

Rediscovering Jesus in the Jewish Gospels

Countdown to the Tribulation

Lesson 46 Matthew 24:3 -28

Terminology

- **“tribulation”** is a specific time period not just regular trouble Greek - θλίβω thlibō - to oppress or be oppressed: “afflicted” (24:9) [θλίψις thlipsis - troubled] as in Rev. 1:9 “I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation”

Walter Bauer’s Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature this word [θλίψις thlipsis] is “rare in extra-Biblical Greek” literature though “frequent in the LXX (Septuagint translation)”ⁱ.

Same word used for the intense suffering of Christ “In my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions [θλίψις thlipsis] of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake.” (Colossians 1:24)

- **“great tribulation”** (24:21) “then there shall be great Tribulation” “great” [Greek - Μέγαλή megalin = great ; θλίψις thelipsis -trouble] Mega Trouble
- **Old Testament** connects it to Israel’s return and redemption implicitly or explicitly.

(Joel 2:1,2) “Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the LORD cometh, for *it is nigh at hand*; A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong.”

(Zephaniah 1:15) “a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess.”

The context is of an unprecedented future time of tribulation on a global scale. “For then shall be great tribulation, **such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be**. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved (24:21,22). Jesus was quoting from the Greek Septuagint (LXX) translation of Joel 2. “there hath **not been ever the like**, neither shall be any more after it.” (Jeremiah 30:7) “Alas! for that day *is great*, so that **none is like it**: *it is even the time of Jacob's trouble*”

The connecting phrase “the abomination of desolation” (Matt. 24:15; Daniel 9:27). This is not a destruction of the 1st century Temple which He had already addressed (24:2). This is a defilement of the yet future newly built Jewish Temple in the end times just before His return.

Timing of the tribulation period (24:29) “after the “Tribulation of those days”

The qualifiers indicate a finite period of time with a beginning, a middle, and an end.

“then” (24:9,10,14,16,21,23,30)

“after...those days”(24:29)

“end” (24:6,13,14)

- **After the Rapture of the Church**

Rev. 7:13 “the elders” asked who were these new arrivals of the innumerable multitude of redeemed. Rev. 7:14 “And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of **great tribulation**, [Greek - Μέγαλή megalin = great ; θλίψις thlipsis] and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

This indicates that the apostles of the church age were already in Heaven before this time. (Revelation 4:4,10) The new arrivals were not part of the “Church/Bride of Christ/Body of Christ” already present since the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17). The church is nowhere mentioned in the events happening on earth recorded in Revelation chapters 6-18. The church/elders are seen in Heaven in Chapter 5 around the throne of Christ and again in chapter 19 when they return on white horses with Christ to earth. The events of the Tribulation period in Matthew chapters 24 and 25 are described in depth in Revelation chapters 6 – 18.

Believer are under no condemnation (Romans 8:1), and are not appointed to wrath. “And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, *even* Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.” 1 Thessalonians 1:10 (2 Thessalonians 2:1-8) corrects the early believers concerns that they were in the Tribulation.

Purpose of the Tribulation

A. For Gentile nations - Judgment of those who are “against thy people” (Dan. 9:24-27)

(Revelation 6:17) For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

(11:18) And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldst give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldst destroy them which destroy the earth.

(12:12) Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.

B. For Israel – To cleanse and spiritually redeem Israel (Ezekiel 38:23).

“a new heart also will I give you...I will put my Spirit within you.” (Ezekiel 36:26). “I will be their God and they shall be my people. (Ezekiel 36:27)

C. For God’s Glory - “The heathen shall know that I am the Lord when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes.” (Ezekiel 36:23).

D. For Satan (Revelation 20:2,3) “And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more...”

Perplexed Disciples Q & A Their Questions and Jesus’ Answers

Their question is really in two parts - what and when regarding two future events. (24:3)

- “When shall these things be” applies to both parts. We could restate them as; What is the “sign of **thy coming?**” and When are you coming?
- What and When shall be the sign of “**the end of the world(age)?**” (24:3).

Q 1a “What shall be the sign of thy coming?” (Matt. 24:3)

A (24:27) “as lightening cometh out of the east and shineth even to the west”

(24:30) “then shall appear the sign...see the sign of the Son of Man coming in the clouds of Heaven with power and great glory”

(24:31) followed by a supernatural instantaneous global gathering of His elect (Jews who got saved during this tribulation period being gathered to Jerusalem)

- Q 1b** “When shall these things be” is referring to the “all these things” preceding His coming. They are not asking for a date of the Temple’s destruction. He had already told them that the Temple would be destroyed in their generation.
- A** Immediately after the Tribulation (Matt. 24:29) of those days
- Q 2a** When is the end of the world/age (Gentiles dominating and walking on Israel)?
- A** (24:6-12) gives the details of the first half of the Tribulation “but the end is not yet”
- Q 2b** What is the sign of the end of the age?
- A1** (24:4,5,11,23-26) Mass deception by counterfeit signs of a false Messiah
- A2** (24:15; Daniel 9:27) The “Abomination of Desolation” by the Anti-Christ (Revelation 13)
- A3** (24:21) “Great tribulation” (Revelation 6-18)
- A3** (24:14) “Gospel of the Kingdom” preached worldwide (same “gospel” as the OT prophets, John the Baptist and Jesus in His first 2 years). This is not the Gospel of the death, burial, and resurrection which had not happened yet. The gospel of the Kingdom is covered in great detail in Lessons 1-5 in this series. Preaching of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists and a global evangelistic response. (Revelation 7:9-14)
- “And I heard the number of them which were sealed: *and there were* sealed an hundred *and* forty *and* four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel. After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. (Revelation 7:9-14;14:1-4,6) “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death” (Revelation 12:11). “These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb”(Revelation 7:14).

