

The Purpose of the Tribulation

IN THE OLIVET DISCOURSE in the book of Matthew, Jesus told His disciples that one day the world would undergo a time of “great tribulation”. He went on to say that this period was going to be so terrible that if He did not cut it short, *every last living thing on Earth would die*. Jesus said that the distress and horror of those days would be worse than any event in all of history – even worse than the Flood, which wiped out all of mankind except for eight people.

Just what is the purpose of this terrible period? Well, in Daniel chapter 9 we find this intriguing passage:

Daniel 9:20: “And whiles I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God for the holy mountain of my God;

21 Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation.

22 And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding.

23 At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to show thee; for thou art greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision.

24 Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.”

In verse 24 the angel Gabriel told Daniel that seventy “weeks” had been set aside. This is one time when I must take issue with the King James translation of the Bible. The word in verse 24 is not the Hebrew word for week, which is *shavuot*. The verse instead uses the word *shavuim*, which simply means “sevens”. It does not refer to seven *days* but seven of *something*. It is like the English word “dozen”. When someone says “dozen” it tells you that they are talking about twelve items, but without more information that is all you know. A better translation of verse 24 would be 70 *sevens*. In this context the item being counted is years. 70 sevens therefore refers to 70 periods of seven years, or 490 years.

At this point you may be wondering what this has to do with the Great Tribulation. As we will see in a moment, the Tribulation is the last “seven” in that group, or the 70th period of 7 years. A better title for this paper might have been “The purpose of the 70 sevens”, but I have a feeling that would have confused just about everybody! The title is still accurate, for the last 7 years is assigned the same purpose as the first 483 years.

In verse 24 the angel tells us that a period of 490 years had been set aside for “thy people”. Since the angel was talking to Daniel and since Daniel was a Jew, the people the angel is talking about must be the Jews. This is further emphasized by the fact the verse mentions “thy holy city”. Taken together, “thy people” must be the Jews and “thy holy city” must be Jerusalem. I see no reason in the text to interpret this any other way.

The angel then lists a number of reasons why God has set aside this period of 490 years:

- To finish “the” transgression
- To make an end of sins
- To make reconciliation for iniquity
- To bring in everlasting righteousness
- To seal up the vision
- To anoint the most Holy. (The Hebrew indicates this is a place, not a person.)

It's worth asking: whose transgressions are being finished? Whose sins are ended? Whose iniquity is being reconciled? I think the answer must be **Israel**. Verse 24 does not say “This period has been established for the whole world”; it specifically points out *Israel* and *Jerusalem*. *They* are the ones being targeted. When this period of 490 years is over, Israel's transgression will be finished, her sins will be ended, and her iniquity will be reconciled.

It's worth noting that verse 24 specifically says *the* transgression. This is not an accident of translation; the Hebrew text has a definitive article here. The angel is talking about a *specific* transgression that will be finished. I believe that transgression is Israel's rejection of Jesus as their Messiah. Throughout history Israel has rejected her Messiah, and she continues to rebel against Him to this very day. However, Zechariah foresaw a time when that would change:

Zechariah 12:10: “And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.

11 In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadad-rimmon in the valley of Megiddon.”

This passage speaks of a future time when the Jews and the inhabitants of Jerusalem (the very same people mentioned in Daniel 9:24!) will realize that they rejected their Messiah and will mourn over Him with great anguish. This will happen at the very end of the 490 years. Israel will realize what they have done and will turn back to God. Their rebellion will come to a final end and, as Gabriel said, their sins will be finished:

Jeremiah 21:31: “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah:

32 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they broke, although I was a husband unto them, saith the Lord:

33 But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

This passage closely echoes Daniel 9:24. It speaks of a new covenant with *the house of Israel*. It is very important to realize that this passage is *not* directed at the Church, which didn't even exist at the time. Jeremiah 21:31 does not say "I will make a new covenant with all people". It specifically lists *Israel* – not once, but twice (verse 31 and 33). I have seen people apply this passage to the Church but I do not think that is valid. (I realize the book of Hebrews quotes this verse, but to whom was the book of Hebrews written? Why, to the *Hebrews*. In other words, to the Jews. There are some promises in the Bible that are specific *to the Jews* and that do not apply to the Church as a whole. But that is a topic for another time.)

