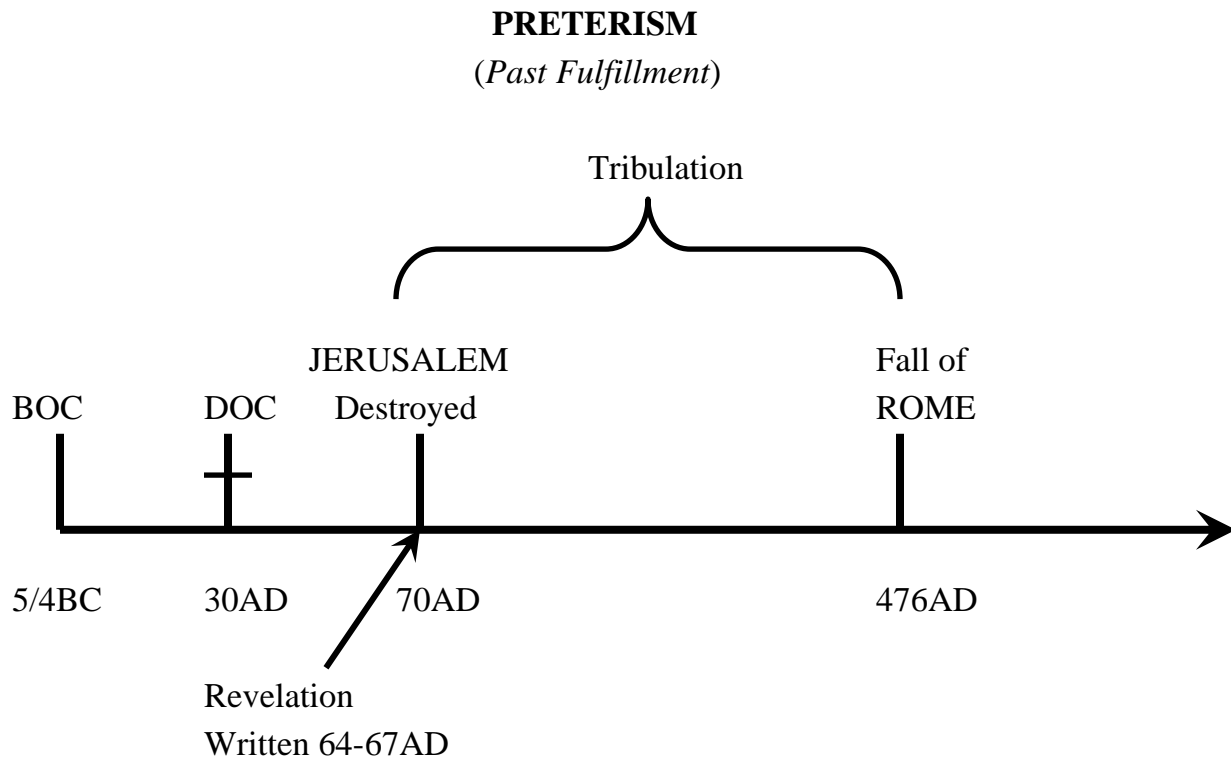


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B0610 – March 12, 2006 – Major Bible Themes
Chapter 44 – The Great Tribulation

