

WILL THE CHURCH GO INTO THE TRIBULATION – Part C

I want to share with you once again what I am trying to do at this point in the series. I am making a concentrated effort to give you all of the reasons possible why I believe that the Church will not go through the Tribulation. That should be a great encouragement to you. If we are alive just prior to the Tribulation, I deeply believe that we can have full confidence that we will never experience going into that period of the pouring out of God's wrath on the entire earth. Virtually no one will escape the horrors of those seven years except maybe the 144,000 Jews who are marked by God and some of the remnant of the Jews that are alive going into the Battle of Armageddon and have fled to the mountains where they are supernaturally protected by God.

If I were to be blunt and ask you the question “*Do you want to go through the Tribulation?*”, I think that no one would say “*Yes, I can hardly wait!*” My question, however, and I think it is actually more appropriate, is “*Then, why would you even take a chance?*” by ignoring Christ today. Without any question, your eternal future depends solely on what you do with Christ before this event occurs. So, if you actually go into the Tribulation, what it means is that you were never really saved. I am more than convinced that there are many, many people both attending and not attending churches who sincerely believe they are saved, but they are actually very lost. Why would I say something like that. Well, it is because their life is not committed and yielded to Christ. It is that simple. They have all of the right answers, but their life is not close to reflecting what they say they have. [Matthew 7:21-23](#) says,

Mt 7:21 (NKJV) "**Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.**" ²² **Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'** ²³ **And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'**

Based on these verses, you can “say” all of the right things and tell people all of the reasons why you are a Christian, but still be very lost. It is the idea of being a “**hearer of the Word**”, but not a “**doer of the Word**”. It is coming to church, but never coming to Christ. This is the greatest tragedy possible. Obviously, those will be the very worst words that anyone will ever hear – “**I never knew you**”. Why is this such a tragedy? It is because Jesus has come to “**seek and save that which is lost**”.

Now, we know from [Matthew 24](#) and [Revelation 6–19](#) that there are very definite characteristics marking both the Tribulation and the time period which actually precedes the Tribulation. It will be a time characterized by war, by nations rising against one another, by frequent earthquakes and other natural and global disasters. There will be widespread famine in the world, many various kinds of pestilence, a time of great apostasy, a false church, a one world government headed up by the anti-Christ, and incredible judgments of God that become more frequent and more severe – seal judgments, trumpet judgments, and finally the bowl judgments. Each of the various judgments will bring widespread death and the total collapse of every known infrastructure to man. God will strike all of the vegetation, the waters, the heavens, and He will even release demons from the bottomless pit. Angels will be released to kill as many as 1/3 of all of the earth at any one given time. Men will be struck down with loathsome sores, the sea will turn to blood, men will be scorched with intense heat, there will be darkness and pain, and the foundations of the earth will be shaken to their very core. Every mountain and island will move

out of its current location. It will be a time like never before – a time the Old Testament calls “**the time of Jacob’s Trouble**”.

So, the question for us is whether the church will not go into the Tribulation. We could ask it this way – “*Is the rapture the next event or is the Tribulation the next event?*” We need to think about this for a minute. There are only two alternatives here. First, if we believe that we are going to go through the Tribulation, then we really need to be prepared to do so. We probably need to be making some serious plans for survival – stockpiling water and food, building various kinds of protective measures, gathering all the medical supplies we can find, finding alternative sources for energy, developing skills we currently do not have, and literally preparing for the worst time possible. However, secondly, if we say we believe that we are not going to go through the Tribulation, then we probably need to simply be sure that we are actually saved. That is the question that you **MUST** answer and the only one that matters.

We know that there is going to be a great apostasy that takes place before the Tribulation, and that apostasy will be taking place in the church. What the apostasy means is that the people who will be falling away from the faith and rejecting the truths of Scripture are probably currently in some local church and believe that they are saved when in reality they are not saved. I wonder if you know some people like that already? I certainly believe that I know people like that. They have a very superficial and intellectual relationship to Christ, but not a life-transforming relationship. They clearly have heard the truth and they say they know the truth, but they are not willing to be committed to that truth. It is just empty talk as far as Jesus is concerned. These people have convinced themselves that because they “**say**” the right things about salvation that they are saved. In reality, they are living under a terrible and frightening illusion and will go through the Tribulation and probably into perdition without Christ. So, in the first scenario where the church goes through the Tribulation, we should be looking for the anti-Christ, but in the second scenario where we do not go through the Tribulation, we are looking for Christ at the rapture - and there is quite a difference between the two.

