

THE PROPHETIC SCRIPTURES:

What Lies Before Us?

Scripture Reading:

Message 8

INTRO: We have spent some time on the topic of what is the next major event in Bible prophecy and your speaker's view is that the rapture is that event. Now let me say that this will not be the first rapture to take place in Scripture. You see, we saw that the word 'rapture' means to be caught up.

In Genesis 5 we have 10 generations that span approximately 2000 years, from creation to close to the time of Noah and the flood. And within those 10 generations we have one rapture; one catching up. Turn with me to Genesis 5 and I will read verses 18-24. Enoch was taken up to glory without dying. He was raptured.

Now notice in verse 24 the word, 'took'. God took him. Let me take you to another passage where the same word is used 2 Kings 2:3 and 5 (read 2:1-12). There is the second rapture. Soon we will come to a very interesting passage about two people, and those two might be these two!

But that is not the last rapture or catching up in the Bible. Turn with me to yet another (read Acts 1:6-11). Notice the words 'taken up' in verse 9 (read). It is the word *epairo*, and it means to be lifted up. He was caught up. Notice again in verse 11 (read). The word here is *analambano*, meaning to take up. So Enoch was caught up; Elijah was caught up, and Christ was caught up. The last ones to be caught up are all the believers at the rapture, the catching up. It will be one incredible moment!

Now what was it like after each of those three events? Well, those men were no longer present on earth and life continued as before. What will it be like on earth after the rapture? Well, life will continue, but this world will enter a new time period. Let me tell you this about this time period; you do not want to go through it. So let us look at it.

C. The Tribulation

1. The beginning

a. How it is described

I want to describe this time period for you in general and I want to begin with Daniel 9:12a, "At that time Michael shall stand up, The great prince who stands *watch* over the sons of your people; And there shall be a time of trouble, Such as never was since there was a nation, *Even* to that time."

Isaiah 4-7, And these are the words that the LORD spake concerning Israel and concerning Judah. 5 "For thus saith the LORD; We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. 6 Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child? wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness? 7 Alas! for that day *is* great, so that none *is* like it: it *is* even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it."

Matthew 24:21-22, ""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. "And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.

What kind of time will the tribulation be? It is described as a time of wrath; a time of judgment; a time of indignation; a time of punishment; the hour of trial; a time of destruction and darkness. Almighty God will pour out all His pent up wrath on ungodly mankind. I could preach to you for the next 10 Sundays on material that describes this short time period and then we would have had a brief look at the Scriptures that deal with this time. Revelation 6-19 is all devoted to this time period. Read those chapters and you will get a glimpse of this time. This is the tribulation period.

Our next question is when the tribulation begins.

b. When it begins

In our last message, one verse of Scripture I spoke to you about was 2 Thessalonians 2:3. You will remember that I said the verse would be better translated like this: "Let no one deceive you by any means; for that day will not come unless the catching up, or the departure happens first..." So I concluded that the next major event prophesied is the rapture of the Church. Now let me read on in this same verse, "...for that day will not come unless the catching up, or the departure happens first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition."

When it says "that day" what day is it referring to? Well, we find it in verse 2 and it is the day of Christ. Now there is a manuscript discrepancy and some versions read "day of the Lord" rather than "day of Christ." If manuscript issues are new to you, I invite you to come to the Bible Versions Seminar I will be doing, Lord willing, in November. Let me simply say that I believe the reading "day of Christ" is the correct reading, although it does not make too much difference in the long run, as I see it.

Now there are three major days that have to do with God in Scripture. There is the day of the Lord and that is the tribulation and the millennium combined. I will not take time to give evidence for my views on this because of the time it would take. Then there is the day of Christ, and I believe it is the seven year time period when the Church is in heaven with Christ. And then there is the day of God, which I have not fully resolved in my own understanding yet.

So back to the question as to when the tribulation will begin. If I am right about the point that Jesus could come at any moment,

and 2 Thessalonians 2:3 teaches that the antichrist, that is the son of perdition spoken of in this verse, comes right after that, then the tribulation could be as close as one day away!

But thought we do not know precisely when it will start, we do know how it will start and we will see that later.

c. How long it will be

Probably the greatest prophecy foretelling the time period we know as the tribulation is Daniel 9:24-27 (read). These seventy weeks, or better, seventy sevens; are beyond doubt seventy sevens of years. Any other seventy sevens do not bring us to anything significant. The seventy sevens of years do.

