

# The Tribulation

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*The earth will experience seven years of sheer terror.  
Will you be here then?*

At the end of the twentieth century people seem to face the future with serious misgivings. A jittery generation asks what terrible events the future holds. Is this, as Hal Lindsey suggests, the terminal generation?

The prophetic Word envisions a period of unprecedented universal suffering. Daniel predicted "a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time" (Dan. 12:1). Christ likewise spoke of a time of unique universal severity. He alerted the world to a time of tribulation "such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, nor nor ever shall be" (Matt. 24:21).

This period of trial that "shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth" (Rev. 3:10) will not be the end of the world. In fact, this time of awesome catastrophes and awful calamities will usher in the glorious Kingdom that Christ will set up on the earth at His Second Advent. However, a period of divine wrath will precede the return of Christ to earth. The Tribulation is a period of purification for the nation of Israel (Deut. 4:30; Jer. 30:7), of separation of the apostates from Israel (Isa. 10:21, 22; Zech. 13:8, 9) and of judgment for the Gentile world (Rev. 6:15-17; Isa. 24:1-11).

Just prior to this time of trouble, the Church will be Raptured. Thus the Tribulation will begin with only unsaved people. This period of time, known in the prophetic Word as "Daniel's seventieth week," constitutes the last seven-year period of Jewish history. It climaxes with the judgment of Israel and the nations at the Second Advent. At that time Christ will weed out rebellious sinners; and with redeemed saints who survived the Tribulation, He will populate the millennial Kingdom.

The Bible reveals hundreds of details concerning the tribulation period. Much of the book of the Revelation is devoted to various judgments that will come upon the world (Rev. 4-19). Most significant, however, in light of the current world situation, are certain geopolitical events in the Tribulation. We will note five of these events. Many Bible students understand

the seventieth week of Daniel, or seven years of tribulation, to begin right after the Rapture. However, it seems best to envision a short period of preparation between the Rapture and the Tribulation.

Christ appears to have given a general three-point outline of the time between the Rapture and the Second Advent. He spoke of certain events as "the beginning of sorrows" (Matt. 24:8), constituting perhaps the events between the Rapture and the beginning of the Tribulation. Then he referred to the "abomination of desolation" (Matt. 24:15), which clearly takes place at the midpoint of the Tribulation (Dan. 9:27). His glorious Second Advent concludes the tribulation period (Matt. 24:30, 31; 25:31), the final period of God's dealing with Israel after the Rapture. If this interpretation of the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 and 25 is correct, there will be a time of trial (Matt. 24:8), followed by a time of tribulation of three and a half years (v. 15), climaxing in a time of terror known as "the great tribulation" (v. 21), encompassing the last three and a half years. In relation to the Jewish people, it is a time of preparation, protection and persecution. Admittedly, many Bible scholars see in the events of Matthew 24:4-8 a reference to events in the Church Age preceding the Rapture. On the other hand, the disciples' three questions in Matthew 24:3 relate primarily to the final period of God's dealings with Israel after the Rapture.

### Confusion among the Nations

Several things need to transpire on earth before the tribulation of seven years can begin. After the Rapture, when millions of Christians have disappeared from this planet, pandemonium will reign on the earth. During that time, Israel will return to the land, and Antichrist will rise to prominence.

#### 1. *The Return of Israel*

It appears that after the Rapture every nation will turn on Israel. This severe hatred and the ensuing persecution will prompt the Jewish people who have scattered around the world to retreat to the land of Israel (Isa. 43:5, 6). In his arresting vision of the valley of dry bones, Ezekiel emphasized the fact that the re-

turn will be in unbelief (Ezek. 37:14, 21). The return will eventually involve every Jew on earth. Of that time God said, "I have gathered them unto their own land, and have left none of them any more there" (39:28). This final return may occur soon after the Rapture, or it will continue until the end of the Tribulation, when salvation will come to those who returned in unbelief (Joel 2:28). Nevertheless, a substantial part of the Jews will have returned to the land by the beginning of the Tribulation. Still a weak nation, they will then look for a strong protector.

