THE GREAT TRIBULATION

by H. C. Heffren

No treatment of the end of the world nor of the Dispensational teaching would be complete without some reference to what is known as The Great Tribulation. Dispensational books abound on every hand giving expression to this theme. It forms a favorite sermon background with unlimited room for excursions in fantasy and forecasting the future political trends of the world. The antichrist looms large in the center as the villain who perpetrates treachery and surpassing cruelty along with wholesale slaughter of human beings. Just what is the Great Tribulation that projects its fearsome profile across our future history?

Very briefly, the Great Tribulation according to Dispensational teaching, will commence after the rapture of the church. Its vortex of action will take place in Palestine, and it will entail death and suffering affecting the entire world. The antichrist, who is the chief architect of the Tribulation is supposed to make a Covenant with the Jews at the commencement of Daniel's Seventieth Week, and then repudiate this covenant after three and one-half years, and plunge the Jews and others into merciless extermination. While the details may differ according to the expositor, this seems to be the sequence of events which is subscribed to by the vast majority of Dispensationalists.

It is only natural that what has been said already about the antichrist and about Daniel's Seventieth Week has a bearing on this answer also. [NOTE: The author is referring to his article entitled: Who is the ANTICHRIST?] **Truth is one. Truth applies to the whole, and therefore, it cannot contradict itself. If the seventieth week of Daniel took place on schedule as God said, then the antichrist of the tribulation is false doctrine because his emergence comes at a time already long-past fulfillment. Thus the Dispensational teaching of a future great tribulation dissolves into history instead of prophecy. If the**

Everlasting Covenant which Christ sealed during Daniel's seventieth week fulfilled God's Plan, then it is impossible for a future antichrist to duplicate it. The Seventieth week can only happen once. It has to be either according to what God "determined" or according to Dispensational jockeying of "hidden interval postponement." The issue in God's Word is very clear.

Dispensationalists call the Great Tribulation the Day of Jacob's trouble and by various other captions. The 24th chapter of Matthew, perhaps, exceeds all other portions of Scripture for references to this event, as well as the multiform and very complicated explanations offered. These are endless and diversified beyond calculation. This is unfortunate, and for the most part both useless and needless. God has given us certain landmarks in prophecy to serve as anchors and as "North Stars" to guide us through difficult passages with comprehension and assurance that our conclusions are right. Truth is not complicated and truth does not contradict itself. Difficult portions in the Bible must adhere in interpretation exactly to what is plainly declared. The Bible does not make a plain statement and then contradict itself with something that is less-easy to perceive.

In order to provide the context for what follows, let us invite your attention once more to Luke 24:44, "Then He (Christ) said unto them. These are the words that I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be FULFILLED, which were written in the law of MOSES, and in the PROPHETS, and in the PSALMS concerning Me." The references to Moses, the prophets and the Psalms abound through the New Testament as is indicated by Paul and Peter and others. The question that is relevant now is, "What did MOSES say?" What bearing did Moses have on Israel's prophecy and Israel's future. The answer is very obvious in the 28th chapter of Deuteronomy. Listen to what Moses said, for it gives an unambiguous prophetic history of Israel.

The chapter is too long to quote in its entirety so we shall quote the pertinent verses, although we invite anyone to read

the entire chapter. Moses spoke in what must be his farewell address to Israel as follows: "But it shall come to pass that if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes which I command thee this day; that ALL THESE CURSES SHALL COME UPON THEE AND OVERTAKE THEE." Deut. 28:15. Having made this unconditional judgment, Moses began to go into detail and outline the nature of the curses for breaking God's Law.

As Moses unfolded the future of Israel he made this amazing statement: "The Lord shall bring thee AND THY KING WHICH THOU SHALT SET OVER THEE, unto a nation which neither thou nor thy fathers have known…" Deut. 28:36. This penetrating prophecy foresaw Israel far down the future with a king exactly as it came to pass, and further he told them of their captivity. Eventually he told them of their continued apostasy and the inescapable judgments of God. Moses continued as follows: "Moreover ALL THESE CURSES SHALL COME UPON THEE…and they shall be upon thee for a sign and for a wonder, AND UPON THY SEED FOREVER." Deut. 28:45a, 46. Evidently Moses was not a Dispensationalist painting the future of Israel in glowing colors of national supremacy. The curse was FOREVER.

That is not all! Look at what follows: "And the Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the EAGLE flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand, a nation of fierce countenance…" Deut. 28:49, 50a. This nation is identified as Rome whose symbol in war was the eagle. "And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters…wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee." V. 53. What Moses describes from v. 53 to verse 57 is almost too revolting to read but it corresponds exactly in every detail with the historical description of the fall of Jerusalem in A. D. 70, even to the cannibalism to which the population was reduced.

