

X. Timeless Truth for Timely Topics in Biblical Perspective
What Does the Bible Say?
“The Great Tribulation–The Tribulation–The Future Tribulation”
Revelation 20
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We will be looking at Revelation 20 and a number of texts along with this one. This series is united to our theme this year of the supremacy and sufficiency of God’s Word and that God’s Word is truth. We started this series of Timeless Truth for Timely Topics by looking at what the Bible says about the end times or eschatology, the study of last things. So we have used this time for a topical expositional study. In this study we’ll look at the matter of the tribulation. This is our tenth study on the study of the last things.

We started by looking at the 70 weeks of Daniel and very clearly, contextually and theologically measures the time in three categories, given in three sections starting with the return from the exile of Babylon to the coming of Christ, the cross and His resurrection whereby He has affirmed the New Covenant, put an end to the power of sin over His covenant people and then there will be a concluding time with that generation where God brings to an end the Kingdom of God entrusted to the kingdom of Israel. Then entrusts the Kingdom of God to His church to be taken to all the kingdoms of the world and that brings us to the victory of the Messiah over Satan and all of our enemies and His enemies. He defeated sin, death, hell, the grave and Satan and therefore we have entered into the work of the Kingdom of God where now it is present but not yet is it in its fullness. It will not be full until the King returns and the King will not return until the work of the Gospel of the Kingdom has done its work to gather the elect of God from all of the nations of the world.

How is going to have that success? It will be because of the victory of Christ and because of what it means that Satan has been defeated, not destroyed yet though. Satan like all of the enemies of God and our enemies were defeated at the cross but not destroyed. The destruction of those enemies takes place at the lake of fire at the second coming of Christ. So in between we begin to look at that period as it is described with the symbolic term of a thousand years – the numbers of completion, 10 times 10 times 10. This refers to the period between the ascension of Jesus and the second coming of Jesus in the present work of the Kingdom unfolding throughout all of the world but not yet in consummation. When it has done its work then the King returns and delivers us into a new heavens and a new earth.

What does that situation look like now? Revelation 20 gives us some insight that will carry us into our study about the tribulation itself. Revelation 20:1-3 says [1] *Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. [2] And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years (a complete time between the ascension of Christ and the one second coming of Christ), [3] and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.*

Satan has been bound and Jesus has already said this when He said I have bound the strong man now go plunder his house but this binding is not one that paralyzes Satan

or makes him passive. He is still active but what he cannot do that in some ways he was allowed to do prior to the work of Christ, is deceive the nations so that the Gospel would not be able to do its work. He is still at work but can no longer deceive the nations as the Gospel is now by the authority of Christ going to all the nations and the elect of God are being gathered from all the nations. When that is completed Christ will return but now we're told that as we get to that point of the Gospel going to all the nations and the elect of God gathered then Satan is loosed for a short season. Let's go back to the text now.

Revelation 20:4–6 says [4] *Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. [5] The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. [6] Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.*

Now you know that what I say at every believer's funeral is actually true. When we are absent from the body and present with the Lord, standing firm for Jesus Christ, ruling and reigning with Christ. When the Kingdom comes to its consummation they shall come with Him in glory. Now in the text we recycle back to that short season where Satan is loosed.

Revelation 20:7–10 says [7] *And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison [8] and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. [9] And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, [10] and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.*

This brings us up to the point of what I'd like to focus on in this study. I want to remind you of where we've been. After the Gospel has gone to all the nations and all the elect are brought to the Lord Satan is let loose for a short season. In the last study we learned that Satan has three allies. The first beast that comes up out of the sea is the power of the state to assault the work of Christ, the Kingdom of God and His church. Its power seems to annihilate the church yet we know Jesus has said that the gates of hell shall not prevail against His church. The second beast we learned about is the beast of false religion that looks like a lamb but speaks with the tongue of demons. The apostate church and false religions will do the work of the state to bring people under the control of the state, even as they bow to the state and not to Christ. The second beast will be at work in concert with the first beast.

The third ally is the prostitute of Babylon and that is the pervasiveness of sexual eroticism throughout the land whereby no longer Biblical sexual ethics of one man, one woman, for one life will be embraced. Now anything and everything in the pursuit of unfettered gratification and sexual eroticism will go throughout all the land. The very prostitute of Babylon joins the two beasts.