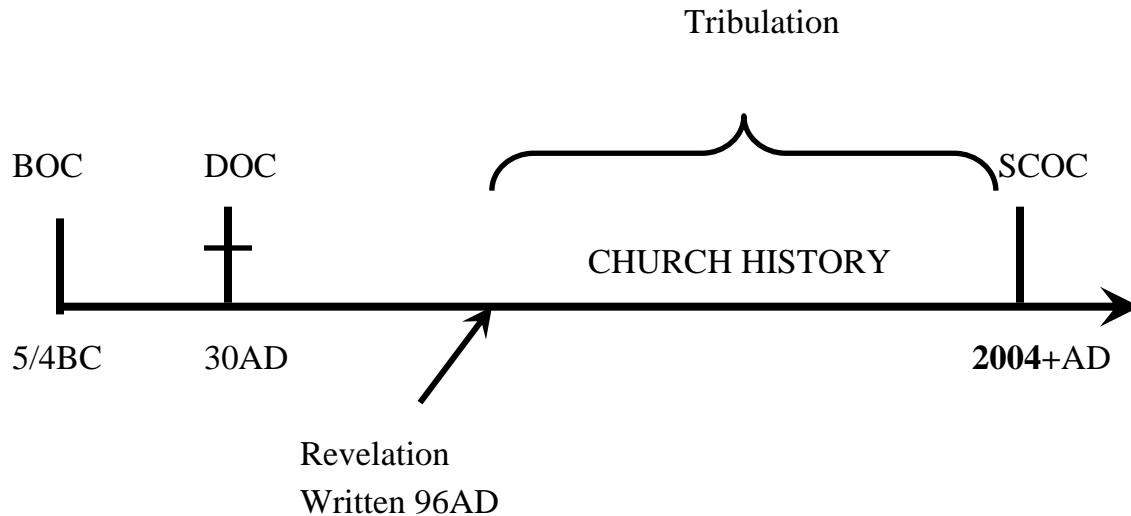
I. CONFUSION OVER TRIBULATION

Many Christians are confused about the timing of the “Tribulation”. Some think the Tribulation occurred around the events of the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus and the Roman armies around 70AD (Preterism).



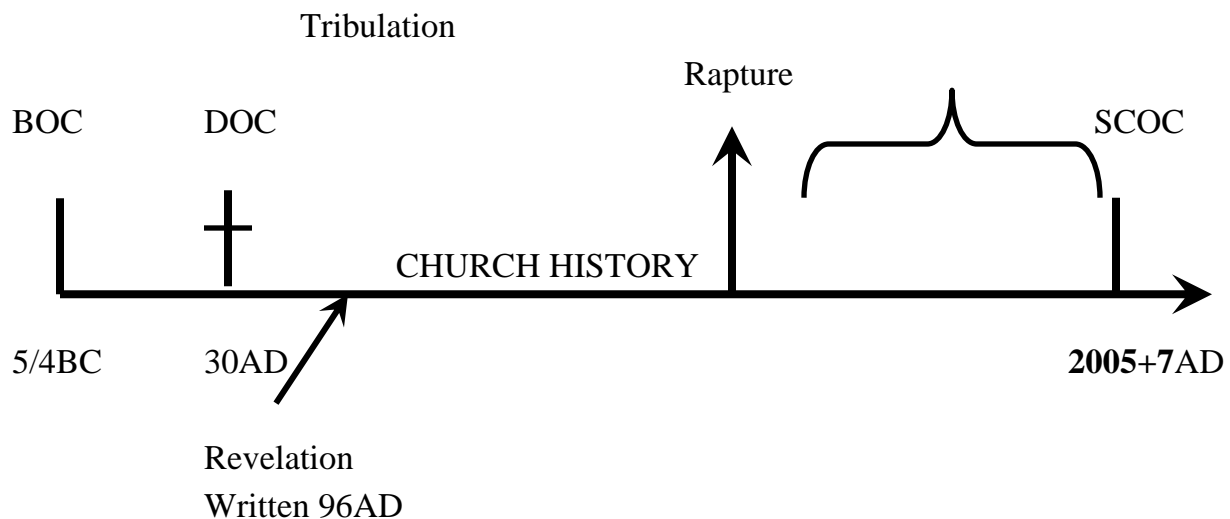
Others think the entire Church Age is the Tribulation (Historical-Continuous).

HISTORICAL-CONTINUOUS
(Present Fulfillment)



Others think that the Church Age will precede the Tribulation (Futurism).

FUTURISM
(Future Fulfillment)



Those who claim we are presently in the Tribulation (Historical-Continuous) support their view by quoting verses from the epistles which speak of Christians undergoing “tribulation”. No doubt believers do experience “tribulation” but that is confusing present “tribulation” with future “tribulation”. This is a confusion of apples with oranges. The way we determine the difference is context! Context, context, context: that is always determinative. You can only make the Bible say whatever you want when you take verses

out of context. If you want to know what the Bible is teaching you have to be a good observer of Scripture and you have to pay attention to the context. This takes time and that's why there aren't many people who know what the Bible is teaching and that's why it's the most abused book in the entire world!

II. THREE DISTINGUISHABLE TIMES OF TRIBULATION

The word "tribulation" (*thlipsis*) simply means "affliction, pressure, anguish, trouble". The tribulation is normally caused by external circumstances (war, famine, intolerance, chaos, etc) and results in inward distress (frustration, anguish, fear, et. al). A good student of the Bible will recognize that there are three distinguishable periods of tribulation: A) General Tribulation, B) Tribulation, and C) Great Tribulation. These three periods of tribulation can be distinguished in their timing, their duration, their form, their degree of intensity, their source, their purpose, and the proper response.