#### 2. *The Revelation of Antichrist*

Matthew 24:5, 11 and 24 record Christ's prediction that many false Christs and many false prophets will emerge after the Rapture; yet when the tribulation period opens, just one political and one religious leader will appear. Their ascendancy over the other candidates is due to the fact that Satan will give them his personal power (Rev. 13:4, 14). Unredeemed mankind will recognize them because of their satanic ability to accomplish feats of "power and signs and lying wonders" (2 Thess. 2:9).

Despite efforts to identify the Antichrist with individuals such as Hitler, Kissinger, Rockefeller or even Saddam Hussein and King Juan Carlos of Spain, all such efforts are doomed: the apostle Paul clearly stated that not until the restrainer (the Holy Spirit) has been removed at the Rapture will the man of sin be revealed (2 Thess. 2:6-9). A satanically empowered Gentile will emerge in Europe as a powerful political leader sometime after the departure of the Church. His emergence and recognition will involve a certain length of time.

### The Covenant by Antichrist

#### 1. *The Confirmation of the Covenant*

With believers gone from the earth, even the United States will become anti-Semitic. Israel will return to the land and will look to Antichrist for military protection. He will sign a seven-year treaty with Israel. Daniel wrote of Antichrist, who "shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate" (Dan. 9:27).



## 2. The Cessation of the Covenant

Daniel literally signified that Antichrist will "initiate a firm agreement." That agreement will turn out to be "a covenant with death, and with hell [Sheol]" (Isa. 28:15), a frightening reference to the arch-deceiver, the archetype of all apostasy, namely Antichrist. As a signatory to the treaty, Antichrist can be trusted no more than the Russians who violated every one of the fifty-six treaties they have signed with the United States since World War II. After three and a half years Antichrist will break the treaty and subsequently will invade Israel.

## The Conquests by Antichrist

In the political realm, the first three and a half years of the Tribulation will include a consolidation of Antichrist's power in western Europe.

### 1. The Confederacy in Western Europe

Antichrist will attempt to revive the Roman Empire, which is predicted to be the last world empire prior to the return of Christ. Both Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the spectacular image in Daniel 2 and Daniel's vision of the four ferocious beasts in Daniel 7 refer to the four world empires between the time of Daniel and the setting up of Christ's kingdom. The divine interpretation of these two highly symbolic chapters is given in the immediate context, precluding any speculation on the part of the interpreter. The world empires are Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. The final phase of the Roman Empire will be a ten-nation confederacy (Dan. 7:23, 24). It appears that Antichrist will subdue three kings by military force, and seven others will then submit to his rule.

In Western Europe the stage is set for the developments predicted for the Tribulation. Since the 1950s the European Common Market or Economic Community, more recently known as the Economic Union, has been in effect; presently it has fifteen member nations. The political United States of Europe has

also been formed. It goes by the name of the European Parliament with headquarters in Brussels and Strasbourg. Only a strong central authority is lacking. The current European scene may have absolutely nothing to do with the predictions of Daniel 2 and 7, but it would be surprising if today's developments were not signs of the times. One need only recall the recent rapid and dramatic developments in eastern Europe to see how swiftly the political power on this planet can change. A restored Roman Empire could emerge on the scene in a relatively short time.

### 2. The Control over Western Europe

Antichrist will be a Roman ruler (Dan. 9:26), with ambitions to rule the world (Dan. 7:23; Rev. 13:7), but for the first three and a half years of the Tribulation he will be unable to exert worldwide control. To the east lie his major enemies, the kings of the North and their confederates, preventing the Roman prince from extending his realm. It is interesting to note that after the Rapture the seat of Western power will shift from Washington, D.C. to Rome. Further, at the middle of the tribulation period there will be once again two major centers of power, the Western confederacy and the Eastern confederacy. For the time being, Russian Communism and its imperialistic expansionism seem to be dead. However, the situation in that colossal country could suddenly change for the worse. Were Yeltsin to succumb to his next heart attack, presumably one of the hard-line Communists would take over the reins of

government. It appears that the corpse of Communism will be revived again before the middle of the tribulation period and will once again pose a menace for mankind, especially for the nation of Israel.