Now, I want to address the makeup of the church itself. This may seem a little boring to you, but it is very critical to eschatology. What we glean from the Scriptures is that they clearly divide mankind into three separate groups: **the Jews, the Gentiles, and the church**. In the rapture, it is **only the church that is removed**, so the unbelieving Jews and the unbelieving Gentiles will not be a part of the rapture. The church **does not** include the nation of Israel, and it **does not** include all of the Old Testament believers who we technically call “**saints**”. The Old Testament saints were never members of the church, or the Body of Christ, simply because the church did not even exist at that time. The Old Testament saints were obviously a part of God’s kingdom and a part of His redemptive work on the earth, but they were not a part of His church any more than the church was a part of Israel at that time. The church was not even established until after Christ had ascended into heaven, and it certainly was not understood by the Old Testament saints. The church was a “**mystery**” to them, and was born in the dispensation that we call the church age as distinct from the nation. We live in what is known as the “**time of the Gentiles**” which simply means that the redemptive purposes of God were removed from the Jews and were given to the Gentiles. Today, the church certainly includes Jews and Gentiles who have been saved since the time of Christ, but it does not include Israel as a nation, nor will it.

The problem that arises in the post-tribulation view is that **the church and Israel are one and the same**. We all become what they would call “**spiritual Israel**”. However, the church is not Israel. It never has

been and it never will be, and that is very important. If you think about one of the terms that is used to describe the Tribulation itself, it is actually called “**the time of Jacob’s Trouble**”, with the word “**Jacob**” clearly being a reference to the nation of Israel. I.e., you could possibly translate it as “**the time of Israel’s Trouble**”. It does not say that it is the “**time of the Church’s Trouble**”. So, in that one respect, Israel is seen as a very distinct and separate entity apart from the church. As a simple example just to help identify the distinctions between the nation and the church, in the Old Testament Israel is spoken of as the wife of Jehovah, but a very unfaithful wife. It is no wonder that both Israel and Judah were carried off into captivity in the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions. In Hosea and most all of the Old Testament prophets, Israel is pictured as being unfaithful, as being a harlot, a prostitute. By contrast, the church is described in 2 Corinthians 11:2 as a “**pure virgin**” being prepared for a future marriage. Those are two very distinct and different roles – a prostitute wife and a pure and chaste virgin waiting to be married.

I find it very difficult to just casually make the church and the nation one. It was the nation that persecuted the church and that literally tried to drive the church out of Israel. The church is built on the work of Jesus Christ, but to this very day, the nation of Israel still rejects both Christ and His work. In fact, they will continue to reject Him right up to end of the Battle of Armageddon when Christ returns. They actually make a treaty with the anti-Christ himself. In my mind, the differences between the nation and the church are so great that it almost defies imagination that someone would even contemplate to spiritualize and make them the same. They are not the same. All I am trying to say here is that the church and the nation are two separate entities with different beginnings, different roles, and different endings. The one characteristic more than any other that defines Israel today is that they totally reject Christ, whereas the true church completely accepts Christ. So, it is very difficult to see them as one entity. The point is simple. Since the two are very different, the church can leave at a different time than Israel.

Please appreciate that these differences and distinctions between the church and Israel are really very critical to eschatology. It would be similar to the differences between the Catholic church and the Baptist church. The differences are so great that the two cannot be compared. This is really a very important issue relative to the differences between Pre-millennialism and Post-millennialism or Amillennialism that we studied last time. One of the major issues associated with this is what is known as the imminence of Christ’s return – can He return at any moment, or are we still waiting for certain events to unfold before that happens. Let me describe the issue this way. If the church will be going through the Tribulation period, then for the most part it is pointless for us to be looking for the return of Christ because we know that it is at least 7 years away. I.e., Christ cannot come now because we still have to go through the Tribulation period before He can return for His church. On top of that, the Scriptures are clear that the vast majority of those persons saved during the Tribulation will either be martyred or killed during the various seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments, plus the outpouring of the antichrist on those who are saved during the Tribulation. We have never witnessed anything like what is described in Revelation. I have seen some hail at times, but never 100 pound hailstones falling from the sky. I have seen blood, but never 1/3 of the earth’s water turning to blood and killing 1/3 of all of the creatures in the sea. I have seen boils and fever blisters, but never men all over the earth being covered with great sores. I have seen an eclipse, but never 1/3 of all of the heavenly bodies going dark. For the most part,

as a believer we would not have anything to which we could really look forward except being martyred and dying some kind of horrific death as God judges the entire world. So, if the church has to go through the Tribulation, then the imminent return of Christ can never be “imminent”, and the next great event that we have to look forward to is not the return of Christ for His church in the rapture, but the Tribulation and the reign of the anti-Christ over the church.