Parables

The Fig Tree (Matthew 24:32-5)

Who is the fig tree? Was Israel becoming a nation in 1948 the fig tree blossoming?

Who is “this generation”? The Fig tree only symbolizes Israel 1 of 17 mentions in the Old Testament. That example of Israel as a fig tree is found in Hosea 9:10 and is not a reference to the rebirth of the nation of Israel in the end times but rather to her birth when God first found her in the wilderness at Sinai. In the same verse Hosea also says Israel was like grapes. So, which is it? Should Israel be typified by the Fig tree or the grape vine? The Apostle Paul clearly identifies Israel as the Olive tree and gentile believers as wild olive branches grafted in among them (Romans 11:17-24).

The same fig tree analogy is recorded in Luke’s account of the same sermon in Matthew 24:32-35.

“And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled” (Luke 21:29-32.)

The key is found in the phrase, “Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; When they now shoot forth.” Do all the trees prophetically symbolize Israel or is it just the fig tree? Neither. When we combine both Gospel accounts, a simple point is being made with this analogy. The generation that sees “all these things,” happening simultaneously, is compared to all the trees blossoming and putting forth leaves simultaneously. It is a sign of a seasonal change. Summer follows new leaves like new leaves follow blossoms. With the same predictability of the seasons found in nature, His second coming to earth will immediately follow the signs in the Great Tribulation. Only that final generation that sees all these things happening will observe Jesus’ return to the earth at the end of the Tribulation. Israel’s current status of being “trodden

under foot” by the Gentile powers will continue until Jesus comes as King of Kings to overthrow those nations and to set up His kingdom in Jerusalem (Luke 21:24).

For years I have wondered how it is possible that the people after the Rapture on earth during that last period of the seven year “Tribulation” generation, who live amidst a plethora of cataclysmic, heavenly signs, could still be caught off guard and not be expecting Jesus’ second coming. Jesus used the precedent of the pre-deluge pagans of Noah’s day. Most “knew not until the flood came and took them all away” even after he told them for 120 years. The fact checkers had mockingly tuned him out but in the end couldn’t swim. You would think that in the Tribulation, they could easily count 7 seals, 7 trumpets and 7 bowls and voila – surely they could almost figure out the month or season of the year of Jesus’ return. After all, that Abomination of Desolation and the Mark of the Beast are big clues. But will they know? Will they have even heard? Will the good news have been thoroughly broadcast? Jesus said, like in Noah’s day, they knew not until the flood came and took them away. People still won’t be ready after “all these things” happen simultaneously for seven years due to the distraction of the devastation from the global tsunami of geological and cosmological catastrophes. The main reason they will be caught off guard is the wide-scale delusion. “And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (1 Thessalonians 2:11). Jesus’ first words in answer to the disciple’s question in Matthew 24:3 was “Take heed that no man deceive you.” Then He said many would be deceived. Later He said the deception would be so strong that even the very elect would almost fall for it (Matthew 24:24), a reference to the saved Jewish remnant of Israel in the Tribulation. Jesus began the chapter warning against deception and He ends the chapter by warning against lethargy.

Days of Noah (Matthew 24:36-44). The phrase “one shall be taken and the other left” has been interpreted as The Rapture which is found nowhere in the Matthew 24 passage but is inserted by confusion with the Second Advent of Christ to earth after the tribulation. It is wrongly connected to the eschatological term “Rapture”, from a Latin word for “caught up,” found in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17. The allusion to Noah easily discredits this interpretation because the ones taken in Noah’s flood were taken away in the flood waters of judgment and drowned, not rescued and safe in the ark. In the Rapture, the one’s taken away are taken up and delivered from God’s coming wrath on the earth. Furthermore, the coming of Jesus described in Matthew 24 is literally to the Mount of Olives not in the clouds. Comparing scripture with scripture instead of proof-texting one verse to fit a preconceived notion will save a lot of confusion. The generation of Noah “knew not until.” They had gone to sleep during the 120-year span of Noah’s preaching.

Two coworkers (24:40-41) Again the one taken is taken away in Judgment like those that drowned in the flood. “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.”

Watchful householder (24:42-44) The point to the tribulation era Jews is to be on alert. He comes quickly.

Wise servant (24:45-51) The point to tribulation-era Jews is to be faithful to the responsibilities committed to you by the soon-coming Master/Messiah.

ⁱ Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian Literature, Walter Bauer, 2nd edition, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1958, P 362