Now verse 25 tells us exactly when these 70 sevens begin. It is from the time when the command would go forth to restore and build Jerusalem. That is 444 B.C. or according to some, 445 B.C. And from there to Messiah the Prince would be seven weeks, the time of rebuilding and then 62 more weeks. And verse 26 says that after the 62 weeks, which totals 69 with the 7 weeks; Messiah will be cut off. This time was fulfilled, according to Sir Robert Anderson, (and none dispute his date) the day Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the donkey and hailed as King.

Now what is most significant is that the events of the seventieth week, as described in verse 27 have never yet happened! Between the 69th and 70th week, almost 2000 years have already transpired.

Now you might say, "How could that happen in a prophecy?" This is not new in prophecy. It happens in numerous prophecies. Let me give you an example in Luke chapter 4 (read 14-21). Now if you study that prophecy, Jesus did not read the whole passage. But if He had read any further, He would have read something that

would happen over 2000 years later! Turn to Isaiah 61 (read 1-3). Notice that Jesus stopped reading in the middle of verse 2. And if He had read the rest of verse 2, He could not have said, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" because the rest would happen much later!

Now why then does it say 70 weeks? Well, note that Daniel says 70 weeks are determined for your people and your city. That is the Jews and Jerusalem! All the time in between the 69th and 70th week is the time of the Church. It is when the bride of Christ is formed for Christ.

If you study the Book of Revelation, you will find that the time described in 6-19 is 1260 days plus 1260 days. That is 7 years. Then you will find it described as 42 months and 42 months, and that is 7 years.

So we have learned that this is a very horrible time period and now we have learned that it will be 7 years long. Now we want to see how it begins.

d. How it begins

To see how this time period begins, we will look at several key passages. The first is Daniel 9:27. So let me give you one other very important piece of information with regard to the beginning of the tribulation. With this bit of information, you can watch the news with greater interest as far as the news from the middle East is concerned. We find this in Daniel 9:27. It says, "Then he..." Now the 'he' refers to this same antichrist that will arise to bring in the tribulation. So we go on, "Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week or one seven." How does it begin? It begins with the agreement between the antichrist and the 'many' for one week or seven years! That is most significant.

The second key passage is Revelation 6 but before we do that, I want to introduce you to that chapter. In Revelation 4:1, John is caught up to heaven to witness the events of the future. And in these chapters we have certain things in heaven revealed to us and one of those is a seven sealed scroll (read 5:1-5). Now there is some debate about what is in this roll, but I have no doubt that this seven sealed scroll is what we have in Revelation 6-22.

And so when we come to Revelation 6, the Lord Jesus, the Lion of the tribe of Judah takes the book and opens the very first seal. And in this first seal, we have revealed to us how the tribulation begins (read 6:1-2).

Some time ago a radio preacher preached through this book on our local radio station. Now another speaker, Chuck Swindol, is preaching through this book. I would recommend you find the schedule and listen to this series as it will deal in detail with many aspects of the time period we are considering (how many are listening to this program?).

Now, what is the meaning of these verses? John is invited to come and see, and he came and he saw a white horse with a rider. So let us consider the white horse first, for this horse tells us how this time period begins.

In premillennial scholarship, and this view has among the very finest of Bible scholars, I think all will agree that this white horse represents peace. I want to read a section for you from my notes on the book of Revelation:

"First, a white horse. Now no doubt we have symbolical language. The significance of the white horse has been greatly debated. One of the first thoughts is, is this Jesus Christ? And I think therein lies the clue. This is not Christ but antichrist. (Now let me just say a word here about the one I have referred to several times as the antichrist. According to

the Bible, before the tribulation begins a man, no a super man will arise. He is a man of polished words and wisdom. The Lord Jesus referred to this man in John 5:43 (read).)

So this one on the white horse is not Christ but antichrist who masquerades himself as Christ. Revelation 19 reveals to us that Jesus Christ will return to this earth riding a white horse. He comes with a bow and not a sword. I feel confident that this first rider represents the antichrist and the white horse represents peace. The following horse represents war and is red. White is here representative of peace. 1 Thessalonians 5:3 indicates that the tribulation will begin with peace.

