

**God's Eternal Plan #21**  
**Why the Tribulation?**  
Matthew 24:21-22

Matthew chapters 24 and 25, often referred to as “the Olivet Discourse,” outlines the program of prophetic events for the nation Israel, from the time of Christ's departure until the time of His coming again. And in that discourse these significant words are found in verse 21, “For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.” The word “tribulation” is used in several senses in Scripture. John 16:33 tells us that when our Lord was speaking to the disciples in the Upper Room, He said to them, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” When Jesus used the word “tribulation” in John 16:33, He was using it in the sense of persecution, or trials, that come to believers simply because we live in a fallen world.

But in Matthew 24:21, when Jesus refers to the “great tribulation,” He is using the word “tribulation” in a *technical* rather than in a *general* sense. And when the word “tribulation” is used in prophecy, it refers to that seven-year period between the *rapture* of the Church into glory, and the *Second Coming* of Christ back to the earth again. The Scriptures refer to that seven-year period as a “time of darkness,” a “time of trial,” a “time of the wrath of God,” a “time of Jacob's trouble,” and in Daniel 9 it is referred to as “the seventieth week.” But Jesus referred to it as “the great tribulation.”

This time will be a time of suffering unprecedented, unmatched, and unparalleled in its severity, and in its intensity. When one speaks of the “tribulation” it is enough to strike dread, or terror, into the heart of any man who has read anything in Scripture concerning the nature of the seven-year period. Let me just share with you these few scriptures found in Revelation 8:7-9:6, “The first angel blew his trumpet, and hail and fire mixed with blood were thrown down on the earth. One-third of the earth was set on fire, one-third of the trees were burned, and all the green grass was burned. Then the second angel blew his trumpet, and a great mountain of fire was thrown into the sea. One-third of the water in the sea became blood, one-third of all things living in the sea died, and one-third of all the ships on the sea were destroyed. Then the third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from the sky, burning like a torch. It fell on one-third of the rivers and on the springs of water. The name of the star was Bitterness. It made one-third of the water bitter, and many people died from drinking the bitter water. Then the fourth angel blew his trumpet, and one-third of the sun was struck, and one-third of the moon, and one-third of the stars, and they became dark. And one-third of the day was dark, and also one-third of the night. Then I looked, and I heard a single eagle crying loudly as it flew through the air, Terror, terror, terror to

all who belong to this world because of what will happen when the last three angels blow their trumpets. Then the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen to earth from the sky, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit. When he opened it, smoke poured out as though from a huge furnace, and the sunlight and air turned dark from the smoke. Then locusts came from the smoke and descended on the earth, and they were given power to sting like scorpions. They were told not to harm the grass or plants or trees, but only the people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. They were told not to kill them but to torture them for five months with pain like the pain of a scorpion sting. In those days people will seek death but will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them!" **Notice that these verses speak of a catastrophic judgment from God on the earth that will affect the earth's surface, so that nature, as well as humanity, will suffer during this period of "great tribulation."** I for one, thank God for the hope that is given to us in the Scripture that before this awful time breaks on the earth, you and I who know the Lord will be translated out of this world, away from the experiences of this great time of suffering.

In the future studies we will be dealing with specific events of the "tribulation," but in this study we will look at the *reasons* for such an event, and how it is related to God's eternal program.

**The first reason for the tribulation is because of the world's rejection of Jesus Christ as Messiah-Savior.** It is needful to understand the Tribulation Period is a time of *grace/judgment*. I realize that sounds like an oxymoron, but it is true, as we will see when we deal with the calling and sending forth of the 144,000 to preach the "gospel of the kingdom."

2 Thessalonians 2:11-12 gives us this insight, "And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness." **To rightly understand these verses we must break them down from the Greek.** The Greek word translated "delusion" is the word "plane" (plan-ay) and it means "fraudulence, or error." And the Greek word translated "damned" in the King James Version and "condemned" in the New King James Version is "krino" (kree-no) and means, "to distinguish, decide (mentally or judicially), to determine." And that puts an entirely different meaning to those two verses.