What we see here is that when this period of time is over Israel's iniquity will be forgiven, her sins will be forgotten, and *all* of the Jews will know the Lord. Notice that verse 34 really does say "they shall *all* know me". Paul made this same point in Romans chapter 11.

So, what we see in Daniel 9 is that 490 years have been set aside to bring an end to Israel's rebellion against God. Gabriel, however, has more details to share:

Daniel 9:25: "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times."

This verse says that the Messiah will appear 483 years (that's 69 periods of 7 years each) after the decree goes out to rebuild Jerusalem. This period of time broken into two parts – the first period of 49 years is followed by a second period of 434 years. It should be noted, as a matter of historical fact, that after the decree was issued to rebuild Jerusalem it took 49 years to rebuild that city (which you can read about in the book of Nehemiah). Then, 434 years after Jerusalem was rebuilt, the Messiah was crucified. There were exactly 483 years from the time the decree was issued to rebuild Jerusalem until the death of Christ on the cross. (As an aside, when the Bible mentions years in prophecies it uses 360-day years. A detailed discussion as to why that is the case is outside the scope of this discussion, but I wanted to mention it.)

Had the Jews been paying attention they would have known exactly when the Messiah would die. However, they weren't paying attention, and the consequences of that ignorance were very severe:

Luke 19:41: "And when he [Jesus] was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it,
42 Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes.
43 For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side,
44 And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; **because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.**"

Jesus says that Jerusalem was going to be destroyed because the Jews did not know "the time of thy visitation". They should have realized that Jesus was the Messiah, but they didn't. They ignored the very clear prophecy in Daniel that specified *exactly when Christ would come*. There should have been nothing unexpected about His arrival.

As an aside, this is one reason why liberal scholars hate the book of Daniel – they reject the

very idea of prophecy. For years they claimed that the prophecies it contained must have been added centuries later. (It's amazing how the Bible *must* be wrong simply because it disagrees with somebody's theory. What kind of logic is that?) This theory was disproven when copies of the book of Daniel were discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls – copies that predated the birth of Jesus by *centuries*.

Daniel 9:26 goes on to say that the Messiah would be killed at the end of the 483rd year:

Daniel 9:26: “And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.”

Notice that it says “after 62 weeks”. Keep in mind verse 25 says there will be 7 weeks that are followed by 62 weeks. The 7 weeks (or 49 years) were the rebuilding of Jerusalem; after those years were finished the 62 weeks (or 434 years) took place. The Messiah died 69 weeks later (or 62 weeks + 7 weeks), which is 483 years. Once again, this is all made much harder to understand because the King James Bible incorrectly uses the word “week” instead of “sevens”.

What all of this means is that when Jesus died (but “not for himself”, as verse 26 points out – He died for *us*, to pay for *our* sins), 483 years of the 490-year period had taken place. Just as verse 26 prophesied, after Christ died and rose again the city of Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed. However, Christ's death stopped the clock. After his death the final 7 years of that 490-year period did not happen. There is a gap between the “cutting off” of the Messiah and that last period of 7 years – a gap that is filled by the Church. The Church exists entirely within that gap; it was born on the day of Pentecost (which took place *after* Christ died, and thus after the 483rd year happened), and it will disappear in the Rapture, which removes her from Earth before that final period of seven years takes place.

The next verse talks about this missing “week”:

Daniel 9:27: “And he shall confirm the covenant with many for **one week**: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.”

