

VISION 3: THE VISION OF THE SEVEN TRUMPETS (8:2-11:19)

1. The Golden Censer (8:2-6)
2. The Sounding of Six Trumpets (8:7-9:21)
 1. First Trumpet (8:7) – Plague of Agriculture
 2. Second Trumpet (8:8-9) – Plague of the Sea
 3. Third Trumpet (8:10-11) – Plague of Fresh Water
 4. Fourth Trumpet (8:12-13) – Plague of Weather
 5. Fifth Trumpet (9:1-12) – Plague of Nonfatal Disease
 6. Sixth Trumpet (9:13-21) – Plague of Fatal Disease
3. The Angel and the Little Scroll (10:1-11) – The Ministry of the Word
4. The Measuring of the Temple (11:1-2)
5. The Two Witnesses (11:3-14)
6. The Sound of the Seventh Trumpet (11:15-19) – End of the World

Special Study: Tribulation

Tribulation and the problem of suffering

Why do people suffer? This is a universal question asked at all times and every place. Sometimes suffering comes from natural calamities, sometimes from deliberate acts of cruelty and aggression. At times it hits the just as well as the unjust. It may come in physical sickness, economic poverty, or purely mental anguish. This must be expected by all. The Christian must accept it with patience and even cheerfulness. Paul urges the Roman Christians to maintain such an attitude, *“rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer” (Romans 12:12 NASB)*

Tribulation for wrong. Not all tribulation is a part of the ordinary lot of man. At times, it comes because of wrongdoing. It is impossible for man to always identify the tribulation directly resulting from his sin, but God has assured us that the consequences are there. The Psalmist tells about the worker of iniquity: *“he has made a pit and dug it deep, and he himself shall fall into the hole that he has made. His mischief shall recoil upon himself, and his violence fall on his own head” (Psalm 7:15,16 NEB)*. Paul makes plain the punishment for sin. *“There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism” (Romans 2:9 NIV84)*.

Tribulation for all the people of God. Tribulation has more meaning than simply the punishment of the wicked. Job insisted this when his friends try to mark him as a particularly bad sinner because he was experiencing such severe suffering. Job denied that his suffering was great simply because his sin was great. Paul would agree. He was anxious to the point out that the people of God must expect tribulation, not for the same reason as the wrongdoer, but suffering nevertheless. He quoted the Psalms (44:22): *“For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered” (Romans 8:36 NIV84)*. He reminded the very community where he had been stoned: *“Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22 NASB)*. Jesus had warned that the depth of a person's commitment would be seen and how he stood up under the hardships of life. *“The seed sown on rocky ground stands for the man who, on hearing the word, accepts it at once with joy but as it strikes no root in him he has no staying-power and when there is trouble or persecution on account of the word, he falls away at once” (Matthew 13:21 NEB)*. The example for Paul's suffering and for our own is none other than Christ himself. A remarkable phrase about Christ is found in Hebrews *“son though he may he was, he learned obedience in the school of suffering” (Hebrews 5:8 NEB)*. *Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are*

achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal (2 Corinthians 4:16-18 NIV84).

Tribulation in the book of Revelation. Tribulation plays an important role in the book of Revelation. All the way from the tribulations among the churches of Asia to the battle of Armageddon, there are trials and tribulations in this apocalyptic book. Sometimes it comes as persecution on the Christians. Sometimes it is punishment on the world. Sometimes it takes the form of war and its consequences, Sometimes it follows in the wake of calamities of nature. In much of this, it would seem that both the Christians and the world would be involved. Jesus has warned us not to pull out the tares from the grain field before the harvest for fear of losing some of the wheat along the weeds (Matthew 13:24-30). Always it seems the bear to the world a call of repentance before it is too late. Although suffering even to the point of dying comes to the Christian, the cause of justice will be served in the end.

The Great Tribulation

Interpreting the book of Revelation is like putting together a jigsaw puzzle. The central, important piece of that puzzle is the second coming of Christ. Other important pieces are the judgment and the end of time. Still other pieces that must be put in the place in order to complete the eschatological picture are the millennium, the resurrection, and the great tribulation. How long must we face tribulation? It will continue to the end of this earthly existence. In fact, it would seem that the most severe trials of all can be expected toward the end of time. One passage of Revelation uses the precise expression *great tribulation* and has become a center of attention to some in their reconstruction of the end times.

Pertinent passages. Three passages are grouped together in conventional treatment of the great tribulation: one is in the prophecy of Daniel, another and the discourse of Jesus, and the third involves the last times of John's revelation.

Daniel 12:1-2 – "At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of the nations until then. But at that time your people- everyone whose name is found written in the book- will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt" (NIV84).

Matthew 24:21-22 (see also Mark 13:19-20) – "For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall. And unless those days have been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short" (NASB).

Revelation 7:13-14 – "Then one of the elders asked me, 'These in white robes- who are they, and where did they come from?' I answered, 'Sir you know.' And he said, 'These are they who came out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb'" (NIV84).

Conclusion

The real message of tribulation is... how it fits into one's own life. The Christian does not glorify suffering as the Hindu. He does not heroize it has a Stoic did. But the Christian uses tribulation to be to come closer to Christ. In some degree, suffering comes to all men- expect it and look to the Lord. Tribulation comes in a particular way to the wicked. The message to him is, "Repent and look to the Lord." Tribulation comes to the righteous also. His word is, "Be faithful, the Lord is coming again." It has been said, "Tribulations are but the rounds of the ladder set up on earth, whereby the soul goes upward to God, and God comes down to us."

Romans 8:35,37 – "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword... No in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (NIV84).ⁱ

ⁱ Excerpt from "Revelation: Standard Bible Studies." By Lewis Foster. Standard Publishing. 1989, 1991. pgs. 111-116.