

Episode #917 Matthew 24 Part 6-A Second Look at the Tribulation

I. The purpose of the gospel of Matthew is to present Jesus as the Christ, the King of Israel. It is another grand treatise like John to prove to Israel Who Jesus really is. It is the book of being “in Israel,” in contrast to believers today who are “in Christ.”

II. The Lord was teaching about the Great Tribulation. We suggested that in order to understand this, we must understand the Bible’s great prophecies regarding the future return of Israel to the land, like that found in Ezekiel 34:11-15.

III. The Great Tribulation. Matthew 24:21-28.

- A. You can find the same truth in Ezekiel 20, when after describing the five great rebellions of Israel, God declares that because of His determination to rule over them, He will bring them out, plead with them, cause them to pass under the rod, bring them into the covenant, and then He will purge out the rebels from among them, Ezekiel 20:33-38. If we consider these two passages, they demonstrate that the next thing in order for Israel is regathering, restoration, and blessing.
- B. Yet in spite of this, the average preacher of prophecy sees no immediate future good for the descendants of Abraham. The current, popular interpretation of prophecy is that all that Israel can expect from God in the future is a time of frightful and fiendish torture, crueller and more unusual than any torture Satan or men have ever devised against them. This is called a time of earth’s matchless agony, without parallel as far as its destructive and terrifying effects, and it is supposed to be worldwide. When people have given themselves to this interpretation, they will consider no facts that contradict it. This is certainly true of those whose idea of future events is that God’s next great work is to remove from the earth His Own and then pour out on those who remain the pent-up wrath He has accumulated through the last nineteen-and-one-half centuries. If people will just consider it, such a display of wrath does not make sense. It would accomplish no good purpose, and it would not even be just as a punishment, as the majority of sinners have escaped through death from having to suffer from it.
- C. The idea that God is going to accomplish His purposes for Israel by plunging them into a time of unprecedented torture and suffering is an idea God Himself has declared does not make sense. Consider Isaiah 1:5. Note carefully: there is no point in striking Israel any more. We know from this that God Himself has declared that any future punishment of Israel would accomplish nothing as far as bringing them to Himself. It might satisfy justice for their sins, but then it would be strictly penal, not remedial. Since their problem then and now was a condition of the head and heart, further punishment would be useless in getting them to turn. It would be like punishing a sick man for his sickness. The condition of Israel’s heart must be dealt with if they are ever to be brought back to their God.
- D. In Isaiah 1:25-26, He says what He is going to do to bring them back.
- E. In view of these facts, we need to restudy, rethink, and reevaluate the entire subject of the Great Tribulation. Here are some suggestions.
 1. Whatever the Great Tribulation might be, we must not forget it is the time of Jacob’s trouble. Jeremiah 30:7. Because of this Divine description, we have reason to believe that this time of future trouble is limited to the land of Israel and the nation of people there at that time. In fact, “Jacob” might limit it further to those in Israel who have the Jacob character at that time. Jacob is

the heel-grabber, and speaks of his fleshly character. But whoever suffers from it, he will be brought out of it, and that will be its outcome. Some interpreters have limited the kingdom to Israel, which we do not agree with, and then expanded the Great Tribulation to take in all of mankind. That is not right. The government of God takes in the whole world, but the Great Tribulation is the time of Jacob's trouble, and it should be limited to Israel the people and the land.

2. There is a wider aspect, however. The time called Jacob's trouble is called in Revelation 3:10 the hour of temptation that shall come upon the world to try them that dwell upon the earth. Those things that happen to Israel become a time of testing, to test all who dwell on the inhabited earth. This statement provides a most definite clue to the meaning, nature, and purpose of the Great Tribulation. It is a time of temptation, of testing, to try all who dwell on the earth. It is a Divine test of the nation of Israel, and then this testing of Israel becomes a test which will try every man who dwells on the earth.
 3. It can be seen at once there would be no value in God making any present test of Israel or of mankind. When we consider a plane that has crashed, there is no value in testing it to see if it will fly as it sits in smoking ruins. In the same way, there is no purpose in testing Israel or mankind when we have so manifestly failed completely as far as the things of God are concerned. There would be no value in any kind of testing of such miserable failures as we are.
 4. In Ezekiel 20, God records five failures and rebellions of Israel, and an even greater failure took place six hundred years later at the time when Christ came and the nation in its leaders rejected Him. The nineteen hundred years that have passed since have seen the attitude of most of them result in them rejecting the One God sent to be their Savior. To test them today would be as pointless as testing a wet noodle to see if it could hold the weight of a man. We know it would not do that. The idea that God will bring about an hour of temptation to test those who dwell on the earth as His next great act is without logic. Man's failure is not only manifest, it is admitted by the majority of men.
 5. However if our day is followed by a great day of enlightenment, of Divine blessing, and of God teaching and training men regarding His works and ways, then this being followed with a time of testing makes good sense and would be proper and reasonable. Israel will experience God's kingdom before the Great Tribulation takes place, and it is the subjects of the pre-advent kingdom who will be tested before entering into the thousand-year reign of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
- F. "Such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time..." It is useless to try to help those understand the Great Tribulation who insist that the word "tribulation" means torture, torment, or persecution. With this idea in mind, one can never come to a true understanding of this time period. The Lord's describes this as being tribulation such as has not been before, and by this definition this is then made to mean this is a worse time of suffering and torture than has ever been before, and this at the hand of our loving and gracious God! This causes great blasphemy to be