Moses continues thus: And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other…and among these nations thou shalt find no ease…and the Lord shall bring thee into Egypt (bondage)again." Vv. 64-

68. THAT IS WHERE MOSES ENDS HIS PROPHECY. It is very plain and simple as well as complete. Any return to God's favor subsequent to this is a RETURN AS INDIVIDUALS UNTO the LORD rather than a return to the land.

We call attention once more to the fact that Moses gave the complete prophetic history of Israel but it hasn't a vestige of Dispensationalism in it concerning a restoration and a brilliant conclusion. Moses said, "And He (God) said, I will hide my face from them, I will see WHAT THEIR END will be for they are a very froward generation in whom is NO FAITH. For they are a nation void of counsel. O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their LATTER END." Deut.32;20, 29. This pathetic lament of Moses concludes his concern as well as his prophecy of Israel. It ends with a whimper! What else is written in God's Word concerning this nation must conform to this explicit and lucid summary. Truth later on in God's Word cannot negate truth already clearly stated.

Although there are many clear anchors for truth, we shall next consider Daniel's prophecy. Dispensationalists have a "field day" inventing every imagination possible concerning the end of the world from Daniel's writings. Here they find a king whom they identify as antichrist, tribulations, abomination of Daniel the prophet, and endless time tables, parenthetic period, and inscrutable interpretations. We condemn this as out of keeping with a God who intends His followers to comprehend His purposes. We dismiss it as contradictory with truth already plainly given by Moses. How then, do we comprehend Daniel? It is very simple.

Turn to Daniel 12:7b, "When He shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these shall be finished." Let us remember that Daniel, like Moses, gives a prophetic history of Israel. The great difference between the two prophets is that Daniel introduced a time element which indicated the exact calendar year the events would transpire. Daniel said "Seventy weeks are determined." Oddly, the Dispensationalists ses a re-gathered Israel in a restored nation

and a position of world leadership in their interpretation of Daniel 9:24-27. Because history does not afford such a fulfillment, they accuse God of not keeping His promises and postponing the prophecy which Daniel gave under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. This is where their interpretation takes on serious proportions for it violates a fundamental principle given by God with which to judge true prophecy. "When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow NOT, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously; thou shalt not be afraid of him." Deut. 18:22. When Dispensationsalists boldly assert that "Nothing in history corresponds to their interpretation of Daniel, and that it must THEREFORE be postponed, they stand judged by God's Word of either making Daniel a presumptuous visionary, or of making God a victim of His own measuring device for discerning inspiration. This is the most serious weakness of the entire Dispensational theory. On this rock it is wreaked and deserves to be condemned.

What Daniel really said is identical with what Moses said, although in different words. Daniel said that when the Jews were scattered, then everything is fulfilled. It is very simple and very clear. This includes the tribulation which he prophesied. Daniel didn't even mention antichrist. Moses told of the horrors wrought by the Romans and the eventual dispersion. Daniel told of the prince who would destroy the city and the sanctuary and disperse the inhabitants. There is no contradiction and there is perfect harmony so far as Daniel is concerned. Daniel did not see a restored Israel. He saw "Seventy weeks determined" on them. After Daniel received his prophetic vision he went into mourning three full weeks. Dan. 10:1. Would this have been his reaction if he foresaw the Dispensational glory surrounding Israel.? Daniel saw the future of Israel in the same manner as Moses stated so clearly.

The prophecy given in Matthew 24 has some areas that seem obscure, but the interpretation must be in harmony with the Scriptures that are plain. This is not difficult. Matthew tells

his readers that, "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, whoso readeth let him understand, then let them which be in Judea flee to the mountains: Matt. 24:15, 16a. Obviously, if Matthew's readers were to understand how to recognize this portent when it arrived, it would have to have some unmistakable identification. For this reason, if for no other, we would reject the Dispensational surmise that it means an idol set up in a future temple. For one thing, no one could "SEE" such an idol except under very unusual circumstances. Matthew is talking of something that is visible for all to behold. Mark refers to the same event in almost the same words.

When we come to Luke's gospel the wording is unmistakable. Matthew wrote his gospel for the Jews who were familiar with the Old Testament prophets. But Luke, being a Gentile, not only related the event but made is so that Gentiles would comprehend the meaning as well. Luke said, "And when ye shall see Jerusalem encompassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains." Luke 21:20, 21a. Luke's instruction is the same as Matthew's and Mark's. Luke's gospel corresponds with history. When Jerusalem was surrounded by the armies of "the prince" (Titus), the Christians knew the "Abomination spoken of by Daniel" had arrived and they fled to the mountains and thus were "saved out of it." In this manner the infant church was preserved.

