatological point of view, however, the inclusion of believing gentiles into the woof and warp of Christ’s millennial kingdom in an identical fashion is also a well-documented prophecy (Is.2:2-3; 11:10; 27:13; 56:3-8; 60:3; Ezek.47:22; Zech.2:10-12; 8:20-23; cf. Est.8:17).

v.2a: *“Nations will take them and bring them to their own place.”* NIV

Commentary: This was fulfilled in the near term by Cyrus the Great’s proclamation and support both of the original return of the exiles to the land under Sheshbazzar (Zerubbabel) as well as of the rebuilding of the temple (2Chron.36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-11; cf. Is.44:28; 45:1-7), by Darius’ confirmation of the policy (Ezra 6:1-12), and by the support rendered to Nehemiah by Artaxerxes (Neh.2:1-9; cf. Ezra 6:13), Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, all kings of the Persian empire which was a great collection of “nations” (Ezra 1:2). However the passage finds its ultimate fulfillment in the regathering of the Jews following the Second Advent, when the nations will enthusiastically assist Israel’s return to the land (Is.43:6; 49:22; 60:4; 60:8-9; 66:20).

v.2b: *“And the house of Israel will possess the nations as menservants and maidservants in the Lord’s land. They will make captives of their captors and rule over their oppressors.”* NIV

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<sup>30</sup> Isaiah lived and prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, i.e., circa 783-687 B.C. (Is.1:1). The year of Isaiah’s commission (Is. 6:1) almost certainly forms the *terminus post quem* for the beginning of his ministry (ca. 740-42 B.C.), while Sennacherib’s attack on Judah (ca. 701 B.C.) can be used as a solid *terminus ante quem* for the composition of the previous chapters (interpretation of historical allusions in the text as well as specific assumptions about the composition of the book in toto are necessary to pin down the date more precisely). The exiles began to return from the later Babylonian captivity in 538 B.C., while the seventy years ended “officially” in 516 B.C. These dates would give us an absolute maximum for the time between prophecy and initial fulfillment of ca. 227 years, and an absolute minimum of ca. 163 years.

Commentary: In addition to the returning believing gentiles, the restored Jewish nation would eventually again rule over the surrounding peoples (Samaritans, Idumaeans, etc.). Yet here we see the eschatological emphasis beginning to rise beyond the contemporary application of the prophecy, for this subjection and possession of the gentiles will clearly be a more prominent aspect of the millennial Israel (Is.11:14; 25:3; 43:14; 49:23; 54:3; 60:10-16).

v.3: *“On the day the Lord gives you relief from suffering and turmoil and cruel bondage,”* NIV

Commentary: As in the previous verse, so here in verse three the application of this aspect of the prophecy, while true for Israel restored from the harsh Babylonian captivity (cf. Ezra 9:8-9; Ps.137:1-6), will be even more perspicuous on that ultimate “day”, the “Day of the Lord” (Is.40:1-2; 49:10; 49:13; 54:7-15; Ezek.39:25-29).

v.4a: *“you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon.”* NIV

Commentary: In addition to the literal king of Babylon (defeated by Cyrus the Great), this verse also applies to the ultimate king of “mystery” Babylon, antichrist as head of the revived Roman empire (cf. Rev.17:1-5), and it is in this connection that the verse and those which follow have their ultimate application (Is.14:14-23). Furthermore, this particular section of prophecy, in addition to looking forward to near term and far term future events, also looks backward to the time of the devil’s rebellion against the Lord before human history began (cf. Ezek.28:11-19).<sup>31</sup> And, finally, when the description of the downfall of the king of Babylon/antichrist/devil is concluded, Isaiah moves back to events that were right on the verge of taking place (closer even than the Babylonian captivity which was still well over one hundred years future). Verses 24-27 detail the impending defeat of Assyria at the Lord’s hands, a miraculous deliverance which was soon to take place in Isaiah’s own days (cf. chapters 36-39). This event, that is, the supernatural destruction of the Assyrian army (see especially Is.37:36-38), is parallel to and evocative of the destruction by the Lord Jesus Christ of antichrist’s armies at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent (i.e., the battle of Armageddon). In practical and contemporary terms, this is surely the message Isaiah was sent to convey, with the dire parallel events of the future serving as a severe warning example to the nation to repent and return to the Lord. That Judah was miraculously delivered from the Assyrian threat while the Northern Kingdom of Israel was completely destroyed is a clear indication of Judah’s response to Isaiah’s message (and of Israel’s rejection of it).

The discussion above should be sufficient to show that Old Testament prophecies may often have both a near term and a far-future fulfillment (i.e., an ultimate fulfillment occurring during the Tribulation and the “Day of the Lord”). We would therefore be remiss if we failed to consider such prophecies in our construction of tribulational history.

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<sup>31</sup> See part 1 of the Satanic Rebellion series, “Satan’s Rebellion and Fall”, for exegesis of Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28.



This multiple applicability, moreover, is a deliberate and divinely-inspired device designed to bring home the significance of the cycle of near-contemporary events ready to be unleashed by comparing them to that ultimate, eschatological (i.e., “end times”) cycle of events. The process of judgment, restoration and replacement is a traumatic one. Prophecies of the sort considered above help to prepare those willing to hear the words of God for the cataclysmic nature of this cycle, be it the ultimate events of the end times or analogously trying contemporary events. In short, God’s prophets were continually led to make use of the device of drawing upon the future events of the Tribulation and “Day of the Lord” as an analogy for what was about to happen in their own time in order to get the attention of those to whom they ministered.

Our treatment of Isaiah 14 above also demonstrates that near and far term applications of these prophecies are often interwoven to such a degree that separating them out can be a difficult process. Usually it is a mistake to try, for, as the passage above shows, more often than not there is *both* a near and a far term applicability. The reality of multiple fulfillment (designed to bring home to a contemporary audience the significance of historical events about to unfold by comparing them to the ultimate example of the end of history), rather than being a hindrance or a disadvantage to us today is, quite to the contrary, a genuine boon in our search for detailed information about the Tribulation and the “Day” which is to follow. For, once we accept the fact of multiple fulfillment and come to understand the purpose and method of the Old Testament prophets in employing it (under the guidance of the Spirit), not only do we find ourselves free of the incorrect and enervating hermeneutic stricture that would have us choose yea or nay in such cases (i.e., under the mistaken belief that each passage *must* refer *either* to contemporary events *or* the end times), but we are also presented with a wealth of information about the events it is our purpose to study here, as previously closed passages become important sources for details about the Tribulation and subsequent “Day of the Lord” when viewed from the standpoint of the prophetic analogy which is the “Day of the Lord” paradigm.

None of this is accidental. The prophecy analyzed above (and all biblical prophecy) is of God’s inspiration, and the predicted (and actual) occurrence of events derives from God’s construction of history and His administration of it according to His divine plan and divine standards for His own gracious purposes. We should not be surprised, therefore, that this sort of thing (i.e., the continual repetition of the cycle of judgment, restoration and replacement) appears again and again in prophecy and in history. Rather we should set ourselves to benefit from this phenomenon in our attempt to glean as much detail as we can about the end times from all scriptural sources. For, with proper interpretation, a precise understanding and employment of the “Day of the Lord” paradigm as applied in scripture to the cycle of judgment, restoration and replacement opens up much of Old Testament prophecy that would otherwise be seen as *only* applicable to events that have already taken place.

In order to put ourselves in a position to gain as much as we can from this deliberate paralleling of events, it will be helpful here to sketch out in broad outlines the pattern of events which the cycle typically entails. Israel, as the nation of believers to whom these prophecies came (exclusively from prophets of Jewish descent), is, obviously, the primary point of reference for

the historical cycle we are considering. A synopsis of the historical sequence of this cycle for Israel (applicable by analogy in many ways to nations in general) can be given as follows in broad outline:

1. **Backsliding**: the spiritual degeneration of the nation.
2. **Warning**: divine verbal warnings and intensifying warning-judgments on the nation.
3. **Judgment**: virtual destruction of the nation by a chosen instrument of judgment (i.e., another nation).
4. **Restoration**: divine deliverance of a faithful remnant and repentance of the survivors.
5. **Retribution**: judgment upon the instrument of judgment (i.e., the destroying nation is destroyed in turn).
6. **Replacement**: the rebellious are purged and joy restored to the redeemed (who replace the previous sinful populace).

Clearly, while response to God's warnings averts the cycle, lack of response brings the cycle to full fruition (which has historically meant, in the case of gentile nations, complete and utter destruction with no surviving remnant).

History continues to repeat itself in the terms described above because mankind remains the same (a fact not lost upon the more insightful secular historians)<sup>32</sup>, but also (and much more importantly) because **God** is forever the same (Heb.13:8), and so are His standards. As a consequence, His response to rebellion on behalf of those who belong to Him is ever the same as well. Thus the Old Testament prophets made great use of His consistent historical and future responses to backsliding in their attempts to turn Israel from her sins. Upon reflection, therefore, it is not surprising that this approach of contemporary warning and encouragement based upon the consideration of cataclysmic future events should have been employed. It is, on the contrary, surprising only that people past and present have failed to prove more responsive to our Lord in light of the fearful expectation of judgment for lack of proper response to and respect for Him so well documented, past, present and future.

This inveterate tendency of mankind individually and collectively to stray from God (with those who turn back to Him under the pressure of judgment few and far between) guarantees that the judgment part of the cycle (which has been repeating since Adam and Eve) will continue as long as sinful mankind inhabits the earth. God's amazing grace in providing forgiveness through Jesus Christ to those who *do* respond and return to Him guarantees that restoration and replacement will also continue for all who take advantage of His bountiful grace. This is, in essence, the story of Christ, the personal embodiment of the grace of the God and the One whose sacrifice has made that grace available to all who are willing to embrace it. And because this essential story of gracious deliverance from judgment in the Messiah *is* so clear, it was possible for the Old Testament prophets to move back and forth between contemporary and far-future references with much greater ease than anything with which we are (at first) comfortable. For

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<sup>32</sup> See Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War.

example, they can switch from the impending destruction of ancient Israel to the ultimate deliverance of Israel at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent precisely because from the divine point of view the progression of these events *is identical* in principle: God’s judgment and His gracious deliverance in restoration and replacement always operate on the same standard and always on the basis of the same sacrifice (that of our Lord Jesus Christ). It is only the particulars (time, persons, scale) which change. So it is that not only can the experience of every nation be seen in these terms (i.e., the alternatives of grace and judgment), but also of every generation and every individual.

#### **d. Typology and Sequence in Old Testament Prophecy**

The interchangeability of particulars within the unchangeable cycle we are studying goes a long way toward explaining the tendency (as well as the ability) of Old Testament prophets operating under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to “shift scenes” with such alacrity. Once we add to this equation the phenomenon of *typology*, our interpretive picture will be fairly well complete. Simply put, typology is the use of an analogous substitute (a “type”) to represent, explain or symbolize an exemplar or model (an “antitype”). This phenomenon is likewise ubiquitous in scripture and not confined to prophecy. For example, Joshua is a clear “type” of Jesus: he leads Israel back into the promised land, defeating her enemies through divine agency (cf. the fall of the walls of Jericho) – even his name, Joshua, is indistinguishable in the Hebrew and the Greek from Jesus (we write them separately in English only as a matter of convenience to avoid confusion).<sup>33</sup> Joshua thus foreshadows the return of our Lord Jesus Christ and His 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent victories. In a similar way, the king of Babylon and antichrist can be representative types of Satan (as we saw above in our consideration of Isaiah chapter fourteen).

Once we have become comfortable with the principle of typology (as well as with those of foreshortening, eschatological paradigms, and the repeating, divinely controlled historical cycle), the method and practice of the Old Testament prophets becomes largely accessible. For these men were all, under God’s divine guidance, working off of a well-known story, *the* story of the ages: divine judgment upon rebellion, with gracious restoration of the repentant, and the replacement of what was lost with something better, all based upon divine provision in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This “story” is the essence of what we call “history”, the *true* story of what is happening, has always happened, and will ultimately happen here on planet earth, ever revolving around and essentially incomprehensible without the Person of Jesus Christ, by whom the world was made and in whom it has its being (Jn.1:3; 1Cor.8:6; Col.1:16-17; Heb.1:1-2).

In historical terms, then, this “cycle as story” typically plays out in the following way:

1. **Backsliding:** A nation, group or individual (more often than not, originally believing) turns away from God.

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<sup>33</sup> For more on the scriptural typology of Jesus Christ in general, see Bible Basics Part 1: “Theology: The Study of God”, section II.C.2: “The Messiah Pre-figured in the Old Testament”.

2. **Warning:** God provides an intensifying series of warnings and divine discipline to graciously prod the wayward back to Him before it is too late.
3. **Judgment:** In the absence of repentance, God raises up an oppressor to destroy the rebellious.
4. **Restoration:** In His mercy, God raises up a Deliverer to rescue the faithful remnant (or person) and restore the repentant survivor(s).
5. **Retribution:** The oppressor (individual or national) is utterly destroyed.
6. **Replacement:** The faithful remnant replaces the rebellious majority, with their end being more blessed than their beginning (for a nation or individual alike).

Egyptians, Canaanites, Amalekites, Assyrians, Babylonians, Romans – the list of nations who have played the role of oppressor in this story (as applied to Israel on the national level) is both long and familiar. In the ultimate version of this “story of the ages”, the one which we have set ourselves to explore in our present study, namely, the Tribulation and the “Day of the Lord”, it will be the worldwide confederacy of nations under antichrist playing this part, and with not only Israel, but all believers cast in the role of the oppressed. The Tribulation will constitute the judgment phase, with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent of the Messiah as the time of restoration, followed by the Millennium wherein the world will see an “over and above” replacement under the righteous rule of Christ unprecedented in human history both for its miraculous nature and for the intensity of its blessings. It is to this historical “antitype” (i.e., the cycle of judgment, restoration and replacement that will occur during the Tribulation and “Day of the Lord”) and personal “anti-types” (i.e., the antichrist and Satan as oppressors in turn opposed by the glorified Christ as Deliverer) to which the prophets ultimately looked and from which they inevitably drew their parallels under the guiding hand of the Spirit.

