

Study Guide: “Understanding the Tribulation”

Carter Sanger, May 2009

Introduction

Do you have a particular perspective of the end times? Do you know when your particular view came about?

There is a particular view of the end that dominates our culture. It is a view that sees nearly all of the events described in Matthew’s Olivet discourse (Matthew 24-25) and Revelation as future. This view is relatively new historically. It comes out of a theological perspective that is only about 200 years old. That doesn’t make it wrong, but it should at least give us pause. There are other views on the events in Revelation that have more scholarly support. These other views are less talked about perhaps for a couple of reasons: 1) because they don’t carry the same sensationalness to them, and 2) preachers and teachers that hold to these views don’t elevate the importance of Revelation above the rest of Scripture. In contrast, some who teach the sensational view tend to give it a disproportionate level of attention when compared to the rest of Scripture.

This popular view sees the events like this: In the future The antichrist (“Beast”) will come and with him a time of great tribulation. Christians will escape this tribulation when they are raptured out of the world. After the tribulation, Christ will come back with those raptured and reign as king on earth for 1000 years.

Let’s take a closer look at Jesus’ words in Matthew. Read Matthew 24:1-35, then discuss the following.

I. The Terror of the Tribulation

In verses 9-22.

- What is happening during the tribulation? Who is suffering in it?
- What is the great temptation caused by the suffering?
- What is Christ’s reason for telling them about the tribulation? Look in verse 4 and 23.

II. The Timing of the Tribulation

- Verse 3 mentions “signs” of the times. How has this impacted our culture?
- Read verses 1-2. These verses explain what the disciples are asking about. What do you know about the temple to which Jesus is referring? Read also Mark 13:1-2 for some clues.
- Who does Jesus say these things will happen to? Who, specifically, is he warning?
- Read verse 34. When does Jesus say these things will occur?

The meaning of “this generation” has been debated. Other Scripture is the best way to interpret confusing parts of Scripture. Read also Revelation 1:1,3; 22:6-7, 10-12. What do these verses say about the timing of these events? To whom is John writing his letter?

The destruction of the temple in 70 AD was a major event in the development of Christianity. It brought to bear what the writer of Hebrews explains in 12:26-28. Josephus and other early historians show us much about the Roman march against Jerusalem that fits well with Jesus’ words in Matthew 24 and those in Revelation. This history certainly points to the real possibility that Jesus was in fact speaking about events that would happen “within the current generation.” The “end” he talks about is not the end of the age (in general), but the end of the *Jewish* age.

III. The Triumph of the Tribulation

John’s Revelation seems to be an expounding of Jesus’ Olivet discourse. The Scroll that is opened in chapter 5 is opened by Christ because of his accomplished death and resurrection.

- Read Revelation 6:2. As the Scroll is opened and the seven seals are opened, what do we find happening?

When scrolls are referred to in the Old Testament they have to do with judgment – often judgment upon Jerusalem. John’s Revelation is replete with Old Testament references and allusions. The seals, the trumpets, the bowls are all pointing to God’s judgment upon those “who pierced him”

(Rev 1:7). (By the way, the word “earth” and “land” in English are from the same Greek word. Verse 7 can grammatically be read, “...and all the tribes of the *land* will wail...” The “land” in the Bible often refers to “The Land”, specifically the geographic land of Israel.)

- The tribulation is not a product of the cosmic battle between God and Satan where people are caught in the crossfire, but a result of the judgment of God. Read Matthew 24:8. What do you think the tribulation is the “birthpains” of? Is this a good or a bad thing for God’s people? (Read Revelation 6:9-10 for help)

Wrap-up

- What does God’s judgment of Israel mean to us today? (Read Romans 11:13-22, especially verse 22 for help)