A. General Tribulation

First, it is a fact that all believers undergo some degree of general tribulation (Rom 12:12; 2 Cor 6:4ff; 1 Thess 1:6; Rev 1:9; 2:9-10). Jesus said,

John 16:33 In the world you have (present) *tribulation*, but take courage; I have overcome (perfect) the world."

| | General Tribulation |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Timing | Present |
| Duration | Fall to NH & NE |
| Form | various |
| Degree of Intensity | Low to Severe |
| Source | Sin, Satan and the World System |
| Purpose | Perfect the Believer |
| Response | Rejoice, Exult |
| Verses | John 16:33; Js 1:2; Rev 2:9 |

Because the world is sin infested and run by the god of this world, Satan, we have tribulation in the world. The source of this tribulation is Satan and the world system. The duration of this tribulation has been from the fall of mankind to the creation of the New Heavens and New Earth. The form of this tribulation is various (wars, strife, corrupt government, famine, loss, chaos, catastrophes, intolerance, et. al). The degree of intensity ranges from low to severe. The source of this tribulation is sin which entered the world by the one man Adam (Rom 5:12). The purpose of this tribulation for unbelievers is to put pressure on them to believe. The purpose of this tribulation for believers is to perfect them (Rom 5:3-5).

James 1:2-4 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴ And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

The believers' proper response to tribulation is rejoicing and exultation.

Thus, there is general tribulation that both believers and unbelievers experience because we are both in a world of sin run by Satan. However, believers experience additional general tribulation because we have been called out of the world system. For example, because the world hates Christ the world hates those associated with Christ. Thus, the world persecutes believers and is intolerant toward them. Christians are called to be *in* the world but not *of* the world. It is also true that believers experience general tribulation to a greater or lesser degree. This is God's way of perfecting individuals and fulfilling His purposes. While individual believers experience this kind of tribulation the Bible teaches that the church will be removed from the world before the next form of tribulation.

B. Tribulation

The second kind of tribulation is known as the 70th week of Daniel and the day of the Lord. This tribulation is distinct from the former in many respects.

| | General Tribulation | Tribulation |
|-----------------|----------------------------|--------------------|
| Timing | Present | Future |
| Duration | Fall to NH & NE | 7 years |

| | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Form | various | 6 Seals, 6 Trumpets, and 7 Bowls |
| Degree of Intensity | Low to Severe | Severe to Extreme |
| Source | Sin, Satan and the World System | God |
| Purpose | Perfect the Believer | Test Unbelievers |
| Response | Rejoice, Exult | Fear, Believe |
| Verses | John 16:33; Js 1:2; Rev 2:9 | Matt 24:29; Rev 3:10; Rev 6:17; 9:20 |

As to *timing* it is yet future. It did not begin at the fall but will begin with the signing of a “firm covenant” between the future Antichrist and many Israelites (Dan 9:27). As to *duration*, it will last for seven years (Dan 9:27). As to *form*, the tribulation will come in a series of Seal, Trumpet, and Bowl judgments (Rev 6-18). As to the *degree of* intensity it will begin severe and will end extreme. As to *source*, this tribulation comes from God (Rev 6:17).

Revelation 6:16-17 Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; ¹⁷ for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

The NT teaches that the church is not destined for this period of wrath.

1 Thessalonians 5:9-10 For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him.

The salvation we are destined for obtaining here is our future salvation, our glorification at which point we will receive a resurrection body, one in which we will have when we live with Christ. This verse clearly speaks of the pre-trib Rapture. As for the *purpose*, it is designed to test unbelievers.

Revelation 3:10 And I will keep you from the hour of testing, that *hour* which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

Those who “dwell on the earth” is a semi-technical phrase which refers to unbelievers (Rev 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 12, 14; 17:2, 8). They are thoroughly settled on earth. Notice how this verse says that those in the Church will be “kept away from the hour of testing”. The way we will be kept away is not described here but we know from other passages it is by rapture (John 14:1-3; 1 Thess 4:13-18; 1 Cor 15:50ff).

The response of the earthdwellers to this tribulation will be fear (Rev 6:16-17) but many will believe (Rev 7:9-17). As you can see there are many differences between general tribulation and this tribulation.