Old Testament prophecy, therefore, is not “all over the map” (for anyone who knows how to read the map). Rather, these future references are deliberately and divinely designed elucidations of the contemporary situations the prophets were confronting. Since, more often than not, these situations involved impending judgment upon the nation for apostasy, one of the most frequent points of analogy to be found in the likes of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, etc., is the Tribulation and subsequent events (i.e., the “Day of the Lord” paradigm). It is for this reason that we have indulged ourselves here in a somewhat detailed discussion of these matters, one which it may well be that some will find challenging to digest at first take. But it is essential to digest these things, for the prophecies concerned constitute an invaluable font of information about the end times, the very subject of our present study.

## **2. Biblical Sources for the End Times**

As mentioned at the outset, we shall be utilizing the Book of Revelation (which treats the end times in an essentially chronological manner) as our organizational guide for this study. Before beginning our exegesis of Revelation, however, it will be useful to list here the major sources of material about the end times occurring outside of the Bible’s final book. Of necessity, this sketch will be in the manner of a quick overview in order to provide a sense of what material there is and where it is to be found. Obviously, time and space do not permit here a complete outline,

not to mention exegesis, of all the books and chapters listed below. These and other pertinent passages will indeed be adduced and considered in context during the course of this study as we proceed chronologically with our investigation of the “history of the Tribulation”. The reader is therefore asked to keep in mind that the following list of “highlights” is not meant to be entirely comprehensive (smaller sections providing critical and significant details can and do occur elsewhere in scripture as well: compare the isolated passages treated in section I above).

#### **a. Old Testament**

“All scripture is God-breathed and useful . . .” (2Tim.3:16; cf. Rom.4:23-24; 1Pet.1:12), and so it is true that there is not a book (nor, for that matter, a chapter) in the Old Testament which cannot be used in one way or another at least to illustrate some aspect of or some principle pertinent to the end times (in part for reasons discussed in section IV.1 above). The spiritual truths of God’s control of history have always remained the same. There are, however, some parts of the Old Testament which need to be singled out here, either for their notable concentration of prophetic information about the Tribulation and the following “Day of the Lord”, or for the very close paradigms they provide to the events of this coming era. That this latter phenomenon is not accidental can be seen in the case of what is possibly the most salient example, namely, the comparison of the Exodus to the Tribulation (i.e., “the Exodus paradigm”): in the book of Revelation, for instance, the victorious song of the martyrs is called “the song of Moses” (Rev.15:2-3; cf. Ex.15), a clear and deliberate coupling of the experiences of the children of Israel in escaping from Pharaoh with that of believers of the Tribulation and the Great Persecution launched against them by antichrist.<sup>34</sup>

In terms of topicality and theme, the traditional English order (though different in some respects from the traditional Hebrew order) suits our purposes here, for it organizes the books of the Old Testament according to genre (loosely construed):

#### **The Pentateuch:** (Genesis through Deuteronomy)

##### Genesis:

- 3:15: the protevangelium
- 6-9: the Noahic paradigm (the flood as a type of the Tribulation)
- 11: the Tower of Babel and Nimrod (a type of antichrist)
- 49: Jacob’s blessing of his sons

Exodus: the book as paradigm (Egypt as a type of antichrist’s kingdom)

Leviticus: 16-17: the Day of Atonement (a type of the Great Tribulation)

##### Numbers:

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<sup>34</sup> These paradigms will be treated in part 7 of this series.

13-20: the apostasy of the Israelites (a type of the Great Apostasy)  
23-24: the oracles of Balaam

Deuteronomy:

18:14-22: the Prophet (a prophecy of Christ)  
28:15 - 30:20: the cycle of judgment, restoration and replacement  
32: the song of Moses  
33: Moses' blessing of the tribes

**The Historical Books:** (Joshua through Esther)

Joshua: the book as paradigm (Joshua as a type of the returning Messiah)

Judges: historical examples of apostasy, judgment, redemption, restoration and replacement

**The Wisdom Books:** (Job through Song of Solomon)

Job: a paradigm of intensive undeserved suffering (analogous to believers in the Tribulation)

Psalms: The book of Psalms, prophecy with a uniquely personal focus, illustrates in a vivid way the ideas discussed in the previous section. This is particularly true of the first two books of psalms (1-41 and 42-72 respectively), organized and, for the most part, written by King David.<sup>35</sup> As other prophets used their inspired knowledge of the end times to draw parallels to motivate their audiences, David shares with us in these two collections a powerful reminiscence of his own spiritual experiences, demonstrating for us how he motivated and encouraged himself in the Lord in the midst of the severe tribulations he faced (cf. 1Sam.30:6). A significant part of this self-motivation comes from his inspired concentration upon future events, that is, looking forward to the Messiah and His kingdom. David had faith in God's promises, that just as the establishment of His greater Son's kingdom was assured, so God would deliver him from his troubles and bring him into his own kingdom as well. Books I and II of Psalms are in particular essential reading for all believers in time of tribulation, especially for us who now find ourselves on the cusp of the end times. For these two books give us David's take on the proper perspective of "the believer *in the storm*". Reading and understanding these books as units is important, for in doing so we catch a glimpse of this great believer under tremendous pressure (in his early exile

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<sup>35</sup> The organization of roughly the first half of Psalms into two books is almost certainly the work of that gifted prophet of God, king David, the author of the majority of the psalms contained therein (though he chose to open both books I and II with psalms not attributed to himself, psalms 1-2 and 42-50 respectively, a mark of true humility on the part of that great believer). After David's death, Solomon placed the capstone on book II with Psalm 72, and Psalms was subsequently expanded to our current collection of 150 psalms in five books (this explains Ps.72:20 and the fact that there are more "psalms of David" later in the book: these were not organized into the collection by his hand as was the case in books I and II).

years, and in his later difficulties), allowing us not only to identify with David in all these troubles, but also to learn how to find our strength and encouragement in God as he did. For those of us whose lot it will be to endure *the* Tribulation, books I and II are veritable synopses of that experience.<sup>36</sup> For this reason, although the same might be said of the psalms in books III-V as well (consider the clear eschatological significance of, for example, psalms 82-84, 87, 93, 96-98, 102, \*110, 117, 118, 137, 148, 150), all of the psalms in these first two books are listed below with a brief description followed in square brackets by a general application for believers in tribulation (and, ultimately, in *the* Tribulation). Far from being repetitive, these are critically important perspectives, which, taken as a whole and kept in the heart, can sustain us in the worst of times:

Book I: David's life a paradigm of the Lord's deliverance from tribulations (the Tribulation)

- 1: spiritual blessings on the faithful, judgment on the wicked  
[*following the Lord is worthwhile*]
- 2: the Messiah's subjugation of the rebellious nations  
[*the Lord protects us from the adversary*]
- 3: David flees from Absalom  
[*the Lord protects us in danger and delivers us from treachery*]
- 4: a plea for relief from godless enemies  
[*let us trust and delight in God and His deliverance*]
- 5: a humble yet confident prayer for help  
[*the Lord answers our prayers, but destroys the wicked*]
- 6: a prayer for forgiveness and help  
[*the Lord forgives us our sins and confounds our enemies*]
- 7: a righteous prayer for deliverance from a false accuser  
[*the Lord judges our wicked enemies; Day of the Lord paradigm in vv.6-8*]
- 8: the Last Adam's future reign  
[*we shall one day share in Christ's dominion over the earth*]
- 9: God's judgment on the godless nations  
[*God controls history and will vindicate our cause*]
- 10: man oppresses but God redresses  
[*despite human expectations, God vindicates the helpless*]
- 11: a rebuke of those who would demoralize the godly  
[*the Lord will destroy the wicked for us*]
- 12: the victories of the wicked tongue are temporary

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<sup>36</sup> As M.F. Unger points out in Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament v.1 (Grand Rapids 1964) 781, many of the psalms (Unger calls attention specifically to 25-39) have a four-fold application: 1) to David, 2) to the trials of the godly in every generation, 3) to the sufferings of the Jewish remnant in the Tribulation, and 4) to the suffering of our Lord during His First Advent.

- [*God protects us from slanderous tongues*]
- 13: a plea for help under extreme pressure  
[*in spite of trouble, we trust in Him and are grateful*]
- 14: the godless adversary  
[*those who follow antichrist are fools – the Messiah will vindicate us*]
- 15: the requirements for fellowship with God  
[*the righteous life is not in vain*]
- 16: keeping our focus on God  
[*He is our portion and hope, our good transcending this life*]
- 17: a confident prayer for deliverance from enemies  
[*we can be assured that God will answer us*]
- 18: a hymn of victory for the Messiah  
[*in Him, our ultimate deliverance & victory are certain*]
- 19: the creation testifies to the truth of God's words  
[*we must stay focused on the Word of God*]
- 20: a prayer for the victory of other believers  
[*we are encouraged by each others confident faith*]
- 21: the Victorious King gives thanks  
[*we will share in our Lord Jesus Christ's final victory*]
- 22: the Suffering Servant and Victorious Messiah  
[*Christ our example of endurance & victory*]
- 23: Christ our Shepherd  
[*the Lord is guiding us through tribulation to ultimate victory*]
- 24: the advent of the King of Glory  
[*those who reject antichrist(s) will reign with the Christ*]
- 25: a prayer for guidance and mercy  
[*God is our source of truth, forgiveness and deliverance*]
- 26: a prayer for distinction from the wicked  
[*God will not destroy us along with the wicked*]
- 27: absolute confidence in the Lord  
[*we can and should have complete faith in His deliverance*]
- 28: a prayer for deliverance is answered  
[*the Lord will hear and answer us in trouble too*]
- 29: praise for the majesty of God  
[*He whose voice shakes the world can and will protect us*]
- 30: praise in repentance for God's mercy and forgiveness  
[*everything depends upon His favor*]
- 31: an acknowledgment of complete dependance upon God  
[*we need Him utterly*]
- 32: praise for God's forgiveness after confession of sin  
[*He forgives those who return to Him*]
- 33: praise for the Lord's character and power  
[*God's plans will stand in spite of human designs*]



- 34: praise for the Lord's goodness unto the helpless who trust in Him  
*[He will provide for us too]*
- 35: placing the battle in God's hands  
*[the Lord will fight on our behalf if we but trust in Him]*
- 36: the godless are blind to the wonder of God  
*[He blesses the righteous but rejects the wicked]*
- 37: God will bless the righteous and destroy the wicked  
*[trust Him – don't look to appearances]*
- 38: a plea for mercy and deliverance from enemies  
*[The Lord forgives those who confess and delivers those who look to Him for help]*
- 39: experiencing the vanity of life  
*[only getting and staying right with God counts in this life]*
- 40: God rewards and delivers the patient and humble [S]ervant  
*[Christ's self-sacrifice, humility and ultimate deliverance our model in tribulation]*
- 41: the Lord's deliverance from the treachery of false friends  
*[the Lord delivers the righteous from even the worst circumstances]*

Book II: David's life a paradigm of God's deliverance from the Tribulation (tribulations)

- 42: confidence in the Lord's deliverance from tribulation, part 1  
*[it is important to find our encouragement in the Lord in times of tribulation]*
- 43: confidence in the Lord's deliverance from tribulation, part 2  
*[it is important to find our encouragement in the Lord in times of tribulation]*
- 44: a plea for national deliverance from persecution  
*[God is the source of our victories and He is aware of all our troubles: trust in Him]*
- 45: the glory of the Messiah and His wedding to the bride  
*[we will share in His victory and be with Him forever]*
- 46: the Messiah's victory over the nations  
*[we have no cause to fear for the Lord fights our battles]*
- 47: the millennial coronation of the Messiah  
*[His victory is a certainty, so our deliverance is assured]*
- 48: the millennial capital of the Messiah  
*[we will be safe and secure with God our guide forever]*
- 49: confidence of the mature believer in the midst of tribulation  
*[the apparent blessings of the wicked will dissolve and they themselves will turn to dust]*
- 50: the millennial purging  
*[the Lord will separate the wicked and the righteous, so what sort ought we to be?]*
- 51: a prayer confessing sin and asking forgiveness  
*[God requires a contrite heart rather than an external show of contrition]*
- 52: the oppressor Doeg the Edomite as a type of antichrist  
*[God will make the righteous flourish, but the destroyer will be utterly destroyed]*
- 53: the fool who denies God as a type of antichrist and oppressor  
*[the ruthless will come to know the fear of God at Messiah's return]*

- 54: a prayer for deliverance from general betrayal  
*[though men betray us for gain, God will deliver us but destroy them]*
- 55: a prayer for deliverance from betrayal at the hands of friends  
*[though those we love betray us, God will judge the deceitful and save us]*
- 56: a prayer for deliverance from allies of convenience  
*[God is our deliverance from unbelievers who surround and would betray us]*
- 57: “do not destroy”; a prayer for deliverance when trapped and cornered  
*[the Lord sees our plight and will turn our enemies’ devices back on themselves]*
- 58: “do not destroy”; a complaint and request for deliverance from evil rulers, like antichrist  
*[the wicked rulers will be destroyed swiftly and the righteous vindicated]*
- 59: “do not destroy”; a prayer for deliverance from powerful enemies; Saul as antichrist  
*[God is our fortress and refuge against the destroyer; He will repay the adversary]*
- 60: an appeal to the Lord of the armies  
*[only with God can we gain the victory]*
- 61: anticipation of the Kingdom of God  
*[we need to have faith that He will deliver us and give us rest]*
- 62: a reminder of the source of our strength and all our good  
*[we need to find our rest and hope in God alone]*
- 63: communion with God in persecution; the Tribulation as a desert that must be crossed  
*[deprivation and persecution bring home the fact that God is our true portion]*
- 64: prayer for deliverance from conspiracy  
*[even the most clever plans of our powerful enemies collapse before God our refuge]*
- 65: a hymn of praise anticipating the Messiah’s return  
*[remember God’s provision and be confident in His ultimate deliverance]*
- 66: praise for Messiah’s victory and ultimate deliverance  
*[He will bring us through the fire and water of the Tribulation, and we will praise Him]*
- 67: the millennial reign of the Messiah  
*[the Lord will settle everything in righteousness and blessing on earth as it is in heaven]*
- 68: the Second Advent anticipated and described  
*[on the “Day of the Lord”, God and His people will be exalted and the wicked destroyed]*
- 69: the humility of the Messiah and His ultimate deliverance of Zion  
*[Christ our role model in enduring tribulation and persevering to victory]*
- 70: a prayer for personal deliverance and for strengthening of fellow believers  
*[we need to encourage both ourselves and others in the Lord]*
- 71: a prayer of confidence in the Lord’s deliverance, even in the face of martyrdom  
*[we need to be confident in Him, even if it be His will for us to drink this cup]*
- 72: the righteous rule of the Messiah  
*[remember that the wonder of His victorious Kingdom is assured for us]*

Song of Solomon: an allegory of Christ and His bride, the Church

## **The Prophetic Books: (Isaiah through Malachi):**

Isaiah: The prophecy of Isaiah provides us with perhaps the largest concentration of material applicable directly to the end times, for Isaiah made good use of the “Day of the Lord” paradigm to impress upon his contemporaries the serious nature of the Lord’s impending terminal judgment upon the Northern Kingdom of Israel and warning judgment upon the Southern Kingdom of Judah (accomplished during his lifetime by the “Lord’s rod”, Assyria). Roughly the second half of the book of Isaiah (i.e., chapters 40-66) concentrates upon the judgment-restoration-replacement theme with a near term focus upon Babylon (though this approach also occurs in key portions earlier in the book). The Babylonian captivity, as mentioned above, was still many years distant at time of writing, so that this second half of the book provided Isaiah’s contemporaries with both an impending [relatively near term] future judgment as well as an ultimate panorama of the judgment to come upon apostasy, the deliverance of the faithful, the destruction of the adversary, and the final victory and reign of Messiah.