History recorded by Josephus, an eyewitness, reveals that the events which took place during the siege were identical to what Moses prophesied. This was the Great Tribulation. This was the Day of Jacob's trouble. This was the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel. When the Jews (the holy or Covenant people) were scattered, all of Daniel's prophecy, including the Seventy weeks which God determined, was finished. It is all very harmonious and clear. The Everlasting Covenant was sealed and ratified during the Seventieth Week, and the dispersion eventuated with that generation in accordance with Christ's Judgment.

The Bible never leaves us without corroborating testimony to confirm our conclusions. Thus we read in Luke's gospel, "For these be the days of vengeance, that ALL THINGS WHICH ARE WRITTEN MAY BE FULFILLED." Luke 21:22. Thus if Luke's gospel clearly fulfills all prophecy, it has to include what was written by Matthew and Mark and Daniel and Moses. Also it is in complete harmony with all of them.

In conclusion, we would not want to infer that Dispensationalists are guilty of all of the suggestions which their interpretation demands. It is not the people that we are opposing. It is their doctrine, and in this regard we have to remember that Dispensationalism is of recent origin, and it is opposed to Amillennialism. Both doctrines cannot be right for they are based on different premises, and they arrive at very different conclusions. Dispensationalism, according to their highest authorities is founded on the Old Testament and is in harmony with the Jewish interpretation of the Talmud. This is where we part company. We are living under the New Testament. The Old Testament was abolished and abrogated. We are under the New Testament which has established a new and better way. Hebrews chapter 8.

In addition to the above, let us also say that while we believe the Bible is clear and unmistakably plain in defining the Great tribulation and identifying it with the history of the downfall of the Jewish nation together with its subsequent dispersion, still we would not by any means suggest that no further tribulations could befall this world. There is evidence of persecution in many lands. There is evidence of falling away spiritually and the permissiveness, occultism, devil worship, fortune telling, consorting with spirits, and general unrest bodes ill for our children. Evil is rampant with the stage becoming more vile and indecent and the screen more violent and cruel. The judgment of God will not overlook these rebellious acts of trying to depose God from His universe. God is still on His throne. The Second Coming will usher in His judgment. His rewards and punishment, and then ETERNITY. The Lord told us to WATCH and PRAY. No advice is more pertinent, timely and

needed. The Great Tribulation is past. Let us learn the lesson! "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses. Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace." Heb. 10:29. God operates a universe that is based on law. You can see this in every detail from the precise regularity of the sunrise and the changing seasons to the meticulous conformity of the planets and worlds without end. The God whose law keeps His universe silently performing His will has a will for man, his creature. Man cannot break that law of love with impunity. God is not concerned with obscure antichrists or nebulous tribulations. He is concerned that men get right with God and live according to His will. If we do that, we have no fear of the Second Coming, the Judgment or any other fearsome event lurking in the future. When we settle out relationship with God at Calvary and commit the keeping of our soul to Him, God will take good care of our FUTURE.

God holds us responsible for our past. We must answer Him for our record. God has graciously granted us the present and for its use He demands our loyal service. The word "future" is not in the Bible! Joseph said, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Gen. 40:8. Moses said, "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we do all the things of this law." Deut.29:29. Many preachers spend far too much time delving into future speculations. Time invariably repudiates their futile predictions. God did not give us a bag full of mysteries, but the Book of Life. He did not give us a bunch of riddles to make us look ridiculous by posing as experts able to solve the inscrutable future.

God gave us His Son and He told us to follow Him. To the bewildered disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration, God spoke with reassurance. "This is My beloved Son, Hear Him." Theologians ought to heed this wise counsel and concentrate

on present principles and plain pathways rather than futuristic spiritual weather forecasts. When God gave us a plumb line, it was not to take soundings of uncharted depths into future ages but to erect an upright character in accordance with His design and pattern. If we heed this present guidance of His Spirit, the God who holds the future will care for us as it unfolds in history and blends with eternity. Preachers were not meant to be soothsayers but truth-sayers. We were not called to predict the future antichrist but to proclaim the eternal present Christ. Finally, we have no authority to postpone what God determined. Let us rather proclaim what God decreed. Amillennialism EXALTS this Christ and His FINISHED work. Dispensationalism INSULTS Christ by telling us He would have set up His kingdom but a handful of unbelieving Jews thwarted His plan and caused it to be postponed to a future age. The Kingdom of God is based on God's Sovereign will and not on sinful man's option. Rom. 9:22-25. Dispensationalism foresees a TRIBULATION with Christ drenching the world in human blood and gaining His victory through death-dealing struggles against a mystical arch-fiend antichrist. Amillennialism sees Christ victorious at Calvary, now exalted by the right hand of God, reigning in power and glory, "eternal, immortal, and INVISIBLE, the only-wise God." (to Whom) be honor and glory forever and ever." 1 Tim. 1:17. Christ said, on ascending to His throne," All power is GIVEN, (Not going to be given at some future time), but GIVEN unto ME IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH." Matt. 28:18.

WHICH IS YOUR CHRIST?