C. Great Tribulation

The third kind of tribulation is called the “great tribulation”. It is a period of unparalleled trouble revealed in both the Old and New Testaments.

Jeremiah 30:7 'Alas! for that day is great, There is none like it; And it is the time of Jacob's distress, But he will be saved from it.

Matthew 24:21 "For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will.

Since there can only be one time of unparalleled trouble then these two phrases refer to the same period of time.

| | General Tribulation | Tribulation | Great Tribulation (subset of Tribulation) |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| Timing | Present | Future | Future |
| Duration | Fall to NH & NE | 7 years | 3 ½ years |
| Form | various | 6 Seals, 6 Trumpets, and 7 Bowls | 6 Trumpets and 7 Bowls |
| Degree of Intensity | Low to Severe | Severe to Extreme | Extreme |
| Source | Sin, Satan and the World System | God | God |

| | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Purpose | Perfect the Believer | Test Unbelievers | Destroy Unbelievers |
| Response | Rejoice, Exult | Fear, Believe | Fury, Repent |
| Verses | John 16:33; Js 1:2; Rev 2:9 | Matt 24:29; Rev 3:10; Rev 6:17; 9:20 | Jer 30:7; Matt 24:21; Rev 7:14; 9:20-21; 11:18 |

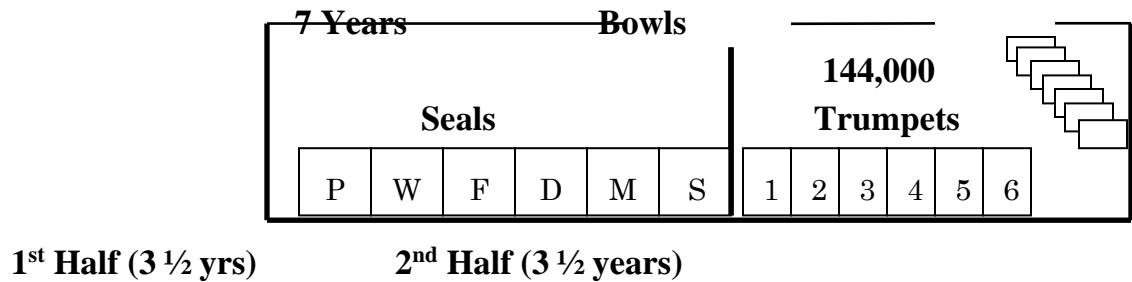
As to *timing*, it is future. It does not begin with the fall or with the signing of a firm covenant but when the Antichrist commits the “abomination of desolation” in the Tribulation Temple.

Daniel 9:27 And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations *will come* one who makes desolate,

The *duration* will be 3 ½ years. The *form* of tribulation will be the Trumpet and Bowl judgments. The *degree of intensity* will be extreme, completely unparalleled. The source of this great tribulation will be God. The *purpose* of the great tribulation is to destroy unbelievers (Rev 11:18) and to purge Israel to belief in Messiah. The *response* of those on earth will be fury (Rev 11:18) and most men will refuse to repent (Rev 9:20-21).

III. THE GREAT TRIBULATION REVEALED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Some students of prophecy identify the “great tribulation” as the full seven years rather than the latter half of 3 ½ years (e.g. Fruchtenbaum). However, it is best to identify it as only the latter half. The adjective “great” added to “tribulation” means it will be greater in intensity. So, the 1st half of the Tribulation will be a time of severe judgments but the 2nd half will be a time of extreme judgments. This progression in intensity is seen in the progression of seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments. *First*, only the seal judgments take place in the 1st half (compare Matt 24:5-8 and Luke 21:11 with Rev 6:1-17) while the trumpets and bowls take place in the second half. *Second*, the seal judgments affect 1/4th of the world population (Rev 6:8) but the trumpets affect 1/3rd (Rev 9:18) and the bowls affect all mankind (Rev 19:20-21)! *Third*, the seals and trumpets start and end successively (e.g. Rev 6:1-4; 9:12; 11:14) but the bowls start successively and overlap so that the earthdwellers experience multiple judgments simultaneously (compare Rev 16:2 with 16:11).



So, there is an increase in intensity over the entire tribulation giving precedence for Jesus' referring to the second half as "a great tribulation" (Matt 24:21).

In the OT the great tribulation was revealed as early as Dt 4:30.