That Babylon should figure so heavily in this regard in the book’s second half (chapters 40-66) should not seem at all odd to anyone who has read the hermeneutic section above – God’s judgment upon Judah through the agency of Babylon in ca. 586 B.C., the restoration of the nation seventy years later, and replacement thereby of the idolatrous inhabitants with a humble, God-fearing remnant, subsequently blessed, is close to being a carbon-copy of the ultimate fulfillment of a similar experience at the end of secular history (a phenomenon repeated constantly in prophecy in accordance with the principles we have studied above). Nevertheless, this focus upon a Babylonian captivity which was still over a hundred years future when Isaiah died has led many to posit a “second Isaiah” who would have had personal experience of these events. In fact, the second half of the book of Isaiah fits perfectly into the scheme and tradition of prophecy as we have been studying it: God deliberately revealed future events to His prophets and thereby made His people aware of important, repeatable and predictable patterns in His administration of history so that they (and we) might draw the right conclusions about His control of events and in humility be forewarned of impending disaster. Because of the importance of the book in its entirety to our purpose in this series, all chapters are listed and briefly considered below. One point which it is hoped will be easily observed from the following is the manner in which Isaiah moves effortlessly between future and contemporary events, illustrating and illuminating each by means of the other:

[Warning and Judgment]

- 1: Israel’s relationship to the Lord the key to her experiences (judgment and deliverance)
- 2: the end times in reverse as cautionary tale: the millennial “Mountain”; the “Day of the Lord” .  
..
- 3: . . . the Tribulation
- 4: . . . the Tribulation continued; the millennial reign of Messiah.
- 5: the parable of the vineyard: Israel’s relationship with the Lord part 2: apostasy and judgment
- 6: Isaiah’s commission: a message of warning destined to be rejected by all but the remnant

[Israel and Assyria: a paradigm of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Advents]

- 7: Immanuel rejected and consequent judgment on the nation embodied in . . .
- 8: Assyria a type of the kingdom of the beast; the majority fail to turn to the Lord for help
- 9: Messiah and His deliverance of the nation; in spite of the apostasy of the nation . . .
- 10: . . . continued; the final destruction of the oppressor and the restoration of the remnant
- 11: the Messiah and His millennial reign; the return to the land
- 12: the joy of the restored (victory song)

[Babylon Present and Future]

- 13-14a: contemporary Babylon as a type of beast's kingdom (the prince as antichrist and Satan)

[Judgments on the Nations: coming conquests as types of the ultimate 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent dispositions]

- 14b: Assyria (a type of the beast's kingdom, his army crushed in Israel at Armageddon)
- 14c: the Philistines (a type of the hostile neighbors of Israel, totally destroyed)
- 15: Moab (a type of the neutral neighbors of Israel suffering under antichrist's conquest)
- 16: . . . continued.
- 17: Syria (a type of the regional allies of antichrist; persecuting Israel but ultimately destroyed)
- 18: Cush (a type of the Southern Alliance defeated at the hands of the beast)
- 19: Egypt (a type of the Southern Alliance leader defeated by antichrist, but turning then to God)
- 20: Egypt and Cush (a type of the Southern alliance in toto, defeated)
- 21a: Babylon (a type of the beast's kingdom; judgment prior to and at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent; cf. Rev.17)
- 21b: Edom (archetypical of all the nations hostile to Israel [the goats]; cf. Esau vs. Jacob)
- 21c: Arabia (archetypical of all the sympathetic nations [the sheep])

[Judah, Tyre and Assyria: types *and* antitypes of Israel, "Babylon" and antichrist's kingdom ]

- 22: the siege of Jerusalem a type of antichrist's attack; the before and after stewards (premiers)
- 23: Tyre as antichrist's Babylon; her destruction
- 24: the Tribulation and 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent judgments as a paradigm for the Assyrian invasion
- 25: praise and celebration in the Kingdom as a paradigm for God's deliverance from Assyria
- 26: the prospect of future praise and resurrection as encouragement in the Tribulation (vv.20-21)
- 27: then Armageddon and the Messiah's reign as a paradigm for His deliverance from Assyria

[type and antitype; the invasion of the land, contemporary and during the end times]

- 28: the Northern Kingdom of Israel's impending judgment an antitype of tribulational judgment
- 29: Ariel: Zion the "alter of God" on which the beast's army (typologically Assyria) is destroyed
- 30: Israel disappointed by Egypt (on whom they rely instead of the Lord) then and in the future by "Babylon"
- 31: the disastrous results of her reliance on Egypt then and "Babylon" in the future
- 32: the King and his Kingdom: God's deliverance despite unfaithfulness and attendant disasters
- 33: the destroyer destroyed (contemporary Assyria and Babylon; future Babylon of the beast)
- 34: God's retribution on the persecutors of Israel at Armageddon (applied to Assyria)
- 35: the millennial Kingdom (an antitype of the blessings to follow Assyria's defeat)

[historical introduction to Isaiah's eschatological compendium]

36-39: Assyria and Babylon – despite the examples of the Northern Kingdom's destruction and the Lord's miraculous annihilation of the Assyrian army, future generations of Judah go down the same path of apostasy; however, the contemporary generation responds and so is not destroyed as typified by the response of their king, Hezekiah

[Isaiah's eschatological compendium: the Babylonian captivity, a future event at the time of writing, paralleling the events of the Tribulation and Second Advent]

40: the encouragement of the coming Messiah: take heart in [T]ribulation, God controls history

41: Cyrus as a type of the Messiah subduing the nations

42: the Messiah's first coming and His glorious return

43: the Messiah's merciful deliverance of Israel (despite her unfaithfulness) from Babylon[s]

44: the folly of the idolatry of Israel's enemies; the repopulation of Israel [near and far term]

45: Cyrus a type of Christ; God's subduing of Israel's enemies at [H]is hand

46: the Lord the One who defeats Babylon [near and far term] despite Israel's hardness

47: the destruction of near and far future Babylon

48: in spite of Israel's hardness, God's appointment of the Messiah to deliver from Babylon[s]

49: the Messiah's two comings: for the humble, a light; for rebels, a sword; He restores Israel

50: God's provision for the salvation[s] of Israel in the person of the self-sacrificing Messiah

51: encouragement to the faithful: God will deliver from [T]ribulation; fear Him not man

52: the good news of incipient victory [based upon] Messiah sacrificing Himself for the nation

53: Messiah's sufferings rewarded by the Lord

54: the restoration and glorification of Israel under Messiah's rule

55: the blessings of His Kingdom and of His salvation available to all

56: the expansion of blessing and salvation to the nations; Israel's pre-advent rulers indicted

57: the contrasting futures of the righteous and the wicked and God's mercy upon the contrite

58: true contrition and its benefits

59: the sinful, the contrite, and the Lord's redemption from sin [1<sup>st</sup> Advent] and oppression [2<sup>nd</sup>]

60: the glories of the Kingdom [following contrition and deliverance]: in Messiah, God is with us

61: encouragement (in [T]ribulation) in the good news of the coming Kingdom and its glories

62: encouragement (in [T]ribulation) in the promise of redemption, restoration and reward

63: encouragement (in [T]ribulation) in the coming judgment; the paradigm of Moses and Israel

64: a contrite prayer for God to bring on these [near and far term] judgments and restorations

65: the alternative futures of the arrogant and the contrite; the reality of the coming Kingdom

66: the reality of these impending events [near and far term]; all will worship Him in His victory

Jeremiah: Although the book of Jeremiah is more heavily and specifically focused upon the contemporary situation of imminent divine judgment upon Judah, the impending Babylonian invasion furnishes an important parallel to the sinfulness of the nation and God's judgment in the form of the invasion of antichrist during the end times (in contrast to the warning judgment upon Judah in the form of Assyria during Isaiah's day). Chapters 1-20 in particular recount the impending judgment upon sinful Judah which will be reenacted in a similar fashion in the future,

along with a similar rejection of the Lord's prophets and their warnings. Some particularly pertinent eschatological passages include:

- 3: promise of the glorious millennial future as encouragement for repentance
- 4: destruction from the north (Babylon as the beast's kingdom) and the "Day of the Lord"
- 6: the command to flee Jerusalem (parallels the mid-Tribulation flight of the faithful)
- 8: trouble from Dan (a reference to antichrist's invasion)
- 12: disposition of the repentant nations [near and far term]
- 14: the drought (evoking similar privations of the Tribulation)
- 15: two witnesses (evoking the ministry of Moses and Elijah before the Great Tribulation)
- 16: prophecy of the restoration of Israel and the conversion of the nations
- 23: the Branch: Messiah and the restoration of the nation an antitype for their own return
- 25: God's judgment on Babylon and the nations (symbolic of the beast's world kingdom)
- 30: the Great Tribulation and millennial restoration applied to contemporary events
- 31: encouragement through Israel's ultimate restoration under the New Covenant
- 33: encouragement through Israel's ultimate restoration under the Branch (the Messiah)
- 45: a message to Baruch: the principle of deliverance through [T]ribulation
- 46-49: prophecies against the nations: near and far term application [see Isaiah 14-21]
- 50-51: the destruction of Babylon and Israel's restoration [near type and future antitype]

Ezekiel: The commissioning of Ezekiel contains many parallels to the apostle John's commission to write the book of Revelation. Ezekiel's status as an exile, the circumstances and overwhelming nature of the vision, the appearance of the Lord, the cherubim, throne and sea, the eating of the scroll, the marking of the elect are just some of the more obvious similarities to what may be found in the book of Revelation as well. And while the theme of the first half of Ezekiel of impending future judgment upon the nation of Israel can also be applied broadly to the future judgments of the tribulational period, it is in the second half of the book where the focus shifts almost exclusively to those future events which we repeatedly see forming a deliberate and close analogy with the near contemporary situation confronting the prophet in his own day:

- 25: prophecies against the nations: near and far term application (see Isaiah 14-21)
- 26-28: Tyre as the beast's Babylon; Tyre's prince as Satan and antichrist (cf. Is.13-14)
- 29-32: reliance upon Egypt ("Babylon") a vain hope near (and far) term
- 33: the warning trumpet principle: God's merciful fore-warning of final judgment
- 34: the true Shepherd's restoration and judgment between the sheep and the goats
- 35: judgment upon Edom as archetypical of the judgment to come upon "the nations"
- 36: the physical and spiritual restoration of Israel [near and far term]
- 37: the resurrection and the reign of the Messiah as paradigms for near term deliverance
- 38-39: encouragement of the prophecy of the beast's invasion and defeat at Armageddon
- 40-48: the millennial temple and regime parallel to post-Babylonian captivity events

Daniel: The book of Daniel, as is well known, contains detailed information regarding the course of events during the Tribulation. Chapter eleven, in particular, will be treated in great detail in part 4 of this study. However, the following observations are offered here by way of overview:

- 2: the statue: a prophecy of world history culminating in Rome and revived Rome
- 7: the four beasts: a prophecy of world history culminating in Rome and revived Rome
- 8: the ram and the goat: Hellenistic history culminating in Antiochus a type of antichrist
- 9: the 70 “sevens”: a prophecy of the future of Israel culminating in the Tribulation
- 11: a prophecy of Alexander’s successors culminating in Antiochus a type of antichrist
- 12: the Great Tribulation and the resurrection

Hosea:

- 14: encouragement from the promise of future millennial restoration and blessings

Joel:

- 1-2: the locust symbolic of the end times invasion
- 3: the “Day of the Lord”, Armageddon, and the millennial blessings that follow

Amos:

- 1-2: prophecies against the nations: near and far term application [see Isaiah 14-21]
- 5: the “Day of the Lord” as a reality check: God will judge in righteousness
- 9: the encouragement of the Messiah and future millennial blessings

Obadiah:

- 1: Edom as typical of “the nations”; the “Day of the Lord” and the coming Kingdom

Micah:

- 1-3: the characteristics of a nation on the verge of judgment symbolic of the last days
- 4: Messiah’s millennial reign and Armageddon as antitypes of divine deliverance
- 5: the first and second coming of Messiah; Assyria as the beast’s confederacy
- 6: pre-judgment indictment of the nation
- 7: the Tribulation followed by the future glory and restoration of Israel

Habakkuk:

- 1-3: the Babylonian invasion symbolic of the beast’s end times invasion

Zephaniah:

- 1: the future “Day of the Lord” employed as a contemporary warning
- 2: prophecies against the nations: near and far term application [see Isaiah 14-21]
- 3: the [T]ribulation and the restoration of the remnant [near and far term]

Haggai:

- 1-2: the rebuilding of the temple encouraged by analogy with future events

### Zechariah:

- 1: the four craftsmen: the four destroyers of Israel destroyed [#4 = Rome – New Rome]
- 2: surveying millennial Jerusalem; command to escape Babylon; the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent
- 3: Joshua the priest symbolic of the remnant to survive to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent
- 4: the warning ministry of Moses and Elijah and the Messiah [the Golden Lampstand]
- 5a: the Scroll: lawlessness to be extirpated in the Messianic Kingdom
- 5b: the Jar: lawlessness restrained until released and manifested in eschatological

### Babylon

- 6: Joshua crowned symbolic of the coming Priest-King; the 4 chariots of God's judgment
- 7: contemporary warning against apostasy by analogy with similar end times behavior
- 8: contemporary encouragement of future millennial blessings upon Jerusalem
- 9: contemporary encouragement of future judgment on the nations and Messiah's return
- 10: contemporary encouragement of the Lord's support of Israel's war against antichrist
- 11: contemporary warning against apostasy by analogy with the future "false prophet"
- 12: contemporary encouragement of the Lord's conduct of Armageddon
- 13: contemporary encouragement of future repentance of Israel and their purification
- 14: contemporary encouragement of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent of the Messiah and His reign

### Malachi:

- 3: the witness (John [1<sup>st</sup> Advent] – Moses and Elijah [2<sup>nd</sup> Advent]); the final purification
- 4: the "Day of the Lord"; the witness (Elijah [John]); the repentance of Israel

### **b. New Testament Books (excluding Revelation)**

Passages in the New Testament with eschatological significance are at once more familiar to most Christians and at the same time somewhat more widely dispersed than is the case in the Old Testament prophetic books, often occurring in the form of individual verses. Chapters of notably concentrated material about the end times include (though are not necessarily limited to):

Matthew 17 (Mk.9; Lk.9): the transfiguration: a preview of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent

Matthew 24-25 (Mk.13; Lk.21):

- the end of the age (Mt.24:1-35): a synopsis of the Tribulation for the benefit of believers
- the unknown day and hour (Mt.24:36-51): warning to the faithful not to fall away
- the parable of the virgins (Mt.25:1-13): those who fall away during the Great Apostasy
- the parable of the talents (Mt.25:14-30): the last judgment based on deeds, not words
- the sheep and the goats (Mt.25:31-46): the last judgment based on deeds, not words

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15: the resurrection

2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5: the resurrection

1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 4-5: the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent, resurrection, and "Day of the Lord"



2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 1: Armageddon

2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 2: the Great Apostasy and the antichrist

1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 4: the Great Apostasy; essential teachings of the coming Anti-Christian Religion

2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3: the Great Apostasy; characteristics of the leadership of the Beast's Religion

2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 2: the Great Apostasy; false teachers and their ultimate judgment

2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3: the "Day of the Lord"

Jude: the Great Apostasy; false teachers and their ways

The purpose of the above survey (exclusive of the Book of Revelation which is to provide the structure for this seven-part study) has been to show by way of overview our Lord's gracious exposition for us before the fact of these critical events:

"I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand and I will do all that I please."  
Isaiah 46:10 NIV

### **3. The Book of Revelation**

Revelation is not only the last book in the Bible – it was also the last written, having been penned under explicit divine inspiration by the apostle John in circa 64-68 A.D.<sup>37</sup> Additionally and very importantly for our present study, Revelation, while partaking of many of the interpretive devices we have studied in the case of Old Testament prophecy, gives a distinctly *chronological* exposition of the Tribulation and the events which follow it. This fact of this step-by-step recounting of future events in Revelation is extremely useful in helping us to understand and to explicate the history of the Tribulation. It is also deliberate, a gift from God the Father to His Son and His Son's Church to aid them in their hour of most desperate need. Furthermore, without the book of Revelation, it would be a difficult task at best to pull together all the various and variegated strands of prophecy in the rest of the Bible into a coherent and understandable whole. There is some irony in the fact, therefore, that Revelation is often considered one of the most difficult books of the Bible to understand, since an essential part of its purpose is to serve as a foundation for understanding the whole future course of history as related by biblical prophecy elsewhere. Time does not permit us (nor would it be of any intrinsic value) to give an account of all the many incorrect theories that have been advanced over the years to "explain" (or explain away) this critical book of the Bible, such as amillennialism (a reduction of the book to symbolic meaning only) and historicism (treating the book as commentary on past historical events only). Suffice it to say, that such theories inevitably stem from a low view of the doctrine of inspiration,

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<sup>37</sup> Contrary to the *opinio communis*, Revelation was written toward the end of the emperor Nero's reign. Nero is the sixth king who "now is" at John's time of writing (Rev.17:10), the last of the Julio-Claudian emperors to be followed in the far future by the "seventh king" (antichrist).

that is, a failure to appreciate and accept the truth of the fact that in the book of Revelation we have the very words of God to the same exact and perfect degree as is the case with all the other inspired books of the canon. The essential point is this: the book of Revelation gives us the most complete, most concentrated picture of the Tribulation to be found anywhere in the Bible, and does so in a largely straightforward and chronological way.

## V. The Revelation of Jesus Christ: Revelation 1:1-20

### Revelation 1:1-2:

Jesus Christ's revelation which God gave to Him in order to show His (i.e., Christ's) servants what must take place in rapid succession; and He (i.e., Jesus) in turn placed His seal of authority upon it by sending it through His angel to His servant John, who [here] gives witness to [this] word of God and testimony from Jesus Christ, as many things as he (i.e., John) did see.

**Jesus Christ's revelation:** The first sentence of Revelation (i.e., verses 1-2) sums up in concentrated and dramatic fashion the book's importance, scope and purpose. It is for Christ, from the Father, through John, to believers, for the purpose of giving the Church of Christ critical information about future events. First and foremost, the book is a revealing of the Messiah Himself, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The word "revelation" (literally "unveiling" as we saw above in part I.1.c) is the Latin counterpart of the Greek word *apokalypsis* (αποκαλυψις) from which our English word "apocalypse" is derived. The "unveiling" in view is of the exalted and glorified Messiah to the entire world as its King, an event which will not come to full fruition until His 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent, but which is to be preceded and heralded by the events described within the pages of the book of Revelation (as well as pertinent passages occurring elsewhere in scripture). The book of Revelation itself, therefore, constitutes a "revelation", not merely of truth directly from God (something that is true of all scripture) but more specifically of the events which precede and accompany the return of our Lord, giving us, His faithful followers, an important preview of that history to come. What these first words indicate is a fact that cannot be overemphasized in our discussions of the end times: the book of Revelation in particular and the culmination of history in general is *all about Jesus Christ*. He is the beginning and the end of God's plan for human history, the solution to the problem of sin and the Ruler who will put all God's enemies under His feet, the last of which will be the scourge of death itself.

**in order to show His servants:** This phrase expresses the purpose of the book: the provision of critically important information to the Church of Christ. For all believers, and especially for that generation "upon whom the end of the ages has come" (1Cor.10:11), knowledge of future events as specifically outlined by God Himself on our behalf is not just "nice to know" but absolute "need to know" information. The Tribulation will constitute a period of testing of the faith of the faithful so intense that many will falter and many will fail (i.e., the Great Apostasy, a chilling event covered in part 3A of this series). It will also be a time of the most intense and widespread

persecution of believers that human history has ever witnessed (i.e., the Great Persecution, covered in part 4 of this series). It is a measure of the immeasurable mercy and grace of our Lord that He has chosen to share with us the details of these difficult times in advance. Moreover, a good part of His purpose in doing so is surely that we may be prepared for what is to come, not through material preparation, but through spiritual preparation, not through hoarding of supplies in our cellars, but through amassing His truth in our hearts, and through drawing ever closer to Him (Ps.118:6-14; 121:1-2; Is.40:29-31; Matt.6:25-34; Rom.8:31; Heb.13:5-6).

**what must take place in rapid succession:** The events of the end times, that is, the eschatological history to come, constitute an essential part of God's plan for the termination of human history, summing all things up in Jesus Christ (Eph.1:10). As we have seen from the prior series (i.e., The Satanic Rebellion, especially part 5) and from our discussion above (section II), the Tribulation is the final judgment phase for these first six thousand years of human history, a judgment which "must take place" before the concomitant restoration and replacement, embodied in the resurrection and Millennium respectively, can be instituted. The Tribulation is thus a period of painful but essential "birth pangs" (cf Matt.24:8), which must precede the new life of the resurrection occurring at Christ's return and the rejuvenation of the earth during His millennial reign. For the Lord will first make clear for all the world to see, human and angelic alike, the utter sinfulness of the human heart and the unadulterated evil of purpose in the heart of the world's present ruler, the devil. Currently under significant divine control and restraint, the world of the coming Tribulation will experience an unprecedented "freedom" to go its own way, and the resultant horrendous behavior on the part of the devil and all who have taken their stand with him (human or angelic) will leave no doubt as to the consequences of a world largely free of God's restraining hand. A significant part of this trend will be the unprecedented persecution of those who have chosen for and stay faithful to the Lord, an event we are entitling the Great Persecution which will in turn occasion massive divine judgment from the Lord on behalf of His children, culminating in the battle of Armageddon (cf. Rev.6:10; 16:5-6). Finally, this terrible time of events "which must take place" will stand in the starkest possible contrast to the wonders of the Millennium which follows, a world of perfect spiritual and material peace under the rulership of the Son of God Himself, our Lord Jesus Christ.

The words translated "in rapid succession" (Greek: *en tachei, εν ταχει*) are not, as is often assumed, making reference to the imminence of the end times (a principle taught elsewhere: cf. v.3). Rather, this adverbial phrase calls our attention to a critically important characteristic of the Tribulation, one of which it would be well for every believer to take careful note: the horrific, utterly unbelievable cataclysms of the Tribulation will severely test the faith of genuine believers not only because of their magnitude, but, significantly, also *because of their rapid succession*. In our own day, and, indeed, throughout human history so far, tragedies, both individual and collective, have often occurred. One has only to reference the hitherto unprecedented events of the Second World War to understand that our world has been no stranger to tremendously difficult periods of human suffering. But in the Great Tribulation, mankind will experience such a string of tragedy upon tragedy, judgment upon judgment, persecution upon persecution, and in such swift and unrelenting succession, that nothing which has happened in the past can serve as

an adequate parallel. The result will be that believers called upon to endure this most difficult period in human history cannot count on a period of emotional respite (as is often provided in the course of human affairs), for during the Tribulation the successive hammer blows of unparalleled events to come will occur one after the other and in ascending intensity.

It is a well known and biblically verified principle that nothing is more difficult to endure than “woe upon woe” (cf. Job’s experiences; cf. also Phil.2:27). During the Tribulation, it will not only be the horror of events, but also their exceptional rapidity and escalating intensity that, barring sufficient preparation, will be sufficient to “stun” even the strongest of believers, removing any chance for normal recovery from emotional shock on account of the continuous sequence of pressure-filled events that will characterize the period. In short, there will be no “breathing space” in the Great Tribulation to come, and instead of a single event with which to cope, we shall be faced with a continual layering of terrible events quite unprecedented in their character and intensity. Now our God is supremely sufficient to supply all our needs, even in this most trying of times (Ps.46). Under such unique circumstances, however, it should be evident at the outset that proper spiritual preparation for that great time of testing will be absolutely essential for faith to thrive and survive. For the Tribulation will be a time when normal, secular strategies for coping with pressure and disaster will be found wholly ineffective – only a solid, deep, abiding faith in the Lord is likely to endure this unprecedented coming assault, a fact that explains in no small part the phenomenon of the Great Apostasy, the wholesale turning away from the Lord (and hence from salvation) which will characterize that difficult period. This is our first glimpse of the true nature of the Tribulation to come and our first indication that no amount of prior spiritual preparation will be regretted on the part of those called upon to suffer through it.

**placed His seal of authority upon it:** The Greek word *semaino* means literally “stamped with a seal or mark” and foreshadows the seal of God given to His servants (Rev.7:3-4) in contrast to the mark of the beast received by those who overtly reject the Lord during the Tribulation (Rev.13:16-18). The means by which this stamp of authority is effected is the transmission of the book to John via our Lord’s personal angelic representative (i.e., “His angel”, most likely Gabriel; cf. Dan.8:16; 9:21; Lk.1:11; 1:19; 1:26; 2:9). The chain of command evident in this passage is important to note. The Son receives this book – more than mere information, it is an authoritative *decree* outlining events which *shall* take place by the command of God the Father (in recognition of the victory of His Son at the cross). The Son sends the message/decree to His one surviving apostle, John, through His top ranking angelic adjutant. John then in turn “bears witness” that the words he has penned are indeed the report/vision he has been given. The chain of authority is thus clearly delineated for us in these verses, making it abundantly clear that Revelation is marked out as the very words of God in a way more precise and definite than is to be found in any other book of the New Testament. Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine any more emphatic assertion of specific divine authority. One can only conclude from this description that the information contained in Revelation is meant to be taken as critical and essential *by God*. As becomes evident later in the book, we are meant to understand the “seal” idea here with a capital “S” (Rev.1:4; 1:10; 2:7; 2:11; 3:1; 6:1ff; 7:3-4; cf. 2Cor.1:22; Eph.1:13;

4:30), for the ultimate Seal of God is His Holy Spirit, that member of the Trinity responsible for empowering the process of inspiration (2Pet.1:20-21; cf. 2Sam.23:2; Acts 1:16; 1Tim.3:16; 1Pet.1:11). Taken in conjunction with the severe warnings at the end of Revelation against altering this message in any way (Rev.22:18-19), we may well ask what more one could have asked by way of introduction to invest this book with God's own authority and emphasize the importance of its message for the entire Church universal, especially for our own generation "upon whom the end of the age has come" (1Cor.10:11; cf. Rom.13:11-14).