spoken against our God, and His character to be greatly dishonored. The meaning of this word must be properly considered.

1. The word “tribulation” comes from the Latin word “tribulum,” which describes a threshing tool for grain. It was a heavy, wooden platform; various means were used to make the underside of it rough. Oxen were yoked to it to drag it back and forth over the wheat to break the kernels from the straw and the husk. Then with large shovels or pitchforks, this mixture of wheat, straw, and chaff was flung into the air. The wind would carry the straw and chaff to one side, while the wheat fell at the feet of the one doing the winnowing. The purpose, therefore, was not to hurt the wheat, but to separate it from the chaff and straw. Thus it is also with the great tribulation. While it is true Israel will be afflicted, yet in all their afflictions God will be with them. The Greek words are *thlibo* and *thlipsis*. One means trouble; the other means tribulation. *Thlibo* in Matthew 7:14 is translated “narrow” in “narrow is the way,” meaning constricted.
 2. When God’s government begins, it will be imposed on men, and then it will deal severely with all those who refuse to submit to its rule. After many years of blessing, the world faces the time of Christ’s personal presence and thousand-year reign. Then things begin to narrow, for no one will pass from the premillennial kingdom into the thousand-year reign of Christ unless he is worthy of it. All Israel must go under the tribulum to separate the chaff from the wheat.
 3. This period is unique over all other times of testing and affliction, and the uniqueness is partially in the fact that Satan has been cast out of heaven and is on the earth, and he has great wrath, knowing his time is short: Revelation 12:12. It is not because there is more killing and suffering than at any other time. In all of history, men will not have faced a time of testing like this. If you fear this time, realize that those who learned well their lessons from the day-to-day instruction in the kingdom of God will have no reason to fear this period. Does the child who has learned his lessons well fear the test? No! So we who believe now have already met the supreme test. No matter those who ridicule belief and make it out to be nothing; those who believe in Jesus Christ today have passed the greatest test. That does not say anything about the so-called average church member, but the person who has truly heard the message of God regarding the Lord Jesus Christ and has believed it and responded accordingly. They will walk through the testing of the kingdom of God and the fire will never touch them.
- G. All the Bible passages that talk about that tribulation reveal that a great feature of that time is the presence of a restored, redeemed, God-fearing nation of Israel. The 3.5 years of the Great Tribulation is a drama already written, with each actor designated and playing his part. That drama can never be acted out without the presence of the principle actor: the nation of Israel.
- H. To bring this actor on the stage, men have decided that the sufferings of that time shall produce such a nation. That is a vain hope in view of Isaiah 1:5. Revelation 7:14 has been appealed to, but there is no such teaching there; it describes the faithful of

God who have gone into the Great Tribulation and come out of it with great honor and glory as their reward.

- I. The Great Tribulation has to do with the threshing that takes place at the harvest that concludes the eon of the premillennial kingdom of God. It is the time when the Son of Man gathers out of His kingdom all things that offend, Matthew 13:41. Before He does that, He must plant His field, the world, with the sons of the kingdom, Matthew 13:38. Among these, the enemy will sow tares. These must grow together until the time of the harvest, and then the process will take place that will make the wheat manifest and bring about the removal and destruction of all tares. We must keep God's order straight. The threshing and harvest must not precede the planting. The planting must come first.
 - J. This time is not one of unparalleled suffering and torture from God. There will be great pressure such as was not from the beginning of the world until that time to choose a side, either Satan's or God's. Yet even at that time, those who endure to the end will be rescued and delivered, and they will receive great salvation and blessing.
 - K. The beginning of the world is *arches kosmou*, from the beginning of the orderly system or arrangement. We typically have to ask ourselves, "Which world?" In this case, we would think the world of mankind since Adam.
 - L. In "nor ever shall be" in Greek are the two Greek words for "no," *ou* and *mE*. There shall by no means be a time of testing like this before that time, nor after.
- IV. Conclusion: The Lord spoke of a coming, great tribulation. Yet we believe that this is focused mainly on the people of Israel, though it tests all who are living on the earth at that time. Let us be willing to reexamine the Biblical evidence to learn God's truth regarding this coming, Great Tribulation.