Deuteronomy 4:30 "When you are in distress and all these things have come upon you, in the latter days you will return to the LORD your God and listen to His voice.

Jer 30 reveals more fully this period of time and refers to it as "the time of Jacob's distress".

Jeremiah 30:5-10 "For thus says the LORD, 'I have heard a sound of terror, Of dread, and there is no peace. ⁶ 'Ask now, and see If a male can give birth. Why do I see every man *With* his hands on his loins, as a woman in childbirth? [birth pains] And *why* have all faces turned pale? ⁷ 'Alas! for that day is great, There is none like it; And it is the time of Jacob's distress, But he will be saved from it. ⁸ 'It shall come about on that day,' declares the LORD of hosts, 'that I will break his yoke from off their neck and will tear off their bonds; and strangers will no longer make them their slaves. ⁹ 'But they shall serve the LORD their God and David their king [millennium], whom I will raise up for them [resurrection of OT saints at second coming]. ¹⁰ 'Fear not, O Jacob My servant,' declares the LORD, 'And do not be dismayed, O Israel; For behold, I will save you from afar And your offspring from the land of their captivity. And Jacob will return and will be quiet and at ease, And no one will make him afraid.

Daniel speaks of the time of Jacob's distress in these words.

Daniel 9:27 "And he [the Antichrist] will make a firm covenant with the many for one week [seven years], but in the middle of the week [3 ½ years] he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering;

The Antichrist will protect Israel for the first 3 ½ years so that they enjoy peace. However, he will break his covenant in the middle of the week and he will persecute Israel for the last 3 ½ years.

Daniel 7:25 'He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.

Then the Messiah will come and destroy the Antichrist and His kingdom. An everlasting kingdom will be set up with Christ as King.

Daniel 7:26-27 'But the court will sit *for judgment*, and his dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever. ²⁷ 'Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of *all* the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom *will be* an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.'

III. THE GREAT TRIBULATION REVEALED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The NT amplifies the OT doctrine of the great tribulation. Jesus warned that the great tribulation would begin when the Israelites saw the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet (cf Dan 9:27).

Matthew 24:15 "Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand),

Israel's time of peace would be over and their persecution would begin. Thus, when this happens they are supposed to flee to the mountains with great haste (Matt 24:16). This period of time will be so terrible that

Matthew 24:22 "Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

This means that if the great tribulation was even one day more than 1,260 days then every person on earth would have been killed. But, for the sake of the elect, that is, for the sake of the elect nation of Israel, the great tribulation will end on the 1,260th day.

During the great tribulation there will be

Matthew 24:24 "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.

The most prominent will be the Antichrist (beast out of the sea) and the False Prophet (beast out of the earth) mentioned in Rev 13. The Antichrist will be carrying out his military campaigns in northern Africa when he returns to Jerusalem to annihilate the remaining Jews. During this time the false prophet will be trying to draw out the Israelites that are hiding in the mountains and in the wilderness by doing great signs and wonders and proclaiming that the Messiah has come (Matt 24:23-26). But the reader of Scripture will not be deceived because he will know that the second coming of Christ will be a public event even as lightning flashes across the sky from one side to the other.

Matthew 24:29-30 "But immediately after *the tribulation* of those days **THE** SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND **THE** MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND **THE** STARS WILL FALL from *the* sky, and *the* powers of *the* heavens will be shaken. ³⁰ "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory.

At His return He will send forth His angels to gather the elect nation of Israel from all over the world.

Matthew 24:31 "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and **THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER** His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

CONCLUSION

| | General Tribulation | Tribulation | Great Tribulation (subset of Tribulation) |
|-----------------|----------------------------|--------------------|--|
| Timing | Present | Future | Future |
| Duration | Fall to NH & NE | 7 years | 3 ½ years |

| | | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Form | various | 6 Seals, 6 Trumpets, and 7 Bowls | 6 Trumpets and 7 Bowls |
| Degree of Intensity | Low to Severe | Severe to Extreme | Extreme |
| Source | Sin, Satan and the World System | God | God |
| Purpose | Perfect the Believer | Test Unbelievers | Destroy Unbelievers |
| Response | Rejoice, Exult | Fear, Believe | Fury, Repent |
| Verses | John 16:33; Js 1:2; Rev 2:9 | Matt 24:29; Rev 3:10; Rev 6:17; 9:20 | Jer 30:7; Matt 24:21; Rev 7:14; 9:20-21; 11:18 |

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