**gives witness to [this] word of God and testimony from Jesus Christ:** The humility of the apostle John is evident in this statement and entirely appropriate. For although these words were written down by him in his own style, the message itself and the content his words contains came directly from God, His Spirit so directing the inspired prophet that the result is the precise message our Lord desired to convey (i.e., our Lord's "testimony" or "solemnly witnessed message of truth").<sup>38</sup> This is the essence of true, biblical "inspiration", not of man's will, but of God's will; not a confused or somewhat imperfect human message with divine elements, but a perfect divine message set in a form understandable to human beings, as the apostle Peter made quite clear in one of his own epistles:

For I did not follow concocted tales in making known to you the power and the coming return of our Lord, Jesus Christ, but was an eyewitness to His majesty. For when He had received honor and glory from God the Father, these words sounded forth to Him from God's majestic glory: "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased." And these words I myself heard as they were delivered from heaven, for I was with Him on the holy mountain (cf. Matt.17:1-8). Yet I consider the prophetically inspired Word (i.e. the Bible) even more reliable (i.e. than what I saw with my own eyes). You too would do well to pay the closest attention to this [prophetically inspired Word], just as to a lamp shining in a dark place (cf. Ps.119:105), until the day dawns, and the Morning Star rises (i.e. Christ returns), pondering in your hearts this principle of prime importance: ***no single verse of prophetically inspired scripture has ever come into being as a result of personal reflection. For true prophecy has never occurred by human will, but only when holy men of God have spoken under the direction and agency of the Holy Spirit.***

2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 1:16-21

Finally, it should not go unnoticed that John's prophetic role in the production of the book of Revelation is also made more clear here than is the case in any other New Testament book. This is evident from the many striking similarities between his experience and that of prominent Old Testament prophets, most notably Ezekiel. Important parallels include John's vision of the Lord Himself with the cherubs, the sea, and the throne (Rev.4 with Ezek.1-2), the Lord's direct and personal address to the prophet and commissioning of him (Rev.1:17-20 with Ezek.2:1ff.), the Spirit's direct control of the prophet (Rev.1:10 & 4:2 with Ezek.2:2), the eating of the scroll (Rev.10:9-10 with Ezek.2:8ff.), the sealing of the servants of God (Rev.7:3-4 with Ezek.9:4), and

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<sup>38</sup> For more on this issue see the special [Read Your Bible: Protection against Cults](#).

the overall theme of warning (Rev.1:3 & 22:1-20 with Ezek.2:3ff.), to name but a few of the more notable similarities. John and Ezekiel see and experience similar things *not* because John is somehow “borrowing” from Ezekiel, but because they both saw the same heavenly realities, and were directed to write about them by the same Spirit. The detail of personal prophetic experience that it was given to John to share with us all is a measure of how seriously we are to take this book of Revelation and the essential information it contains: it was apparently judged important by our Lord for all of His Church to see that this vivid description of tribulational events came directly from Him. We therefore ignore and belittle these warnings to our very great peril (as the following verse makes abundantly clear).

### Revelation 1:3:

The one who recites this prophecy will be glad he did so, as will those who listen to the words of this prophecy and retain [in their hearts] the matters written in it. [This is true] because the time is near [for these events to take place].

**one who recites:** True happiness comes from reading and heeding the words of God (the only sure basis for spiritual growth and progress in His plan for our lives).<sup>39</sup> This is true of all scripture and, as this verse affirms, especially true of the book of Revelation (so that we would surely be mistaken to judge it of less account than other scripture). At the time when the apostle John penned these words (the mid 1<sup>st</sup> century), “books” (actually papyrus scrolls which had to be individually and painstakingly reproduced) were quite expensive and would certainly have been out of the question for the average individual. In our modern world we tend to take for granted this most blessed of all possible material possessions – our very own copy of a translation of the holy scriptures. Because of the great expense and difficulty of reproduction, for many centuries only large congregations would have been likely to possess a complete Bible. And so, because of its rarity, church services during John’s day and later devoted much time to public readings of the scripture (the only way that the average Christian would be able to hear it). Concentrating on the “retention” of what was being read was therefore crucial, and the fact that the verse above makes a point of encouraging those who would hear the book of Revelation read out loud to hold these things in their mind shows just how important we should deem the book and its contents to be.

**the words of this prophecy:** Revelation is here officially called a “prophecy” and is thus validated as unquestionably part of God’s canon of holy scripture known as the Bible. Furthermore, from the Greek etymology of the word *propheteia* (προφητεία), a prophecy is properly both a forth-telling and a fore-telling from God Himself (cf. 2Pet.1:16-21 quoted above). It is important to recall in this connection that this particular prophecy is “the Revelation of Jesus Christ”, literally the “unveiling” of Him and His future appearance as the coming King. We can say with assurance therefore that great lengths have been gone to in order to assure us that we are meant to understand here and now the information Revelation contains about future events, for it is a “prophecy” in both senses of the word, that is, a *fore*-telling as well as a forth-

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<sup>39</sup> See the special Read Your Bible: Protection against Cults.

telling. This is true as much as a source of personal motivation for proper spiritual preparation as it is as a guide for negotiating the future events themselves. As noted earlier in this study (section I.1), even if we are not personally called upon to endure the Great Tribulation, the spiritual preparations we make inspired by this book will be invaluable also for the personal tribulations that every believer must face sooner or later. And should we indeed find ourselves in the midst of that great conflagration to come, then a thorough knowledge of the details contained in the Bible's final book will be absolutely essential. Finally in this connection it should be noted that this "reading" was also normally associated with "explaining" the scripture (the original point of attending church services now sadly lost in great measure in contemporary Christianity: cf. Jewish custom as in Lk.4:16-30), so that the blessing offered by verse three above is the very thing for which we are striving here as we translate and exegete the book of Revelation as a blue-print for the Bible's future history of end times event.

**because the time is near:** Since the book of Revelation is at its most essential level about Jesus Christ as His "revelation", the nearness of time referred to here is first and foremost the imminency of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent of our Lord. Because this world-changing development will be preceded by the events of the seven year Tribulation (as related in the book of Revelation), the "nearness" described in this verse necessarily applies to these events as well (which form the focus of much of our present study).<sup>40</sup> This principle of "imminency", i.e., that the Tribulation could commence at any time, is specifically given here as a reason for paying close attention to everything the book of Revelation has to say. Repeated references to this principle throughout the book of Revelation (e.g., 1:3; 3:11; 22:7; 22:12; 22:20) leave little doubt that we are meant to understand the end times in just this way: the final cycle of history which can potentially begin at any time. This principle of imminency of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent (and so of the Tribulation which precedes it) thus constitutes a stirring call to spiritual preparedness, for even the casual reader of Revelation will be aware of the inadvisability of facing the incessant string of catastrophes which the Tribulation will bring without adequate spiritual preparation.

This point has proved a stumbling block to many in the past. For, clearly, many centuries have passed since the apostle John was inspired to write these words from God. How then could these events have been considered "near" at the time? In fact, we have already discussed in great detail the principle that in God's eyes, even a span of a thousand years is like a mere day (Ps.90:4; 2Pet.3:3-10; see part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion, section II.7). Even without this principle, there is really no contradiction here. The imminency of the end times means rather that God has the right (since our Lord's victory at the cross) to bring these events about *at any time*, and that, therefore, we His children must be prepared for these events *at all times*. If God in His matchless grace has seen fit to delay the onset of the Tribulation (and bring to salvation countless believers in the meantime), this should be a cause for rejoicing, not doubting. Our Lord's efficacious sacrifice on behalf of the entire world has opened the door for the glorious future to come, so that

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<sup>40</sup> Indeed, claiming that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent "is near", although in truth the prophesied tribulational events have yet to run their course is a characteristic doctrine of the coming "antichrists" predicted by our Lord Himself (Lk.21:8).

the Father is perfectly within His divine right to begin the final chapter of history at any time (as has been the case since 33 A.D.), or, alternatively, to delay commencement of the end times until all those He has determined for faith in Jesus Christ have been saved. Inasmuch as we are not privy to these details, readiness and acceptance of the principle of imminency (along with a dedicated commitment to diligent spiritual preparation) is and has always been the appropriate response to the “nearness” of the time expressed here and elsewhere in the book of Revelation. We should expect to experience the Tribulation, whether we ultimately do or not. That is the only way to be spiritually safe.

Moreover, many of the readers of these words over the centuries did indeed pass through serious and intense tribulation (e.g., the martyrdom of believers in the Roman empire, in Europe during the Reformation, and in Communist countries, to mention but three particularly harsh examples of persecution). And, as we have often remarked, anyone attempting to truly follow Jesus Christ will meet with “personal tribulation” in this life.<sup>41</sup> The call to spiritual readiness embodied in this verse has thus never been to no avail for any who have heeded it from the heart. We have also seen (in part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series) that God’s plan for human history has been proceeding in a succession of thousand-year millennial days, a schema which places the commencement of tribulational events in the very near future from our present point of view. As the Creator and Director of history, it is entirely within God’s prerogative to alter this schema at will (whether to lengthen or to shorten the time: Ezek.12:26-28), but it is certainly incumbent upon us, His children, to strive to be spiritually prepared for whatever may befall *now more than ever* as we “see the Day [of the Lord] drawing near” (Heb.10:25).

And let us give careful attention to one another[‘s ministries] as motivation for [our own] love and good works, not abandoning your mutual assembling (as some have made it their practice to do [and which makes this impossible]), but rather encouraging each other [to persevere in this work of the Lord], and doing so to an ever greater degree to the extent that you see *the day [of the Lord] drawing [ever] closer*.

Hebrews 10:24-25

#### Revelation 1:4-6:

John, to the seven churches which are in Asia [Minor]: Grace to you and peace from the One who is and was and is coming (i.e., the Father), and from the seven spirits (i.e., the Holy Spirit) which are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth. To the One who loves us and has released us from our sins by His blood – and He has made us a kingdom, priests of His God and Father – to Him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

**John:** John begins this salutation by identifying himself. He is the apostle John, the one whom “Jesus loved” (Jn.20:2; 21:7; 21:20) and entrusted with the care of His mother Mary at the cross

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<sup>41</sup> See n.1 above.



(Jn.19:27), the last of the apostles (cf. Jn.21:22-24), and the one called upon here to deliver the final message of the Bible, a tremendous honor indeed.

**the seven churches:** These are the seven churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea, all located in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) and apparently part of John's circuit ministry. As an apostle of Christ, John's authority for building up the church extended as far as necessary, but at this point His personal teaching ministry seems to have been concentrated on these seven churches (which he would have visited in a circular sequence; cf. Samuel's ministry: 1Sam.7:16-17). At the time of writing, as he indicates below, however, John was apparently being held in custody by the Roman authorities on the island of Patmos (v.9), in conjunction with the first empire-wide persecution of Christianity launched by Nero, a pogrom which had recently claimed the life of the apostle Paul (2Tim.4:6-8), and possibly that of Peter as well.

As to the seven churches themselves, they are indeed actual, historical congregations of believers alive at the time of writing, circa 64-68 A.D. Moreover, they are also used symbolically in the chapters to come as representing the seven sequential, chronological periods of the Church Age's two millennia (the specifics of which will be addressed in part 2 of this study). The fact that Revelation is addressed to the entire Church Age to come (in the form of "the seven churches") therefore makes the book unique for us in this respect as well – it is the only New Testament writing with a message specifically addressed to us today, the seventh and last "church" before the close of our present age.

**Grace to you and peace:** This blessing is a heart-felt wish offered up by John on behalf of his audience (which, given the preceding observation, includes you and me).<sup>42</sup> It is a wish for us to have from God both His grace (i.e., His perfect favor) and His peace (i.e., His perfect comfort). Both of these elements speak to the results of a close, enduring and growing relationship with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Grace views this desirable relationship from the standpoint of God, the one who gives us everything (with spiritual blessings especially in view), while peace views it from the point of view of the believer, who is kept safe and secure (most importantly in the heart) by God who protects us in every situation. The "blessing" is couched in the form of a wish because God's grace and God's peace are not to be taken for granted: they increase or decrease in proportion to the believer's nearness to Him, in proportion to the Christian's spiritual growth. John here fervently wishes for the favor of God and the protection of God for all those under his charge, present and future, but he recognizes (as the fact that this is a wish indicates) that the fulfillment of his desire is not in his hands. Each of us as individual Christians must decide to make our relationship with God, our spiritual growth, the top priority in our lives for this wish to attain its maximum potential. This blessing is not "magic". Whether we receive all

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<sup>42</sup> A verb in the optative mood (the Greek mood of "wishing") has here been omitted ("ellipsis") as is often the case in such constructions. Compare 1Pet.1:2 and 2Pet.1:2 where we find the full construction, with the verb in the optative included: "*may* grace and peace abound for you".

the grace and peace we could receive does not depend upon John or anyone else, and we know that God's ability and desire to bless us is not limited in any way. No, if we are limited, it is only by ourselves, by our own failure to put God and His Word first in our lives.

John also clearly marks out the source of this potential double blessing as God in all three Persons, and does so in a way that emphasizes our God's complete control over the events that are about to be related. The grace and peace, the favor and comfort which can be ours, come from the entire Trinity, emphasizing the Father's imminent possession of the devil's world, the Spirit's restraint of the devil's world (see Rev.5:6; Is.11:2), and the Son's victory over and conquest of the devil's world. This is a very important perspective on which we would do well to reflect. For all the terrible events of the Tribulation will be unable to shake the bountiful supply of grace and peace directly from God to all believers, provided only that we keep faith with Him.

Finally, it should be pointed out that in this formulaic wish John has omitted one element which is often included in similar introductory blessings, namely mercy (cf. 2Jn.3; also 1Tim.1:2; 2Tim.1:2). The omission here is significant in that mercy is the gift of God that allows (through the blood of Christ) sinful man to accommodate to the perfect holiness and justice of God. The book of Revelation, addressed to believers (who have made this accommodation through their relationship with Jesus Christ), is largely concerned with God's judgment upon a renegade world in the clutches of the devil as never before in history. For the devil, the antichrist, the false prophet, and all those who arrogantly reject God, the Tribulation will mark that period when the long-suffering mercy of God, categorically spurned by his enemies, will no longer be the issue; rather, God's holiness and justice will be the issue, visited upon the persecutors of His people in righteous wrath.