## The Confounding of Communism

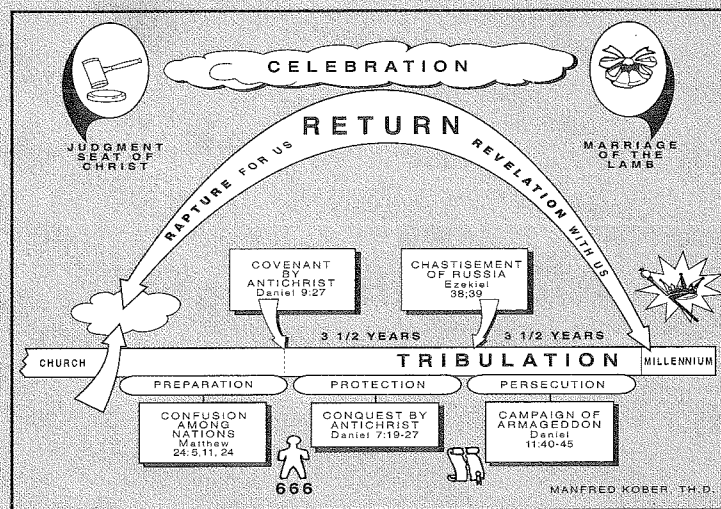
### 1. The Invasion by Gog and Magog

In the middle of the tribulation period, after Israel has been regathered from the nations (Ezek. 37:21), Gog and Magog will invade the land of Israel. At that time the Jews will live under Antichrist's protection in peace and safety. While sincere Bible scholars differ as to the time when the battle of Gog and Magog takes place, there seems to be only one period when Israel will be totally protected—and that is in the first half of the tribulation period. Anyone familiar with Israel today would hardly describe it as "the land of unwallled villages . . . at rest, . . . dwell[ing] safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates" (Ezek. 38:11).

Russia's move against Israel will be prompted by an irrational hatred for Israel ("thou shalt think an evil thought," Ezek. 38:10c) and a desire to pillage and plunder ("to take a spoil, and to take a prey; . . . to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods," Ezek. 38:12-14).

### 2. The Decimation of Gog and Magog

Despite Communism's reign of terror and source of unprecedented human suffering, God has shown forbearance these last seventy years. But at last, when the Russian bear invades Israel, God will have had enough. He testified, "My fury shall come up in my face" (Ezek. 38:18). God will use eight specific judgments to accomplish the destruction of Russia and her confederates. In fury He will unleash the weapons in the arsenal of Heaven and destroy the invaders through an earthquake, civil war, pestilence, blood, rain, flood, fire and brimstone (vv. 18-23). The invasion will result in the





death of all invaders. Some corpses will be buried in the valley of Hammon-gog, on the east of the Dead Sea (39:11). The rest of the corpses will be devoured by birds and beasts (vv. 17-20).

While Russia presently appears economically weak, it is still a strong military power. Whatever may happen between now and then, it is certain that by the middle of the tribulation period Russia will once again be a formidable military power with countries such as Iran, Ethiopia and Libya as confederates (38:5, 6). Russia's fate will be sealed at the time of its vicious attack against Israel.

## The Campaign of Armageddon

With the removal of Antichrist's opponent, the Roman ruler will be able to expand his domain worldwide. Yet he will never be totally successful in his endeavors, because various armies will challenge his rule during the final three and a half years of the Tribulation. A series of battles are predicted for those forty-two months. The campaign of Armageddon is named after a valley by that name in northern Israel (Rev. 16:16). Here World War III will erupt, as four major armies eventually converge on Israel. The scene is one of unbelievable bloodshed, with a river of blood running about four feet deep for two hundred miles (Rev. 14:20), perhaps from Megiddo northwest toward the Mediterranean Sea and southeast toward the Jordan Valley, then southward to the southern end of the Dead Sea. While the term "Armageddon" has been used of other battles, no carnage has ever equaled that eschatological engagement of four major armies comprising every fighting man on this planet. God predicts that "all the people of the earth" will "be gathered together against" Jerusalem (Zech. 12:3). And again He warns, "I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle" (Zech. 14:2).