All of this will and is being led by the antichrist. There have been many antichrists. The two beasts have been here since Jesus has ascended and so there have been many antichrists but it seems as though the Bible tells us it will come to a very pointed event where the second beast is using false religion, false teaching and false experiences to support the state in its rebellion against the claims of God and the state will present itself as the messiah – the one in whom you're to put your trust in and live in. Paul seems to indicate that there is a very specific antichrist, a man of lawlessness which must be revealed before Christ comes and who works in concert with these beasts.

It is at that moment at the seeming victory of the beasts and the prostitute, led by the antichrist that Christ returns and with one breath will slay them. He will deliver His people into the new heavens and the new earth and those who are not His people will be thrown into the lake of fire with the beasts, the false prophet and the prostitute of Babylon. There will be the eternal judgment upon them all.

It is that little season that I believe the Bible warns us about in a future tribulation. Whenever we tackle the issue of the tribulation I believe it is important that you see it three ways – the great tribulation, the present tribulation and the future tribulation. The great tribulation is a forerunner of the future tribulation in which will also be a great tribulation and was prophesied by our Lord before He went to the cross in the week of His passion. It was when He answered the question of when He would come again. Let's look at this in Matthew 24.

Matthew 24:1–28 says [1] *Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. [2] But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."* (You can only imagine how astonished they were for one gate was 150 high and these stones that weighed millions of tons that made up the temple.)

[3] *As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" [4] And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray. [5] For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. (False teachers – one beast) [6] And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. (power of the state – another beast) See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. [7] For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. [8] All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. (These are the groanings in which the whole nation wants to be delivered but these are not the signs)*

[9] *"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. (That future tribulation) [10] And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. [11] And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. [12] And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. [13] But the one who endures to the end will be saved. (Here is a sign – the Gospel will be proclaimed throughout the whole world.) [14] And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (There is increasing tribulation from the first to the second beast, inflicted upon the people with many antichrists leading to the antichrist.)*

[15] *“So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), [16] then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. [17] Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, [18] and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. [19] And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! [20] Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. [21] For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. [22] And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. [23] Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. [24] For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. [25] See, I have told you beforehand. [26] So, if they say to you, ‘Look, he is in the wilderness,’ do not go out. If they say, ‘Look, he is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. [27] For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. [28] Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.*

He has given us the overview and now wants to take us to the end. These building will come down in a great tribulation such has never been experienced and never will be. How can that be true and continue if there is going to be a great tribulation at the end? It is because He is speaking to Israel at this point. Israel has had much tribulation that has passed but not like what is about to come upon them. He is anticipating what will occur in that generation which is the arrival of the Roman general who will one day become an emperor a Caesar, Titus. He will set siege from 66 to 70 AD toward the time when this generation that is now alive will experience and if you go read Josephus and Eusebius you will find out what happens for they both agree. Somewhere around one and a half million Jews were killed. Temples were taken down and as they were the Kingdom of Israel came to an end. The Kingdom of God that was at work within the kingdom of Israel was now going to all the nations and stewardship was handed over to the church of Jesus Christ.

After the sacrifice of Christ the abomination of desolation had continued and it wasn't Titus. The abomination of desolation continued as they continued to erect sacrifices beyond the final Sacrifice. Now the judgment of God falls upon them and the kingdom is taken away from them. Eusebius and Josephus record something that was noteworthy to the historians, for as that change came upon the Zealots who had invoked this rebellion against Rome, they came now as instruments of God's judgment and wrath upon the city. Remember there were thousands of Christians and there was Pentecost. What happens to those being added every day to the church? They fled and an entire colony fled to the mountains. Eusebius records it. They were not there to continue the kingdom of Israel. They were there for the Kingdom of God. As they fled now the judgment of God came upon them. They followed their Lord's instructions. Don't wait for winter, you need to flee. They had already been persecuted once in the days of Stephen by Saul and others but now a persecution was coming that had never been experienced before upon the people of Israel.

Then Christ says this in Matthew 24:29–31, [29] *“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 heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.*

[30] Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. [31] And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

He says after that tribulation comes the end. All the elect have been saved. This creation is rolled up and a new heavens and a new earth is going to be rolled out as He brings us to that glorious cataclysmic conclusion at the end of that tribulation. The tribulation that fell upon Israel began the tribulation for the millennial Kingdom is spreading throughout all the world. The tribulation began with the ascension and it was seen with the great tribulation against Israel and it began to unfold from there into the present tribulation that all believers will suffer until Christ comes again. Then it comes to a great cataclysmic tribulation at the end.