**the One who is and was and is coming:** The Father. That He "is and was" speaks to His eternity; He is God forever and ever. That He "is coming" not only confirms that this eternity of His will never end. It also is our first direct statement of the Father's advent: He too will again take up residence on the earth at the end of time, so that we His children will ever be with Him, along with His Son and His Spirit, not in heaven, but on the new earth and in the New Jerusalem, when everything has been replaced that was displaced by the devil's original rebellion, only with the end superior to the beginning (cf. Rev.21:22; 22:3).

**the seven spirits:** The seven spirits which reside before the very throne of the Father are a reference to God the Holy Spirit as is evident both from later instances in the book of Revelation and from elsewhere in scripture as well (Prov.9:1; Is.11:2; Zech.3:9; 4:2; 4:10 with 4:6; Rev.3:1; 4:5; 5:6).<sup>43</sup> The Holy Spirit is, of course, indivisible, and the number seven here most likely connotes the idea of perfection and completion: that is, the continued perfect ministry of the Spirit throughout all seven periods of the Church age promoting spiritual growth and restraining

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<sup>43</sup> The NIV's alternative reading for this and the other Revelation "seven spirits" passages of "the seven-fold Spirit of God" suggests a similar interpretation.

the evil one. That the Holy Spirit is not overtly so named here is in keeping with His role in the Father's plan. The very name "Spirit" or wind (in Greek and Hebrew both) indicates something powerful but unseen, the hallmark of the Spirit's ministry.<sup>44</sup>

**from Jesus Christ:** As the Person whose revelation is the object of this book, our Lord Jesus Christ is both the final member of the Trinity mentioned in this salutation and is described in a detailed, three-fold way, with each description contributing to our understanding of the God-Man's unique role in the plan of God (with each corresponding to the members of the Trinity in the same order as in the salutation):

1. the faithful witness: As the Father's representative (e.g., Messiah means "Anointed One", i.e., by the Father; cf. Jn.4:34; 7:16; 8:26; etc.), Jesus Christ bore perfect witness to the truth of God during His 1<sup>st</sup> Advent, and left us that legacy of placing faithfulness to the truth before everything else.

2. the firstborn from the dead: The God-Man is also the only human being to live His life in complete responsiveness to the Holy Spirit, and is the first to have been resurrected into incorruptible form by the power of the Spirit (Rom.1:4; 1Pet.3:18; cf. Rom.8:11). Our Lord has thus left for us the pattern of operating in God's power rather than our own (Zech.4:6; Rom.8:14), and demonstrated for us the certainty of our hope, the reality of the future resurrection for which we so eagerly look (Rom.8:23-24; Heb.2:9; 1Jn.3:1-3).

3. the ruler of the kings of the earth: This title calls attention to the work of the Son of Man Himself, having won the right of total rulership of the world through His self-sacrificing victory at the cross (Lk.10:18; Jn.16:33; 19:30; Col.2:15; Rev.5:5). Our Lord Jesus Christ set for us the example of serving in humility in this life in the sure and certain hope of ruling with Him in the next (Matt.20:25-28; Jn.13:1-7; 2Cor.8:9; Phil.2:5-8). The 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent will see the fulfillment of this principle, and we who have chosen for Him will share in the rulership of His Kingdom (Rom.8:17; 2Tim.2:12; Rev.1:6; 2:26-27; 3:21).

As we contemplate the words of this book of Revelation, let us remember that it is the revelation of our Lord and Savior, and let us remember well the example He has set for us, the example of putting God the Father's truth first as a faithful witness in everything He thought and said and did (not of being concerned for His own reputation, opinions and experiences), the example of relying and depending entirely on God's provision of strength and power in the Holy Spirit in everything He thought and said and did (not of being concerned with His own fleshly resources and logistics), and the example of humbly serving God the Father for His glory in everything He thought and said and did (not of being concerned for His own status or position). For to serve our Master well, we have to be like Him in these things, and that means imitating His faithful witness for God, His selfless reliance on God's power, and His humble service to God.

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<sup>44</sup> For more on the Spirit's ministry see section II.B.3.b.3 of part 1 of Bible Basics: "Theology: The Study of God".

You too should have this attitude which Christ Jesus had. Since He already existed in the very form of God, equality with God was [certainly] not something He thought He had to grasp for. Yet in spite of this [co-equal divinity He already possessed], He deprived Himself of His status and took on the form of a slave, [and was] born in the likeness of men. He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even [His] death on [the] cross [for us all].

Philippians 2:5-8

For it is to this [sharing in the sufferings of Christ] that you have been called, for Christ also died on your behalf, leaving you an example so that you might follow in His footsteps: He committed no sin, nor was any guile found in His mouth. He did not return slander when He was slandered, did not threaten when He suffered, but entrusted Himself to the One who judges righteously.

1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2:21-23

Let each one of us strive to please his neighbor for [what is truly] good in order to bring about [that person's] edification (i.e., spiritual growth). For certainly Christ did not strive to please Himself, but, just as it is written, "the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen upon Me".

Romans 15:2-3

I have given you an example that you may do as I have done.

John.13:15

If anyone wants to follow Me, let him [first] deny himself, then pick up his cross and follow Me.

Matthew 16:24

**to the One who loves us and has released us:** This phrase begins a doxology which is concluded in verse six. John expresses for us all the praise we long to shower upon our Lord Jesus Christ in response to His love for us, manifested in His releasing us from our sins by His own blood, His death on the cross on our behalf. Sandwiched in between the object of praise (Christ) and the praise itself ("glory and power forever") is a parenthetical remark that should capture our attention: through His victory, our Lord has "made us [into] a kingdom, namely priests" to His Father.<sup>45</sup> No clearer proof could be given that this book is for believers in Jesus Christ. For it is the revelation of Him (in all His coming glory), *and* we are to share in that revelation, being an integral part of His Kingship, and sharing in His priesthood. As we contemplate the tribulational sufferings to come outlined in Revelation, we should not lose sight of the fact that these are merely the birth pangs that must precede the "birth", namely, His return

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<sup>45</sup> This is a quote from Ex.19:6 applied here by John under the guidance of the Spirit to the entire Church, not exclusively to Israel. For the incorporation of the gentiles into Israel as the bride of Christ, see part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section II.8.b.i-iv.

accompanied by the glories of His millennial reign wherein we shall be full and blessed partners. Glory to Him! May we strive to hold fast to the King of glory no matter what may betide in order that we may share in the glory of His Kingdom to which we have been called (Rom.8:17; 2Tim.2:12; Rev.1:6; 2:26-27; 3:21).

Revelation 1:7:

Behold! He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all the peoples of the earth will grieve on account of Him.

**He is coming with clouds:** This verse gives us a foretaste of the ultimate result of the working out of history in the final, tribulational period as described in the book of Revelation, providing us with a synopsis of the “revelation of Jesus Christ” at His 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent (for His millennial reign). The “clouds” mentioned here are the “heavenly armies” of Revelation 19:14, not only the angels who will accompany our Lord at His return, just as they announced His birth (Lk.2:13; cf. Dan.7:13; Matt.24:30; 26:64; Mk.13:26; 14:62; Lk.21:27), but His bride, the Church, as well (cf. Rev.17:14; and compare Rev.19:7-8 with 19:14). For the entire “host” of the Church of Jesus Christ will be marshaled in resurrection on that Day and return with Him in glory to share in His millennial reign (1Thes.4:13-18; cf. 1Cor.15:51-52).

**every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him:** The dramatic return of our Lord will be visible to everyone on earth. Singled out for special mention are His kindred people, Israel, in the phrase “those who pierced Him”, referring to the episode at the cross as predicted by Zechariah (compare Jn.19:34-37 with Zech.12:10; cf. Ps.22:16). This is a description of an instantaneous repentance and conversion of the Jews alive at the Second Advent when they witness the return of the Messiah as explained by the apostle Paul (Rom.9-11): the “hardness in part” that has characterized the majority of the descendants of Abraham since the 1<sup>st</sup> Advent will dissolve instantly upon the Messiah’s return. The return of many Jews to the Lord during the Tribulation, the ministry of the 144,000, and the purging that follows Christ’s return, all subjects requiring detailed explanation (forthcoming in future installments of this series), are omitted here (both in the text of Revelation as well as our coverage), since the purpose of this reference is akin to that of the previous phrase, namely, to emphasize the final victory of the Messiah and the completion of the process of restoration when Israel’s heart is once more united to the Lord at His return (Acts 3:21; cf. Ezek.36:27; 39:25-26; Joel 2:30-32; Mal.4:6; Matt.17:11; Mk.9:12; Acts 1:6).<sup>46</sup>

Brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery (and so think more of yourselves than you should): hardness has come over a part of Israel until the time when

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<sup>46</sup> For the combination of the gentiles with Israel in the Church of Christ, see the discussion in part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”, section II.8.b.i–iv. See section IV of the same study for the specific issue of “restoration” in God’s plan.

the fullness of the gentiles has come in [to the family of God]. And it is in this [following] way that all Israel will be saved just as it is written:

The Deliverer will come from Zion. He will expel ungodliness from Jacob. And this will be My covenant with them when I take away their sins.

Romans 11:25-27

**all the peoples of the earth will grieve:** The grief indicated here is largely self-directed. When the glorified Christ becomes visible to the surviving inhabitants of the world (unbelievers all, as the resurrection of living believers will precede this event: 1Cor.15:51-52; 1Thes.4:13-17) their folly in failing to turn to God will become painfully and penetratingly obvious, occasioning intense world-wide grief and regret (Zech.12:10-14). This prophesied reaction should be a source of major encouragement to believers present and future, for it guarantees that those who deny the truth of the faith upon which our lives are founded (and who will, in the Tribulation, persecute us universally for it) will come to understand *in this life* the horrible error of their ways – our vindication in this respect will not need to await the Last Judgment.

It should also be noted that this reaction to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent directly picks up the response during the 1<sup>st</sup> Advent of those present at the crucifixion who “beat their breasts” following our Lord’s remarkable death and the supernatural darkness and earthquake preceding it (Lk.23:48). Beyond a self-centered sense of anguish for what had happened and for what might result, the world as a whole did not turn to Him despite this “grief” and in the future too is destined to repeat the experience of uncomfortable foreboding at His glorious return, having failed to choose for Him during the Tribulation as well, despite even more dramatic, supernatural demonstrations of the power of God.

#### Revelation 1:8:

I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord who is God, “He who is and was and is coming, the Almighty”.

This verse, with the Father speaking in His own voice, serves to validate Christ’s coming reign foreshadowed in verse seven. For the Father to speak thus in His own voice is a rare yet precedented occurrence found also in other places where He seeks to demonstrate that the Son is acting entirely with His authority (e.g., Ps.110).<sup>47</sup> With this statement then, the Father effectively rules out any other way of salvation (cf. Jn.14:6). Verse eight sets His seal, as it were, upon the conclusion to all prior history being summed up in the person of His Son as the only acceptable

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<sup>47</sup> Most apparent instances in the Old Testaments are actually of the Son speaking for the Father. See part 1 of Bible Basics: “Theology: The Study of God”, section II, “The Trinity”. There are similar overt validations by the Father of Christ’s ministry during His 1<sup>st</sup> Advent: a) at its beginning with the baptism of Christ (Matt.3:17; Mk.1:11; Lk.3:22); b) at its foreshadowed conclusion at the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt.17:5; Mk.9:7; Lk.9:35); c) in response to Christ’s prayer prior to His crucifixion (Jn.12:28).

object of faith in the Father's eyes. Revelation is "Christ's revelation" and this testimony from the Father is the equivalent of Him setting His signet ring in the wax of its seal to guarantee that the book, along with the exalted role for His Son that it describes, possesses His very own authority.

Verse eight also marks the end of the introduction and salutation of Revelation in a manner befitting the discussion of the end times that forms the content of Revelation, for the part of the Father's title "who . . . is coming" (Rev.1:4; 4:8; cf. Rev.21:22-23) projects our view forward to the conclusion of Christ's millennial reign when the Father's Advent to the newly recreated earth and the arrival of the New Jerusalem will mark the end of human history and the beginning of the Eternal State where God shall be "all in all" forevermore (1Cor.15:28). Verses seven and eight in combination, therefore, embrace the entire final chapter of history, from the return of the Messiah to the commencement of eternity, reminding us that in spite of tribulation or even *the* Tribulation, all that is to come will be resolved in God's glorious and perfect way (a perspective we would do well to retain as we contemplate the pressures and disasters that will dominate the seven year period which precedes this blessed end).

#### Revelation 1:9-11:

I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance in Jesus was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I came to be in the Spirit on the Lord's day and heard behind me a loud voice like that of a trumpet, saying, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.

**fellow partaker in the tribulation:** The humility of this great man, an apostle of Christ, is again clear in this self-description, where he represents himself not as such but as our brother, and one who shares in our common testing (tribulation), common aspiration (our resurrection and glorification in the Christ's kingdom), and common necessity (of enduring patiently anything and everything it is our lot to face as believers in our Lord Jesus Christ here in the devil's world).

**the island called Patmos:** As suggested above, the vision (and subsequent writing) described here most likely took place in circa 64-68 A.D. at the time of the empire-wide persecution of Christianity under the emperor Nero. John was evidently not executed at this time (as the apostles Paul and Peter were), but was, as tradition holds and as this description would seem to confirm (both from the reference to "tribulation" and his explanation: "because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus", i.e., teaching and telling about Jesus) exiled to the small Aegean island of Patmos for the duration of the persecution (an event which would not have extended far beyond the death of Nero in 68 A.D.).