"Second, the rider has a bow. Walvoord says this is the symbol of distant victory. The difference between a battle by bow or by sword is sword fighting is hand to hand. With a bow, one can kill at a distance. It is interesting that there is no mention of arrows. It may well indicate bloodless victory. The bow is a weapon indicating that this rider has a weapon but it does not shed blood. This fits well the introduction of the tribulation by peace.

"Third, a crown was given to the rider. There are two kinds of crowns in the Bible. There is the *stephanos* crown which was given at the olympic games. It was a wreath of leaves. Then there was the *diadem* crown which was a metal crown. Obviously the crown of vegetation is a temporary crown and that is the crown in this text. The rider in Revelation 19 has many crowns on His head and they are diadem crowns! He will be the KING of kings. He will rule over all people and His rule will be permanent!

"Furthermore, we note that the crown was given to this rider. This leader does not become leader by his own might but by the request of others.

"The fourth and last bit of data we are given is that this rider goes out conquering and to conquer. This man is tremendously successful and he is conquering. Whatever all his tactics are by the use of his weapon, the bow, he is very successful. But the text says that he is out to conquer. It seems that outwardly he appears peaceful and docile but inside there is one intent, to conquer!

"What we have here is the beginning of the tribulation. This rider, no doubt, will be the one who makes the seven year peace pact with the many of Daniel 27. And all begins well. Man will now be in a time in which they say, "We are dwelling in peace and safety." What we have here is the calm before the storm. We do not know how long this time will last but I think it might last for some time for we will see later what is happening among those who recognize that the tribulation has started and that Jesus is truly the Christ."

How does the tribulation begin? We go to one more passage (read 1 Thess. 5:1-3. How will it begin? It will begin when man thinks he has arrived at a time when he can publish that a time of peace and safety has been reached. Surely no person would claim we are there now. We are in a very unstable time, and a time in which little is safe. Watch the news of the fear of Iran and North Korea and you will see how unstable our time is.

I want to mention one other very significant event that will mark the beginning of the tribulation. This is a most remarkable revelation! Turn with me to Revelation 11. Now before I read here, let me explain how I see the chronology of this book. As I see it, it is one of the most chronological books in the Bible. Chapter 1 is an introduction. Chapters 2-3 deal with the church age. Chapters 4-19 deal with the

tribulation. Chapter 20 deals with the millennium and the short season and chapters 21-22 deal with the new heavens and new earth.

Now chapters 4-19 deal with the tribulation. And it goes through the tribulation six consecutive times. And as I see it, 11:1-6 are the beginning of the third time through and these verses cover the first 3 ½ years. Now here, at the beginning of the tribulation we have two witnesses who will prophecy for 1260 days. How long is that? Well, that takes us from the beginning of the tribulation until precisely the middle of the tribulation, which is a very significant time in this time period.

Now there are various arguments as to who these two witnesses are but most agree that it is either Moses and Elijah or Enoch and Elijah. I am not going to go into details on this debate. If you have an interest in that you can easily research this yourself.

Now as I see it, 7:1-8 give us the beginning of the second time through the tribulation. And here we have 144,000 elite Jews saved and sealed. What happens through the evangelism of the two witnesses? Well, first, 144,000 elite Jews are saved. Far more than this number are saved, but only 144,000 are chosen by God. And I want to show you how successful they are (read 9-17). Hundreds and hundreds of thousands of people all over the world are converted to Jesus Christ through their witness! The tribulation begins with the witness of these two witnesses.

CONCL: What lies before us? Well, first, the rapture of the Church. And I believe, immediately after that, the revelation of the antichrist. This morning we have sought to answer a number of questions regarding the tribulation. 1 How is the tribulation described in the Bible? It is a time of darkness. It is horrible beyond description because it is a time such as has never been before, nor

will ever be after this. Then we asked when the tribulation begins. We concluded that it begins shortly after the rapture takes place, which is an event that could happen today. That means it could begin tomorrow.

How long will it last? It will last 7 years. How does it begin? It begins officially by the signing of a seven year peace pact. It begins as a time of peace, which soon gives way to bloodshed. Also, it begins with two witnesses who prophecy for 3 ½ years and are then killed. But during the days of their ministry, literally millions of people turn to salvation.

Now let me draw a practical application from all this. If Christ might come today, and if the tribulation could begin tomorrow, how should I live today? Dwell on that this coming week and you will begin to see what is truly important in life!