

THE GREAT TRIBULATION

Mark 13:14-23

Intro: Mark chapter 13, like Matthew 24 and 25, and Luke 21, are a digression from the rest of the material that we have in these three Gospels. By that I mean that these Gospels, along with the Gospel of John, are primarily concerned about the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, Who He was, what He taught, and the works that He did. Mark 13, and the other chapters I have mentioned, deal with the future. They are primarily prophetic. And in my understanding of these chapters, they are still prophetic! I mean by that, that they have not yet been fulfilled as far as the main prophetic utterances are concerned.

I believe that our words Lord's in this chapter have three divisions:

- 1) The first thirteen verses deal with the time before the Great Tribulation, probably covering many years of Israel's history, but concentrating on the events which lead up to the Great Tribulation.
- 2) Verses 14 through 23 give us Mark's record of what the Lord said about the Great Tribulation.
- 3) Beginning with verse 24, and continuing on to the end of the chapter we have what will take place after the Tribulation (see verse 24) and focusing upon the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth. Mark described it as when "they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory" (Mark 13:26).

As I mentioned last week, Matthew tells us the more about these events in Matthew 24 and 25 than either Mark or Luke, but there is much more that is contained in the OT as well as in the remainder of the NT, particularly in the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

As I explained to you last week, there was no Church at this time. The Church began with the baptism of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2. The Church, I believe, will be raptured before the Great Tribulation. The main purpose of the Tribulation is judgment upon Israel, to bring Israel back to the Lord, but it will be a time of terrible judgment that will extend upon the whole world. The most detailed description of the Great Tribulation is given to us in the book of The Revelation, especially from chapter 4 to chapter 18.

One reason there are different interpretations of the book of The Revelation, is because many Bible teachers take it as allegorical. I am one of

those who takes it literally. There is allegory in The Revelation, but basically it is the record of three series of judgments, the judgments that are unsealed, the trumpet judgments, and the bowl judgments, in that order. And there are seven of each one. When the Apostle John spoke of a fourth of the earth population being destroyed, I believe that is what he meant for us to understand. I believe that when John spoke of mountains being moved out of their places, that is exactly what he meant for us to understand. When he spoke of a third of the trees of the earth being burned up, that is what is really going to happen. And so on with a third of the creatures who live in the sea being destroyed, and a third part of the sea becoming blood. God judged Egypt in the days of Moses by turning their water into blood; why can't He do the same on a world-wide scale?

When you start to spiritualize the events of The Revelation, you can probably make the Bible mean whatever you want it to say. Start with a literal interpretation. If the Bible speaks in figures of speech, it will usually be clear that this is what is being done. Remember this saying: "When commonsense makes good sense, seek no other sense." If God did not mean what He said, why didn't He say what He meant?

But for now we are in Mark, chapter 13.

Last week I gave you a lot of preliminary material about this chapter, and so today I want to go briefly over the first thirteen verses to review what Mark indicated would be a prelude to the Tribulation.

This whole message was the result of what the disciples, actually four of them said about the buildings of the temple. They marveled at the great stones out of which the temple had been built. Some of these were sixty feet long. Pillars were made out of white marble, all of one piece, thirty-five or forty feet long. I remember seeing stones in the Middle East that were as big a railroad box cars. The disciples evidently felt that such large stones provided total security for the temple buildings. They did not know that in 70 A. D. the Roman Emperor would order the destruction of Jerusalem with its temple, and that not one stone would be left upon another. We feel that way about our country and our way of life. But nothing in this world is secure, and the Lord was warning His disciples about putting their trust in anything in this world.

Now many Bible teachers believe that what our Lord said about the temple buildings was fulfilled in 70 A.D., and so all of this must be

history. But the answer to that is that, while it certainly was partially fulfilled, that was not the main fulfillment because the other events which in the Lord predicted, have not followed. But you say, what events? I am referring to the Tribulation, the worst time that the world has ever known. And the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth. The destruction of the temple that stood there is our Lord's day, was certainly a foreshadowing of events yet to come, but not the complete fulfillment. So we have to look at all that the Lord said would take place.

He said that there would be false Christs appearing, false Messiahs, by whom many would be deceived. The Jews were looking for world peace, but the Lord spoke of "wars and rumors of wars," of one nation going against another nation, and one kingdom against another. There would be earthquakes and famines in many places bringing the troubles which usually accompany such events – such as disease, death, homelessness, despair, and suicide.

And then there was going to be trouble inside of Israel itself. In their synagogues they would be charged and beaten, but they would also see that this would provide them with special opportunities to witness to their leaders about the Gospel. And they were not to plan what they would say when brought before their own authorities because the Holy Spirit would lead them to speak the truth at the right time.

Even families will be torn apart – one brother against another brother, fathers against their sons, children against their parents (and the list could be extended). But one member of a family would testify against another member, and have him, or her, put to death. And special hatred would be turned against Jewish believers around the world. How could the Lord have pictured conditions that would be more alarming than these. Peace of mind and hearts in such conditions would be utterly impossible. Obviously many would die, but many others would survive all the suffering and persecution because they are the people of God. The Lord will not allow His people to be wiped out.