**in the Spirit:** God placed John in an ecstatic state to receive the divine revelation which was to follow. The phrase "in the Spirit" as used here should thus be carefully distinguished from the

command given to all believers to “walk in the Spirit” (Gal.5:16; cf. Rom.8:4; Gal.5:25; Eph.5:18).<sup>48</sup> The translation given above “*I came to be* [in the Spirit]” is a rendering of the Greek verb meaning “to happen” or “to become” (*gignomai*: γίγνομαι). Obviously, English usage will not allow the translation “*I became* in the Spirit”, but on the other hand “*I was* in the Spirit” fails utterly to convey the passive and progressive nature of the event, that is, that John is hereby describing his *entrance* into an exceptional spiritual state *quite apart from his own will*. What we have here then is a description of the ecstatic prophetic state induced by God on behalf of His **prophets** specifically for the purpose of divine revelation, an event well paralleled in the cases of other inspired writers of scripture (Num.12:6; Ezek.1:1; 1:3; 2:1; 8:3; 40:2; Dan.10:1-7; Micah 1:1; Zech.1:8; 4:1; Acts 10:10; 11:5; 22:17; 2Cor.12:1-4; 2Pet.1:20-21; Rev.4:2; 17:3; 21:10; cf. Is.6:1ff.; Jer.1:5-19; Hos.1:1-2; Amos 8:1; 9:1).

**the seven churches:** As mentioned above, these seven churches in Asia minor are traditionally taken to be (and in all probability were) the main stops on a circuit of face-to-face ministry upon which John had regularly embarked before his exile to Patmos. However, as an apostle of Jesus Christ, John’s authority was not limited to these seven churches, but covered the entire contemporary Church. Furthermore, as a gift of revelation about our Lord Jesus Christ and the events surrounding His glorious return, the book of Revelation is a common heritage of the entire Church throughout the centuries (not just the seven churches mentioned here). That the seven churches listed above should be singled out in this way as recipients of the book of Revelation is a powerful indication of their symbolic function: they are meant to stand for the Church as a whole, not only for a small portion of the believers alive at the time of writing, but for the *entire Body of Christ* throughout its history (a subject we shall visit in detail in part 2 of this study).

#### Revelation 1:12-16:

So I turned around to see [the source of] the voice that was speaking to me, and when I had turned around, I saw seven golden lampstands. And in the middle of the lampstands was what looked like a man, dressed in a long robe with a golden belt tied around His waist. And His head and his hair were as white as wool or as snow, and His eyes were

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<sup>48</sup> The expression “filled with the Spirit” is also used of this ecstatic prophetic state and similar miraculous empowerments of the Spirit (cf. Lk.1:15; 1:41; 1:67; Acts 2:4; 4:8; 4:31; 9:17; 13:9). The phrase “filled with the Spirit” should, however, be carefully distinguished from Paul’s command in Ephesians 5:18 which is often mistranslated. A better rendering is “keep on being *ful*-filled or “made full” by means of the Spirit” (i.e., keep growing in Christ with the help of the Spirit’s ministry; cf. Col.2:10). The verb in Ephesians is different from the Luke-Acts passages referenced above (*pleroo* versus *pimplemi*) and the Luke-Acts passages use the genitive (of filling) versus the preposition *en* with the dative in Ephesians 5:18. We are not commanded today to enter into this or any other state of ecstasy (generally reserved for prophets and the unique times of the inception of the Church) anymore than we are meant today to engage in speaking in tongues. See the discussion in Peter #13. For more information on the guidance the Holy Spirit provides to believers, see the Peter series, lessons 7, 14, 16 and 18.



like a fiery flame, and His feet were like white-hot bronze when super-heated in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. And He held seven stars in His right hand, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword. And His face shone like the sun in its glory.

**I turned around to see:** John, in the midst of this ecstatic, prophetic state, nevertheless maintains his personality and normal perspective. In this his experience is identical to that of other prophets, for example, Isaiah and Ezekiel (cf. especially Is.6; Ezek.1-2). Indeed, the similarities not only between John's experience and theirs but also in the particulars of what he is shown are most reminiscent of what both of those Old Testament prophets were given to record. It is important to note that this is because they all saw the same reality, glories of God that are not visible to the rest of us, and most definitely *not* because of "literary borrowing" (as many who deny the truth of scripture would have it). The similarity of experience between Ezekiel and John is particularly striking. Both are exiles (Ezek.1:1), both see the Lord in His glory (Ezek.1:26-28), the cherubim (Ezek.1:5-21), the throne and the sea (Ezek.10:1; cf. 1:22), both are commanded to "eat the scroll" they are given (Ezek.2:8-3:3), both describe the marking of the elect to be spared divine judgment (Ezek.9:3-4), and both relate the taking and scattering of fiery coals from the altar of God as an instrument of divine judgment (Ezek.10:1-6). For anyone acquainted with both books, it is clear that this is a partial list of many other similarities which should not be considered surprising given that, as we have seen above, Ezekiel is largely taken up with describing (even if sometimes by way of foreshadowing) the very events that John is given to directly prophesy in Revelation.

**seven golden lampstands:** As the Lord Himself tells John in verse twenty, these lampstands represent the seven churches. In the ancient world, the *lychnia* (lampstand) is akin to what we would call a "floor lamp", being an elevated stand upon which an oil-burning "lamp" (comparable to a "light bulb" in our analogy) would be placed in order for the light of the lamp to be more widely distributed (cf. Matt.5:14-16). That we are meant to understand that these lampstands include lamps even now burning and giving off light is clear from Revelation 4:5. Note then that all seven of these churches are giving off light, the very purpose of the church, individually and collectively (Mk.4:21; Lk.8:16; 11:33; and cf. Jn.8:12).<sup>49</sup>

You are the light of the world. A city built on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and [so] it illuminates everything in the house. Let the light within you shine in this way before men, so that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Matthew 5:14-16

From the passage above and the context of the lampstands we can easily deduce that the proper job of the Church, as well as of individual churches and Christians, is largely to shine forth God's

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<sup>49</sup> For light as symbol of good, see part 2 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "The Genesis Gap", section II.2.b.

light in this dark world. That is, to act as His witnesses to the truth, the very light of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ (Jn.14:6; cf. Jn.1:4-9; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46), to do everything necessary to provide a place and a means for the light of the truth of the gospel to be available for the illumination of the hearts of all (cf. 2Cor.4:4-6), both for the salvation of the unsaved (Jn.12:46), and for the edification of the Body of Christ, our fellow believers who compose His Church universal (2Pet.1:19). Therefore that a group of churches, seven in number (the scriptural number of completeness and perfection as the seven days and the seven spirits indicate), should thus represent with such strong symbolism the purpose of the *entire* Church, is yet another indication of what we have suggested above, namely, that these seven churches do in fact stand here for the *entire* Church of Jesus Christ throughout the two millennia of its appointed history. For it is in precisely this way, that is, by shining forth God's light in the dark world around us, that we Christians individually and collectively have always been charged with following in the footsteps of the true Light of the world (Jn.8:12), in order that we might become more like Him even as we progressively reflect His truth with ever greater diligence, accuracy, and effectiveness:

And every one of us, when *we reflect* [like a mirror] the Lord's glory with no "veil" obscuring our faces (i.e., with unsullied Christian witness), is being transformed into the same image (i.e., becoming more Christ-like) so as *to reflect* an ever greater degree of glory – exactly what is to be expected with the Lord's Spirit as the agent of our transformation.

2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 3:18

Do everything [you do] without grumbling and criticizing, that you may be blameless and undefiled, children of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you *shine as light-givers* in the world, holding fast [your witness] to the Word of life (i.e., Christ and His gospel).

Philippians 2:14-16a

**a man:** This "man" is *the* Son of Man, our Lord Jesus Christ, the subject of the revelation given in this book.<sup>50</sup> John felt it necessary to add this detail because the appearance of our Lord here is so overwhelmingly impressive that it would be easy to assume that this glorious Person is too marvelous to be a genuine human being. But Jesus, in addition to being divine, *is* human – without taking on true humanity, He could not have died on our behalf to liberate us from our sins. What is astonishing to John is that Jesus' appearance here is so strikingly different from that of the not-yet-glorified Person he had seen so many times in his life, both before and after

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<sup>50</sup> The Greek has "a son of man", a reference here (without the definite article) to the fact that this was definitely a genuine human being John saw (as opposed to an angel or a Theophany [i.e., an apparition of God in human form]). So while it is true that Jesus is indeed *the* Son of Man (i.e., the archetypical, perfect, genuine human being: Mk.8:31), the purpose of this reference is to assure us that Jesus is human, even in His awesome, glorified state (quite an encouragement for us who look forward to the day of our own resurrection and glorification: Rom.8:30).

His resurrection (e.g., Jn.20:22). Only the short glimpse of the glorified Christ he had seen on the mount of transfiguration (Matt.17:2; Mk.9:2-3; Lk.9:29) could have prepared him for this awe-inspiring sight of our Savior in all His glory as He is now seated at the Father's right hand (Ps.110:1; Rom.8:34; Eph.1:20-22; Phil.2:9; Heb.1:3; 12:2; 1Pet.3:22). Up until this giving of the book of Revelation, the descriptions we have been given of our Lord in His glorified status, with the full panoply of glory having been received after His ascension to heaven and session at the Father's right hand (cf. Jn.7:39; 12:16), have been somewhat limited (the mount of transfiguration and Paul's vision on the road to Damascus being notable exceptions: Matt.17:1-13; Mk.9:2-13; Lk.9:28-36; Acts 9:3-9; 22:6-11; 26:13-18). Here, John is privileged to see (and records for the entire Church) our Savior as He truly is, with further shielding of His glory from our eyes being unnecessary since His first mission on this earth has been completely and successfully accomplished (Phil.2:5-11, and compare Is.53:2 with Jn.7:39).

This picture of our Lord is glorious indeed – gloriously dressed, dignified by His snow-white hair, with all His physical characteristics, eyes and face and voice, bespeaking even in His humanity the deity that is His. And it is well to remember that the reality of the truly overpowering nature of the Messiah evident from this passage was always true (even when with His glory masked He came to earth in the flesh for the first time: Phil.2:7-8). The wonder of His glory is a reality here and now as well (even though He is not at present visible to the world: 1Pet.1:8). When His revelation to the world does become a historical reality at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent, we have already seen how the universal response of the unsaved inhabitants of the earth will be one of paralyzing awe and deep regret at their previous lack of faith in Him. As His followers, then, do we not need to take pains to see Him as He truly is – just as He is described here – picturing in our hearts and taking to heart the awesome reality of Him (with the help of this gift of scripture and the teaching of the Holy Spirit)?

For here stands our Messiah in all His glory *in the midst* of the seven lampstands, that is, our Lord in His capacity as the central and focal Person of *the* Church, itself being represented as a perfect seven-fold whole. In His right hand, He holds seven stars, angels who superintend the seven historical periods of the calling out of Christ's Church (cf. verse twenty). And out of His mouth comes a sword, a symbol of the word of God (Heb.4:12), the very truth of Him, now complete with the giving of this book, the final installment of the canon of holy scriptures. In this image, the collaboration of the Trinity in the completion of Christ's Bride and the glory of that accomplishment can be clearly seen, with our Lord Himself standing in the midst of His Church (the seven lampstands), holding in His hand the administrative authority (the angelic superintendents) to call out and direct its development (as delegated by His Father: cf. Heb.2:13b), and empowering this glorious process through the sword of the Word, the province and ministry of the Holy Spirit (Eph.6:17). As Christ's face shines upon us at the conclusion of the description in verse sixteen, therefore, let us remember Peter's words and treasure them up carefully in our hearts along with all other scripture that speaks of Him until the day when we see His glory face to face in our own flesh (1Cor.13:12; 1Jn.3:2; cf. Job 19:26-27), remembering that it is in these same holy scriptures that we find the true power to see Him by faith here and now, and so live our lives *for* His glory:

You too would do well to pay the closest attention to this [prophetically inspired Word], just as to a lamp shining in a dark place (cf. Ps.119:105), until the Day [of the Lord] dawns, and the Morning Star rises (i.e. Christ, the Light of the world, returns in glory), pondering in your hearts this principle of prime importance: not a single verse of prophetically inspired scripture has ever come into being as a result of personal reflection. For prophecy has never been given as a result of man's will – on the contrary, [it has only come when] holy men directed by the Holy Spirit have spoken words [that come] from God.

2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 1:19-21

### Revelation 1:17-20:

And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. Then He put His right hand on me, saying, “Don't be afraid. It is I, the First and the Last, even the Living One. And although I died, behold, I am alive forever and ever! Indeed, I possess the keys to death and Hades. So write what you have seen, both the things that are [happening] (i.e., the Church Age trends represented by the seven churches) and the things that are going to happen after them (i.e., the Tribulation and the events which follow it). The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand and the seven lampstands [is this]: the seven stars are the seven churches' angels, and the lampstands are the seven churches.”

**like a dead man:** John's response at the visible presence of God, here the resurrected Christ, is entirely understandable and appropriate (cf. Ex.33:20; Deut.5:26; Judg.13:22; Is.6:5; Ezek.1:28). As flesh (and corrupt flesh at that), fellowship with the holy and perfect God is impossible and unthinkable for us (that experience must await our resurrection). We should consider, moreover, that even the apostle John, one of the greatest believers ever to have drawn breath, was not prepared to see the glorified Jesus in the flesh – if only we could see God as He really is, how would we not immediately realize the completely unfounded nature of our earthly fears; how would we not immediately be ashamed at the deficiencies in our personal service to Him? This passage offers us a rare chance, namely, to see with scripture's help through the eyes of faith our Lord as He really is, and to recommit ourselves to trusting Him with all our heart and to following Him with all our strength. We may not be doing so now to the degree we should, and we may not even be capable of complete success in this, but when we finally do see Him face to face, will we regret a single prayer to Him, a single attempt to grow closer to Him, a single act of ministry on behalf of His Church that would otherwise have failed to occur? After all, lack of zeal and enthusiasm for our God and His Christ is, as we shall see in the next installment of this series, the operative negative characteristic of the Church during this final phase of its calling out prior to the Tribulation. We would thus do well to make maximum use of every opportunity for reinforcing the reality of Him we claim to love more than life itself, and for taking up with vigor the individual cross we each have been assigned to bear.