**At the beginning of the Tribulation Period the world will elect a ruler, and that ruler will set himself up, not only as a political ruler, but as a religious ruler as well.** This person is referred to in Revelation 13 as "the beast," and will claim worldwide political power. As he gains more and more power he will also set himself up as the one object of worship throughout the world as he rules on his throne as god. The entire world will worship "the beast."

**Remember we said the Tribulation Period would be a time of *grace/judgment*.** Therefore, 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12 point out the fact that in the Tribulation Period God will, in His grace, give the entire world, through the preaching of the 144,000, another opportunity “to distinguish, decide, to determine” the difference between the true Messiah and the “fraudulent” imposter.

**Therefore, the second reason for the Tribulation Period is for God to make Himself known to the unbelieving world.** Revelation 14:6-7 puts it this way, “Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth - to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people - saying with a loud voice, Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.”

You might recall that when Moses was sent to Pharaoh with the message that Pharaoh was to let God’s people go, Pharaoh raised a theological question when he said in Exodus 5:2, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go?” **Therefore, the plagues that were issued on Egypt, through Moses, were *object lessons in theology!*** It was God’s way of teaching Pharaoh who He was, and why Pharaoh should worship Him. And the ten plagues that came, through Moses, was a divine judgment to teach Pharaoh that Jehovah was God and beside Him there was none other.

**But Pharaoh was stubborn, and God brought judgment upon judgment until finally the last judgment was the death of all the “first born.”** It was only then did Pharaoh acknowledge the power of God, and free the children of Israel. Therefore, he was able to “krino” (kree-no) “to distinguish” between the one *true* God and the *false* gods of his fathers.

And it is as though the same question is being asked today by an unbelieving world, and is carried over into the Tribulation Period, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice...” **And the holy hand of God will be manifested in a number of significant events during the Tribulation Period, to prove to the world, and to Israel, that He is God and beside Him there is none else!** And as difficult as it might seem the Tribulation Period will be a *grace/judgment* that once more will allow God to reveal Himself to an unbelieving world and to His chosen people Israel.

**Therefore (notice the progression), the third reason for the Tribulation Period is to prepare the nation of Israel for her Messiah.** Ezekiel 20:36-38 prophesied, “Just as I pleaded My case with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will plead My case with you, says the Lord God. I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant; I will

purge the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the country where they dwell, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord.”

John 1:11 tells us that when Christ came into the world at His *first advent*, “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.” The ministry of Jesus was not sent to the Gentiles, but to the Jews, as seen in Matthew 10:5-7, “These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” **Jesus came to Israel as David’s Son, in order that He might set up David’s throne and rule according to the promises of God.** And as Christ stood before the nation and told them He was their Messiah, their King, their Savior, they shouted their rejection, “We have no king but Caesar.”

With the knowledge of that *rejection*, Peter stood on the Day of Pentecost and spoke these words recorded in Acts 2:36, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

Looking down the corridors of time Jesus spoke these words in Matthew 23:37-39, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”

**The fourth reason for the Tribulation Period is for God to redeem a people who will be on the earth *physically* at the second advent of Christ, over whom He will reign during the *millennial kingdom* and into the *eternal state*.** Revelation 7:9-17 puts it this way, “After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb! All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen. Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from? And I said to him, Sir, you know. So he said to me, These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore

nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

Whereas the vast majority of people will continue to reject Christ even during the tribulation, there will one here, and one there, and one over yonder, who will say, “God, I give up! I realize that Jesus is the true Messiah, and I receive Him as my personal Savior.” **And during the Tribulation Period there will be those who will turn to Christ in simple child-like faith as their Lord and Savior.** These people will then live on this earth during the millennial kingdom in their physical bodies.

**I am impressed with this fact – God’s wrath during the Tribulation Period is poured out because of the Gentile’s response to Christ.** He judges *Israel* because they rejected Christ and offers them another opportunity to *distinguish between the false and the true.* He judges the *nations* because they worship “the Beast.” He judges the *world* because the world says, “We do not need Christ.” **And the bottom line is God will defend the name of His dear Son by pouring out His wrath on those who reject Him!** Thus, the Tribulation Period.