Here we find our missing period of 7 years. It begins when “he” (not the Messiah this time, but the Antichrist) confirms “a covenant with many for one week”. In other words, the Antichrist signs a seven-year treaty with “many” nations, of which Israel is a part. (Isaiah 28:15 calls this a “covenant with death”.) This period of 7 years is the 7 years of the Tribulation. In the middle of this period (or 3.5 years into it) the Antichrist will stop the sacrifices that are being made in the third Temple, will walk into its Holy place, and will declare himself to be god. (This is discussed in 2 Thes. 2:3-4.) After that things will get *really* bad *really* fast – in fact, Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 24 that when the people of Israel saw this take place they should run for their lives. The last half of the Tribulation will be *far* worse than the first.

At the time this paper was written, only 69 of the 70 “weeks” have taken place. There is only one “week” left – the 7 years of the Tribulation. As we've just pointed out, what starts that last period of time is not the Rapture of the Church but the signing of a treaty with the Antichrist. So far that has not yet occurred, but I believe we are approaching that moment. Each day brings it closer.

The reason there is a gap between the 69th and 70th “weeks” is because Israel rejected her

Messiah. Their rejection of Jesus caused a number of things to happen, which Paul discusses extensively in Romans. Of special interest is Romans 11:

Romans 11:11: "I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.

12 Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?"

We see that "through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles". The Lord used their rebellion and hardness of heart to save the Gentiles. However, their blindness is temporary:

Romans 11:25: "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in."

Israel is blinded right now, but that will only last until "the fulness of the Gentiles be come in". I have heard it said that the word "fulness" in this verse is a nautical term that refers to having enough people to sail a ship. In other words, the idea was that you had to have a certain number of sailors on board before you could safely leave the shore and head out to sea. This verse seems to imply that the Church will contain a specific number of people, and as soon as she is completed the Lord will take her home and Israel will begin her final "week".

The purpose of the Tribulation, then, is to *bring Israel back to God*. The Lord wants to put an end to Israel's rebellion and bring her back to Him. To do this He set aside 490 years. The Tribulation is the last of those years, and it will begin after "the fulness of the Gentiles be come in" and the Church has been brought home to Heaven.

This is another reason why I do not believe the Church will go through the Tribulation. The focus of those last 7 years is on *Israel*, not the Church. It is Israel who rejected her Messiah while the Church accepted Him. There is every reason for Israel to go through the Tribulation, but there is no reason for the Church to do so – especially if she reaches her full number *before the Tribulation begins*. After all, the blinders are only removed from Israel *after* the Church is completed. If the Bride is complete then why leave her here? It's worth noting that the Church did not appear on Earth until Pentecost, which is after the first 69 "weeks" had taken place.

Yes, there will be people saved during the Tribulation – Israel, for example. But they will not be a part of the Bride any more than Old Testament saints were part of the Bride. They were part of the Wife of Jehovah, but that is a topic for another time.

Of course, the Tribulation will serve one other purpose. It can be found in many places throughout the book of Revelation:

Revelation 9:20: "And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk:

21 Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts."

During the Tribulation the Lord will pour out awful judgments upon the Earth to punishment mankind for their sins. People everywhere will realize what is going on, but as the verse says they will refuse to repent. Instead of abandoning their sins they will try to hide from God:

Revelation 6:15: “And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains;

16 And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and **hide us** from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:

17 For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?”

Right now we live in an age of faith. We believe in Jesus even though we have never seen Him. The day will come, however, when all that will change. The Lord will pour out incredible, supernatural wrath upon entire planet in such a way that everyone will realize the Most High God is angry. When the wrath of the Lamb begins no one will question what is happening or why it is occurring. And yet, despite all this, many will continue in their rebellion and refuse to believe the truth. Instead of repenting, people will continue to gnash their teeth and curse God.

Many people will be saved during the Tribulation – but others will refuse to believe and will be lost forever. Israel, however, *will* be saved, for God will put an end to her sin and will give her a new heart.