### 1. The Commander (Dan. 11:36-39)

The main character in the second half of Daniel 11 is the Antichrist, the willful king, whose rule will be challenged by a series of invasions at the weakest flank of his domain.

### 2. The Campaign (Dan. 11:40-45)

#### a. The Assault from Egypt (11:40a)

An attack is directed at Antichrist, the protector of Israel, from the south. The geographical direction is from the vantage point of Israel.

#### b. The Attack by Russia (11:40b)

Russia will have previously been decimated as a world power but will be able to muster a few more soldiers. It appears that one-sixth of the Russian forces will not take part in the battle of Gog and Magog (Ezek. 39:2). Perhaps in a joint maneuver with Egypt, Russia will attempt to move into Israel and from there westward to unseat Antichrist in Rome.

#### c. The Action by Antichrist (11:40c-43)

Daniel predicted that "he shall enter also into the glorious land, and many countries shall be overthrown" (v. 41). The antecedent for the "he" in verse 40c and subsequent verses apparently is the willful king of verse 36 who will move against the invading armies. Since Satan will give him supernatural intelligence, he can successfully counter every effort against him. His military prowess will reveal him to be the most successful human general of all times.

As the willful king, Antichrist will enter "the glorious land" (v. 41a) and perhaps at that time will break his treaty with Israel. Three areas will escape his domination: Edom, Moab and Ammon (v. 41c). Just to the east of Israel lies an area that will not fall into the hands of Antichrist. Jewish people will find a refuge here while Antichrist invades Israel, abominates the sacrifice in the temple and desolates the temple mount. Speaking of the urgency and mortal danger of Israel at that time, Christ admonished the people of the Tribulation to "flee into the mountains" (Matt. 24:16), undoubtedly a reference to the mountains in Trans-Jordan.

As Antichrist moves from Rome to Israel, he will destroy Egypt, Libya and Ethiopia (Dan. 11:43). The Roman ruler will lash out at the countries that apparently oppose him or pose a threat to him as he sets up his headquarters in Israel.

#### d. The Approach of the Asiatics (11:44)

The tidings out of the east and north that come to him will be of great concern.

Who would not be concerned if he heard that an army numbering 200 million demonized horsemen were after his jugular vein (Rev. 9:16)? But Antichrist will be able to counter their attack as well. He will firmly establish his military headquarters on "the holy mountain," that is, Mount Zion or Jerusalem, "between the seas," undoubtedly a reference to the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean Sea.

Some have suggested that the invaders from the east and the north are the Red Chinese. They, as well as the nation of India, could possibly muster an army numbering 200 million. However, the reference could be to a confederation of various Asiatic nations that will cross the dried-up Euphrates River (Rev. 16:12) to engage Antichrist in battle. In fury he will destroy even those invaders.

#### e. The Advent of Christ (11:45b)

When all seems lost for the nation of Israel, with troops numbering perhaps in excess of 500 million fighting on the mountains and in the valleys of Israel, help will come suddenly from a fifth army. Daniel closed the description of the campaign of Armageddon cryptically with the words, "Yet he shall come to his end and none shall help him." Just when Antichrist will seem to have defeated all of his major enemies and to rule triumphantly over the world, he himself will perish. To understand the situation at which Daniel merely hints, one needs to read carefully Revelation 19:11-14, which describes the advent of Christ. This passage is the New Testament counterpart of Daniel 11:45. Christ will descend from Heaven, followed by the armies of the saints (Rev. 19:14), to establish Himself as rightful ruler over the earth. The Lord will take the counterfeit Christ and false prophet and cast them alive into the Lake of Fire and Brimstone (v. 20). Despite Satan's efforts to wrest Christ's reign away from Him by offering a substitute Christ to the world for seven years, God will at last place His Son upon His holy hill of Zion (Ps. 2:6). "And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one" (Zech. 14:9). ■