The tribulation that began with the ascension of Christ will increase with great intensity just as the Kingdom of God increases and expands. The Lord will shorten days here and the preserving work of God’s grace will maintain the church in the tribulation that unfolds even until the last tribulation unfolds at the end. So there was the initiation of tribulation with the great tribulation in 70 AD continuing in a present tribulation and then coming to a future great tribulation at the end of a short season of intense tribulation before Christ comes, when Satan has been loosed and allowed to deceive the nations at that time, assisted by the first and second beasts and the allies.

I want to support this matter of a present tribulation scripturally. Let’s look at Revelation 1. Is there a present tribulation? The future tribulation of the loosening of Satan has not arrived. Revelation 1:9 says [9] *I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.* He was already under exile and been persecuted. The Lord is sustaining him through this present tribulation that faces all of us as believers if we’re going to be faithful to Christ.

This is hard for us to understand for because of God’s grace and mercy through the two great awakenings we have been blessed by the effect of the Gospel upon this state until up until this time has not participated in the ways of other states to bring assaults upon the church of Jesus Christ. So when I talk about persecution and tribulation about the only thing we have is that someone laughed at us when we were telling them about Jesus. That has not been the majority report of God’s people throughout the ages and it’s not the majority report today in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and parts of Northern Africa. What John encountered they are encountering.

That’s why when John talks about the work of the Kingdom he uses this grand number of 10 times 10 times 10 of completion and the thousand year period. When he talks about the tribulation in Revelation 13 against the Kingdom of God he uses shorter numbers consistently. For instance, he uses 42 months, 1,260 days, time, time and half a times. In other words, he is saying it is measured and under the sovereign hand of God. In a recent interview a pastor was asked whether he thought things are going to get better or worse and his answer was ‘yes.’ The Kingdom will expand and the tribulation against Christ, His church and an assault on the Kingdom will intensify but the grand thousand tells you of Christ’s completion as the Gospel goes to all the nations and all the elect will be gathered in with the trumpet of the Word, even as God’s people will have to suffer.

It is just like John but not just John there is Peter. Let's look at I Peter 4:1–2, 7–8, 12–17, and 19, which says [1] *Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, [2] so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.* (He doesn't want us to be amazed at suffering.) [7] *The end of all things is at hand; (which started when Jesus ascended) therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. [8] Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.* (He goes on as to how we should live.)

[12] *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. [13] But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. [14] If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. [15] But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. [16] Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. [17] For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? [19] Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.*

You can hear the echo of what Paul says when he said "It has been granted unto us not only to believe in Him but to suffer for His sake." Peter was referring to the days of Nero when Nero would take the phrase of the Christian 'you're the light of the world' and on the apian way Nero would impale Christians, pour tar on them and light them as candles to light his road with a sign that they are the light of the world. He tells them not to be surprised at the fiery ordeal. Tribulation is present for God's people. It will intensify into a great tribulation to mirror the great tribulation that came upon Israel which it had never seen before. In the meantime that tribulation is against the Lord's people. Now let's look at II Timothy 3.

II Timothy 3:12–13 says [12] *Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, [13] while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.* II Thessalonians 1:4–8 says [4] *Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring. [5] This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—[6] since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, [7] and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels [8] in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.*

Jesus is coming and He will bring all accounts to conclusion. In the meantime God's people suffer yet are protected by the hand of God. Their suffering becomes a platform of their testimony of the Gospel. Now let's look at John 15:18–19 which says [18] *"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. [19] If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."* So what will happen? Let's look at John 16.

John 16:33 says [33] *“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”* In Me you have peace, in the world you have tribulation. So if you are in Jesus then you have peace with God and you have the peace of God. The fruit of the Spirit is also at work within you. You are peacemakers through the Gospel of reconciliation. If you are in the world you will have tribulation, perhaps some more than others but you will have tribulation. I feel a great necessity to say this to you because I believe unless God gives another great awakening I’m trying to prepare you for it, to stand firm in that day and hold fast to the Word of God in Christ.