**Don't be afraid:** Jesus' words here are definitely not commanding John to abandon his healthy fear of God, an essential ingredient in the life of every believer and one without which a true love of God (one encompassing the appropriate level of awe, reverence, and respect, at any rate)

would be impossible (cf. Deut.10:12; 10:20; Ps.19:9; Prov.1:7; Eccl.12:13; Is.6:5; 11:3; 33:6; 57:11; Matt.10:28; 2Cor.5:11; Eph.5:21; 6:5). That having been said, it is also important for believers to understand the difference between fearing God and being unreasonably afraid of God. In this respect, we may compare our situation to that of the relationship between children and their honorable, loving parents (an illustration that is really more than that since God actually *has* adopted us as His children in Jesus Christ: Jn.1:12; Rom.8:14-19; Gal.4:5; Eph.1:5; Heb.12:7). In normal, healthy families, children do not live in constant fear of their parents. However, all children must learn at a very early age that their parents' authority is nothing to be trifled with, and that trepidation is indeed a legitimate feeling when they contemplate or commit behavior which is unacceptable in their parent's eyes (especially when a fair standard is employed). In the same way, we believers, adopted into the very family of God the Father on the basis of His Son's sacrifice on our behalf, can be absolutely confident of His love for us (cf. 1Jn.4:18), but by the same token we would be foolish to deceive ourselves into imagining that our heavenly Father will tolerate unacceptable behavior from us any more than our earthly parents did (Heb.12:4-13). It therefore bespeaks a complete misunderstanding of the perfect and merciful character of our God to possess a morbid fear of a Father who loved us enough to send His Son to die on our behalf (Jn.3:16; Rom.5:8; 2Cor.5:14). But should the fact that He loves us so and forgives us in Christ produce disrespect for Him on our part and embolden us to conduct unbecoming those called to be the children of God? God forbid! We should take care never to lose our healthy fear of God, since it helps to keep us on the straight and narrow (Ex.20:20; Prov.3:7), and guides us away from many of the pitfalls of this life (Ps.19:9; Prov.9:10-12; Eccl.12:13-14). For those who possess this appropriate fear of God and follow Him in the way He has ordained (through following Jesus Christ), there truly is nothing to fear, in this life or the next (cf. Rom.8:12-17):

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and the body in hell.

Matthew 10:28 NIV

**the keys to death and Hades:** "Death and Hades" refers to what we generally call "hell" in our contemporary vernacular (and they have this same meaning in Rev.6:8; 20:13-14; and cf. Matt.16:19). That is to say, this is the place of the dead who rejected Christ during their earthly lives. The compound term used by our Lord here is far more accurate and specific than what we mean by "hell", for the common-knowledge of this concept is misguided on several points which should be addressed here. Hades, the present "hell", contains three separate compartments:<sup>51</sup>

1) torments (the place we think of as "hell" where unbelievers are being temporarily housed after death: Matt.5:29-30; 23:33; Lk.12:5; 16:23; Rev.20:13-15).

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<sup>51</sup> For more information on Hades, see the Satanic Rebellion series, part 1, section II.6.d; part 2, section II.3.b; and part 5, note #28 (where Peter's role in Matt.16:18-19 is discussed).

2) Abraham's bosom (where believers were temporarily housed prior to the ascension of our Lord to the Third Heaven which is the current residence of believers who have died: Lk.16:19-31; cf. Rev.7:9-10).

3) the Abyss (where a portion of rebellious angelic kind, notably those involved in the Genesis chapter six attack on humanity, are being temporarily imprisoned: Lk.8:31; 2Pet.2:4; Jude 6; Rev.9:1-11; 20:1-3).

All residence in Hades is temporary, because the ultimate abode of all believers is the New Earth (at the end of history: Rev.21-22), while the ultimate abode of unbelieving humanity and rebellious angelic kind is the Lake of Fire (following the Last Judgment: Matt.25:14-46; Rev.20:11-15). The designation "death and Hades" is also important in this particular context as well because it makes clear that the dead mentioned here are unbelievers, not believers who have died in the Lord (as these are presently in heaven: cf. 2Cor.5:6-10; Rev.7:9-10).

The "keys" mentioned as being possessed by our Lord Jesus Christ refer to the fact that only through Him can a person escape our common human destiny of death and punishment (Jn.14:6). Because God in His wondrous mercy gave His Son for us and because Jesus died for us, that destiny can be changed by any and all – one needs only to turn to Him to receive this redemption from the power of sin and death (Rom.8:1-4; Gal. 3:13; 4:5; Eph.1:7; Col.1:14; 1:20; Heb.1:3; 1Pet.1:18-19; Rev.1:5), and the grant of eternal life in their place (1Jn.5:11-13). The plural, "keys", used here is also significant. Christ Jesus is *the* key, but we must accept and follow Him (i.e., we must receive and utilize the key we have been graciously offered by putting our faith in Him). He has already "unlocked" and opened the door of the prison house for us all (cf. Is.42:7; 61:1), but we must still follow Him out (cf. Acts 12:9). All the merit, all the work is His (Eph.2:8-9), but we must respond to that work in order to be released (Jn.1:11-13; Rom.10:8-11). Just as our Lord told us at John 3:5 that we are saved "by water and Spirit" when we are born again (i.e., our belief in and response to the water of the Word, the gospel message, on the one hand, and God's salvation of us in Jesus through the power of the Spirit on the other: Eph.5:26; Rev.22:17), so the plural "keys" is an indication of this critically important point of truth: God has done absolutely the most for us in sacrificing His Son (Rom.5:6-8; 2Cor.9:15; Eph.2:8), but He will not override our free will and force us to believe in Him against our will (1Tim.2:4; 2Pet.3:9; cf. Rev.2:21).

**the seven churches' angels:** The "*angeloi*" (*αγγελοι*) mentioned here are, as is almost always the case in scripture, angels (not human "messengers" or "pastors" as some versions have it). And, as is also the case in this passage, angels are often identified as stars in the Bible (Job 38:7; Is.14:12 & 13; 40:26).<sup>52</sup> It is not an uncommon event for them to be entrusted with the sort of oversight and protection described in this verse. In this connection, we may mention as parallel cases their guarding of individual believers (Gen.32:1; 2Kng.6:16-17; Ps.91:11-12; Dan.6:22;

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<sup>52</sup> It is very likely that these seven are the seven archangels. See Coming Tribulation part 3A, section I.1, "The Seven Archangels with the Seven Trumpets".

Matt.4:11; Matt.18:10; Lk.16:22; Act 12:15; Heb.1:14), their ministries to specific nations (Dan.10:13; 10:20-21; 11:1), and their guardianship of the gates of New Jerusalem (Rev.21:12). In this last instance of protective oversight, they are also organized in a similar way to what is described in Revelation 1:20, with one angel assigned to each gate for each individual tribe of Israel, a fact that carries even more weight when we consider that the description given in Revelation chapters 21-22 includes all who shall ever put their faith in Jesus Christ, ultimately organized into the framework of Israel.<sup>53</sup> Thus an “angelic liaison” for the sequential generations of the Church forms a close parallel to the liaisons for individuals, nations, and ultimate corporate divisions of the Body of Christ found elsewhere in scripture. Moreover, since the seven churches of chapters 2-3 are, additionally, individual local churches in their own right as well, the principle of a specifically assigned angelic minister to all true churches of Christ should also be understood from these passages. The purpose for such angelic officials is doubtless the same as we have seen from prior studies: in addition to the wonders He performs by His own power, God also works through His creatures (whether men or angels), for we are all His servants (Heb.1:7; 1:14; Rev.19:10; 22:8-9). Thus God’s control and oversight of the Church of Jesus Christ, whose Church we are, is a highly organized affair, with every detail of our progression and edification, in fact, having been meticulously planned since before the beginning of time (Rom.8:28-32; Eph.1:11; 2:10; 5:25-27), a most important perspective to have and to retain at the threshold of the Tribulation.

## **VI. Conclusion: The True Focus of our Hope**

In these closing days of the pre-tribulational history of mankind, life has become both complicated and comfortable for many believers, a potentially dangerous correlation of factors. For to the extent that one possesses all the necessities of life in abundance, even to the point of luxury (in historical terms, even though in relative terms this will always be the province of the few), the most powerful natural stimulus to Christian hope is largely removed. And to the extent that the modern lifestyle which supplies that abundance is found to be a jealous and demanding taskmaster (especially if the entertainment and delights that are part and parcel of this lifestyle be factored in), little time and energy may be expected to remain at the end of frantic days and hectic weeks for the barest consideration of such issues, let alone the diligent service of our Lord, especially in an environment where most of our friends and neighbors are caught up in focusing upon the false hopes of this ephemeral world. This challenge – of serving God in the midst of the realm of Mammon – is no easy one, and it is really no surprise that it is one which has gone widely unanswered in these last days of the Church. Just as the believers in Laodicea were spiritually poor in spite of their material prosperity, so we, the last generation of the Church and heirs to the questionable Laodicean heritage, need to take very seriously the challenge of focusing our hope on what is truly important, what is eternal, and of eschewing what is really not

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<sup>53</sup> This is especially so since Church Age believers will ultimately be enrolled into these tribes. See part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”, under “The Symbolism of the Four Gaps and their Twelve-Day Groupings”.

important, but instead destined to be reduced to dust. For without a clear vision of the hope that is before us, we stand little chance (in the face of the relative prosperity and universal apathy that surrounds us) of motivating ourselves in the Lord to the level of zeal for Him that is both appropriate and salutary. In order to be spiritually safe now, and, even more importantly, to prepare effectively for the difficult times ahead, it is absolutely imperative that we break through this all-pervasive miasma of worldly comfort set in such a demanding material lifestyle, and instead see clearly in our hearts that our true treasures are the ones we ought to be busily storing up in heaven:

Don't stock up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and corrosion eat them away and where thieves dig through and steal [them]. But stock up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor corrosion eat them away and where thieves neither dig through nor steal [them]. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:19-21

Jesus is our treasure, not the things that this earthly life can provide, though they exceed our wildest dreams and expectations. We are here for Him, and only have our hope of outliving the grave because of Him and because of what He did for us. Do we remember Him? Do we see through the deception of material prosperity and desires and fears into the true, the good, the eternal realities that lie behind this fragile and unsatisfying veil of pseudo-happiness the devil has striven so mightily to produce? If we cannot see our Lord but faintly now, what, pray tell, should we expect when the coming storm breaks upon us? No, we must not be blinded by the world and the things of this world. We must take advantage of every day, every opportunity, to draw closer to our God, to be more like our Savior, and to serve Him in the manner and the ministry that He has chosen for us individually one and all while we still have the light to do so, because the days of darkness are fast approaching.

So Jesus said to them, "For a little while yet, the Light is among you. Walk while you have the light, so the darkness doesn't overtake you. Indeed, the person who walks in darkness doesn't know where he is going. While you have the Light, believe in the Light, that you may become sons of light."

John 12:35-36

Beyond the days of Tribulation, lie all the eternal glories that He has promised: our reward, our resurrection, the New Jerusalem, and our eternal relationship with Him. If we have but a little faith, He is faithful to bring us safely through the "fire and water" to come (Ps.66:12; Is.43:2), through the wilderness of tears that must be traversed (Ps.84:5-7; Is.58:11), through whatever the individual trials it will be our lot to face, even unto death (Ps.48:14). And on that day, when we stand with Him in resurrection and in glory on the holy mountain, we shall begin an eternity of joyful praise, thanksgiving and adoration, and know of a certainty that He was faithful to all He promised us.



And it will be said on that day, “Behold, this is our God! We put our hope in Him that He would deliver us. This is our Lord. We put our hope in Him. Let us rejoice and be glad in His deliverance!”

Isaiah 25:9

For we believers in Jesus Christ, “upon whom the end of the ages has come” (1Cor.10:11), are waiting for the literal and bodily return in glory of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Rev.19:16). On the other side of the vast darkness and excruciating testing which is the Great Tribulation is His glorious appearance, His “revelation” to the world, once and for all, and our gathering together with Him, in resurrection and in glory, for an eternity with Him, a joy which shall know no end (1Thes.4:16-17). This final and inexpressibly wonderful union with Him who is our Master is the true focus of our hope, and even in the Tribulation’s darkest days, every passing day will only bring us closer to this blessed reality.

[W]e who are awaiting the *blessed hope*, namely the glorious and majestic appearance of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Titus 2:13

Until that glorious day, let us then be careful how we walk. Let us rather run well this race that has been set before us (1Cor.9:24-27), carefully redeeming the time (Eph.5:16; Col.4:5), and training ourselves for the battle ahead (2Tim.2:3-5; 4:7-8), never losing sight of the One who is our hope, our great and unshakeable confidence even in death of victory over death in eternal life forevermore.

To all [believers] God desired to make known what wealth there is in this glorious mystery regarding the gentiles, for it is that Christ – *your hope of glory* – is in you.

Colossians 1:27

*Marana tha* (Aramaic = “O our Lord, return!”)

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 16:22

No matter how trying the tribulations or the Tribulation to come, no matter how painful and dark, no matter even if death or martyrdom awaits, the wonder and the glory of His return, and the rapturous joy we shall experience on being united with Him for all eternity thereafter will eclipse whatever sorrow and suffering has preceded it with the blinding light of an eternal life with the One we love (Rev.7:16-17).

For I do not consider these present hardships in any way comparable to the glory destined to be revealed for us [at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent]. For all creation eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God. For the created world is now subject to futility – not of its own choosing, but because of Him who subjected it [as a consequence of Adam’s sin] – but not without hope. For [at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent] the created world will be liberated from its enslavement to decay at the glorious liberation of the sons of God (i.e. our resurrection). For we know that the whole creation has been experiencing intense pain and agony right

up until this present time. And not only the created world, but we too who have received the Holy Spirit as a foretaste [of the good things to come] agonize within ourselves as we eagerly await our adoption, that is, the redemption of our body (i.e. resurrection). ***This is the hope with which we were saved.***

Romans 8:18-24a