This is not the Great Tribulation that the Lord is talking about. He is not talking yet about the events of Revelation 4 through 18. That comes next. But all of this would seem bad beyond what people could endure. The whole world would be against them, and it would appear that even God was against them.

But then we come to what John Mark was directed by the Holy Spirit to tell us about the Great Tribulation. That is what Matthew called it. Luke spoke of it as a time when Israel would be trodden down by the Gentiles. Actually the Gospel of Mark is a good place to start studying about the end times and the Great Tribulation.

As we come to our text for this morning, verse 14 gives us the key event which seems to mark the beginning of the Great Tribulation. See Mark 13:14.

I. THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION (13:14).

Just what was the Lord talking about?

He was referring back to the prophecy of Daniel, as He indicated. There are several verses in Daniel's prophecy which refer to *the abomination of desolation*, or *the abomination that maketh desolate*. The word "abomination" speaks of idolatry. The first of the ten commandments was, and is, "thou shalt have no other gods before me." There are many things that are abominable to God, but that which is most abominable is when men worship any god except God Himself. And to do so is to make desolate, which means to ruin or to destroy.

Now without going into a lot of detail that at this point might confuse rather than help, let me say that the Tribulation period is a fulfillment of what is known in Scripture as the seventieth week of Daniel. It is actually a week of years, making it seven years. During this time the Antichrist will appear and deceive Israel into thinking that He is the true Messiah. The first three and a half years of this period will be relatively peaceful, but in the middle of that week, or after three and a half years, he breaks his covenant with Israel and puts an end to the offering of the sacrifices that God has required of His people, and he sets himself up as the Antichrist that he is. From that point on the Jews will experience terrible persecution and death, as is described in the book of the Revelation. But affliction will be the order of the day. The Lord's words to His people in those days are given in our text in **verses 15 through 19. (Read.)**

This will be the greatest time of persecution and affliction that the world has ever experienced. But it will not be repeated again to the end of time. If the Lord allowed it to continue, there would be no people left on the earth. We can see now how that even today is a very real possibility. But

the Lord is not going to let that happen! And why? It will be for the sake of His elect, His chosen ones (and I believe that the emphasis here is upon His elect in Israel).

Israel is a very special nation. Among the nations (including our own) there is none so dear to God as Israel. But this does not mean that just because a person is a Jew, he is a child of God. The Apostle Paul wrote in the book of Romans,

28 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:

29 But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God (Rom. 2:28-29).

And, in the chapter we had in our Sunday School lesson for today, Romans 9, in the verses just before those which were assigned to us, we read,

6b For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel:

7 Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called.

8 That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed (Rom. 9:6b-8).

So it is for the elect of Israel that the days of the Great Tribulation will sovereignly be cut short. And yet probably not just for the elect Jews, but for the elect Gentiles around the world.

Personally I do not believe that we are going to be here for all of that. Some think that we will be. But considering the purpose of the Tribulation, plus the fact that before the Lord returns to the earth “in power and great glory,” I believe He is coming in the air to take those of us on earth who know the Lord today, to be Him in heaven. That doesn’t mean that we might not have to suffer before we go. The radical Muslims have as their target Israel, America, and Christians. But thank God we are to be looking for, not the Tribulation, but “that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ, Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people,” a people for His very own, “zealous of good works” (Titus 2:13-14).

But how did the Lord finish His comments about the Great Tribulation?
Look with me at Mark 13:21-23.

Concl: When the Lord comes at the end of the Great Tribulation, no one is going to have to be told that He has come. Everybody is going to know it, and especially His people will know it. And when He comes for His church, which could be any day, we won't need to be told because we will be "caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

But the big question that we all need to face regardless of the position we hold on the coming of the Lord is, do I really know God? Am I, at this very moment trusting Jesus Christ as my Savior? I am not asking you if you believe what the Bible teaches about Jesus Christ, although it is good if you do. But I am asking you if you really know God. You say, how can I be sure that I know God?

I have just finished reading the first part of Pilgrim's Progress. Bunyan, the author, makes it very clear that we don't know God until we have sought from Him the forgiveness of our sins. But he also brings out very clearly that you can never have the forgiveness of your sins unless you believe that Jesus Christ by His death on the Cross paid your debt to God in full. If you are trying to get God to forgive you of your sins by those good things that you are trying to do, it is obvious that you don't know God. The only way to God is through Christ. The Lord Jesus was constantly warning His disciples and the other people He taught, about being deceived. I am very sure that there are many, many people on earth who call themselves Christian who don't know God because they don't know Christ, and they don't know Christ because they have never come to Him seeking the forgiveness of their sins. You can't work off your guilt of a single sin. But the Lord Jesus died so that you could have the forgiveness of them all. Make sure that Jesus Christ is your Savior today. This is one matter where you can't afford to be wrong. You and I need to be saved from the penalty of our sins, and Jesus Christ is the only Savior that there is, the only Savior there ever has been, and the only Savior that there ever will be. I hope and pray that He is your Savior.