

The Purpose of the Tribulation

In the Olivet Discourse Jesus told His disciples that one day the world would undergo a time of “great tribulation” (Matthew 24:21-22). This period was going to be so terrible that if He didn't cut it short *every last living thing on Earth would die*. Jesus said 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 8 people.

What is the purpose of this terrible period? In Daniel chapter 9 we find this intriguing passage:

Daniel 9:20-24: “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; 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. And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding. 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. 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.”

The angel Gabriel told Daniel that seventy “weeks” had been set aside. This is one occasion where I believe the King James translation is wrong. The word in verse 24 isn't the Hebrew word for week, which is *shavuot*. Instead the verse uses the word *shavuim*, which simply means “sevens”. It doesn't refer to seven *days* but seven of *something*. It's like the English word “dozen”. When someone says “dozen” it tells you they're talking about twelve items, but without more information that's 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 that has to do with the great tribulation that Jesus spoke of. The tribulation is the last “seven” in that group. It's the 70th period of 7 years. Those final last 7 years have 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.

The angel 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.)

Whose transgressions are being finished? Whose sins are ended? Whose iniquity is being reconciled? I think the answer must be **Israel**. Verse 24 doesn't say “This period has been

established for the whole world”. No, it specifically points to *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.

Verse 24 specifically says *the* transgression. This isn't an accident; the Hebrew text has a definitive article here. The angel is talking about a *specific* transgression which 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 prophesied of a time when that would change:

Zechariah 12:10-11: “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. 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. In that day they will mourn over Him with great anguish. This will happen at the very end of the 490 years. The Jews will realize what they've done and will turn back to God. As Gabriel said, their rebellion will come to a final end and their sins will be finished:

Jeremiah 21:31-34: “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: 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: 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. 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's important to realize that this passage isn't directed at the church, which didn't exist at the time. Jeremiah 21:31 doesn't say "I will make a new covenant with all people". It specifically addresses *Israel* – not once, but twice (verse 31 and 33).

Some people apply this passage to the church but that's an error. It's true that the book of Hebrews quotes this verse, but that book was written to the *Hebrews*. In other words, it was written to the Jews – the very people to whom this promise was made! There are some promises in the Bible which are specific *to the Jews* and don't apply to the church as a whole.

What we see here is that when this period of 490 years is over Israel's iniquity will be forgiven, her sins will be forgotten, and *all* of the Jews will know the Lord. Verse 34 really does say "they shall *all* know me". Paul made this same point in Romans 11:26-27.

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 means if the Jews had been paying attention they would have known exactly when the Messiah would die. However, when the Messiah came they rejected Him. The consequences of that were very severe:

Luke 19:41-44: “And when he [Jesus] was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, 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. 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, And shall lay the 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 said that Jerusalem was going to be destroyed because the Jews didn't know “the time of thy visitation”. They should have accepted Jesus as their Messiah but they didn't.

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.”

The passage says He would die “after 62 weeks”. Verse 25 says there will be 7 weeks which are followed by 62 weeks. The 7 weeks (or 49 years) were for the rebuilding of Jerusalem. After those years were finished an additional 62 weeks (or 434 years) took place. The Messiah died 69 weeks later (or 62 weeks + 7 weeks), which is 483 years.

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 didn't happen. There's a gap between the “cutting off” of the Messiah and that final period of 7 years – a gap that's 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 will disappear in the rapture which will remove us from this world before that final period of 7 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”. The antichrist will make a seven-year treaty with “many” nations, including Israel. Isaiah 28 calls this a “covenant with death”:

Isaiah 28:15-18: “Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves: Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place. And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it.”

This final period of 7 years is the tribulation. In the middle of this period (or 3.5 years into it) the antichrist will stop the sacrifices which are being made in the third temple, will walk into its Holy place, and will declare himself to be God:

2 Thessalonians 2:3-5: “Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all

that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?”

After that things will get *really* bad *really* fast. In fact, Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 24:15-20 that when the people of Israel see this take place they should run for their lives. The last half of the tribulation will be *far* worse than the first.

So far only 69 of the 70 “weeks” have taken place. There's only one “week” left: the 7 years of the tribulation. That final period of time isn't triggered by the rapture of the church but by the agreement the antichrist makes with Israel.

The reason there's a gap between the 69th and 70th “weeks” is because Israel rejected her Messiah. That rejection of Jesus caused a number of things to happen, which Paul discusses in Romans. Of special interest is Romans 11:

Romans 11:11-12: “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. 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?”

Paul tells us that “through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles”. The Lord used their rebellion and hardness of heart to save the Gentiles! For now the Jews are blind to the gospel, but that 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 fullness of the Gentiles be come in."

Their blindness will only last until “the fullness of the Gentiles be come in”. I've heard it said that the word “fullness” in this verse is a nautical term which refers to having enough people to sail a ship. The idea was that you must have a certain number of sailors on board before you could safely leave the shore and head out to sea. This verse teaches that the church will contain a specific number of people, and as soon as it's completed the Lord will take her home and Israel will begin her final “week”.

The purpose of the tribulation 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 has set aside 490 years. The tribulation is the last of those years. It will begin after “the fullness of the Gentiles be come in” and the church has been brought home to Heaven at the rapture.

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

It's true there will be many people saved during the tribulation. However, they won't be part of the church any more than the Old Testament saints were part of the church. The Jews who were saved before Christ died were part of the Wife of Jehovah – but that's a topic for another time¹.

1 For more information on this topic see: <http://stories.cyragon.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/The-Wife-of-Jehovah.pdf>

The tribulation will serve one other purpose. It can be found in many places throughout the book of Revelation:

Revelation 9:20-21: “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: 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 terrible judgments upon this world to punishment mankind for their sins. People everywhere will realize what's going on but they will refuse to repent. Instead of turning from their sins they'll try to hide from God:

Revelation 6:15-17: “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; 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: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?”

What is the tribulation? It's the great day of God's wrath.

Right now we live in an age of faith. We believe in Jesus even though we've never seen Him. The world hasn't seen Him either – but one day that will change. During the tribulation the Lord will pour out incredible, supernatural wrath upon entire

planet. When He does this the whole world will realize the Most High God is angry. Once the wrath of the Lamb begins no one will question what's happening or why it's occurring – and yet many people will continue in their rebellion anyway. Instead of repenting they 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, because God will put an end to her sin and give her a new heart.