So there is the great tribulation that came in 70 AD that set the trigger forward into the present tribulation against the church of Christ that is increasing and increasing until it gets to the short season when Satan is loosed and a great tribulation where Satan and his allies (the first and second beasts and the prostitute of Babylon) do their work. What will that look like? Now let’s look at II Thessalonians 2. Here they have asked Paul when Christ is coming.

II Thessalonians 2:1–7 says [1] *Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, [2] not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. [3] Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion (short season of Satan) comes first, and the man of lawlessness (Paul’s language for the antichrist) is revealed, the son of destruction, [4] who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. [5] Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? [6] And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. [7] For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way.*

Paul is saying that Jesus will not come back until that season arrives with Satan and the allies of Satan. At that time he brings them together in opposition against the church of Jesus Christ deceiving the nations and to annihilate the work of the Kingdom, this man of lawlessness will reveal himself as a military, economic and religious power as the power of the state in that day will do its work. Two reasons this is there is that one, God has gathered the elect, the Gospel has gone to the nations and Satan is loosed for a little while but the one who restrains will be taken away and I think that is referring to the work of the Holy Spirit. It does not mean that the believers that are there don’t have the Holy Spirit for they have the Holy Spirit within them.

In John 16 Jesus said He sent the Holy Spirit into the world and He will convict the world of sin, judgment and righteousness. He does the work not only of redeeming grace but of common grace to restrain evil so that men who are totally depraved do not act absolutely depraved. But in that day His work of common grace is removed because He is removed out of the world. He still is in believers. He seals and upholds believers in that day but His work in the world is restrained and He is taken out of the way. Now the beast and antichrist are fully revealed so what will it look like?

II Thessalonians 2:8–12 says [8] *And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. [9] The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan*

with all power and false signs and wonders, [10] and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. [11] Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, [12] in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

So he'll use false teaching and deception. Do you see the parallel here? God sent Christ. Satan sends the antichrist. Jesus bears witness with true signs, wonders and miracles and speaking and teaching the truth. The antichrist will have false signs, wonders and miracles done with power and those who are fascinated by that kind of thing will fall away to them but those who know the truth, the elect of God, will stay the course because they love the truth. So by the power of the Spirit of God they maintain their walk before the Lord.

I want to sum this all up with three takeaways. One, the tribulation against the Kingdom of God will be a consistent reality between the ascension and the second coming of Christ. The great tribulation began with the ascension of Jesus against Israel in 60 to 70 AD, the tribulation comes and then comes to a heightened intensity when Satan is loosed.

Secondly, this tribulation will be initiated by a great tribulation which will remove the Kingdom of God from the kingdom of Israel to be placed under the stewardship of the church. In Matthew 21 Jesus is speaking to Israel. He came to His own and His own did not receive Him. That nation had been given stewardship of the Kingdom. Matthew 21:43 says *[43] Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you (Israel) and given to a people (the church of Jesus Christ) producing its fruits.* Now it has been given over to the church to be taken to the kingdoms of this world.

Number three, the great tribulation will be continued though restrained to this present tribulation until it is consummated in a future tribulation during the short season of Satan being loosened prior to the second coming of Christ. Will we be here during that tribulation at the end? That is a great question and I'll answer that in our next study. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together in Your Word. Thank You Father for the work of grace in the lives of Your people. We thank You to see Your Kingdom going throughout all the world knowing that Jesus will come when the Gospel has gone to all the nations and all the elect have been gather from all nations into the Kingdom of God and we now know that there will be a loosening of Satan and there will be a day of instance tribulation with the beasts and the prostitute of Babylon, led by an antichrist. Yet Father while we don't understand all of that we anticipate it, we just simply want to be found faithful in this day of tribulation. In this day we have peace with God and in this day we will take the message of the Gospel to a troubled world so that they will hear the truth. It is Jesus who saves and not the state or an apostate church or a false wonder, sign and miracle but it's Jesus. It is the truth of Your Word that brings sinners to Jesus to be saved. Father, it is that King whom we will preach until He comes, for I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

LIFE TAKEAWAYS

Tribulation against the Kingdom of God will be a consistent reality between the Ascension and Second Coming of Christ.

This Tribulation will be initiated by a Great Tribulation which will remove the Kingdom of God from the Kingdom of Israel to be placed under the stewardship of the Church.

The Great Tribulation will be continued though restrained to this Present Tribulation until it is consummated in a Future Tribulation during the “short season” of Satan being loosened prior to the Second Coming of Christ.