

The Great Tribulation?

What is it? Will we go through it?

(Mat 13:21 NIV) But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.

(Luke 8:15 NIV) But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

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Summary

When we talk about 'The Great tribulation' we are primarily talking about Rev 7:14. However there are about eight events described in the bible that come to mind when we mention this event. These are each examined to see what the scripture says.

The Great Tribulation?

1. The great tribulation of Rev 7:14.
2. The great distress of Mat 24:21, Mark 13:19 and Luke 21:20-24
3. The time of anguish and perplexity in Luke 21:25
4. The man of lawlessness in 2 Thess 2:3
5. The seven trumpets and bowls of Revelation.
6. The beast(s) of Rev 13
7. The time of distress spoken about in Daniel 12:1
8. The hour of trial (Rev 3:10).

The Greek word *thlipsis* used for tribulation in Rev 7:14 (the great tribulation) is a word that covers a wide range of conditions varying from marriage, hardship, childbirth and persecution to the great distress of Mat 24:21. An examination of scripture confirms that tribulation in its various forms is to be expected by Christians while on earth. Paul and James tell us to rejoice in our sufferings and trials because these produce perseverance, character and maturity. Paul contrasts our temporary afflictions in this life with the eternal glory they achieve for us. Scripture is then examined to see what it says about persecution and its message is that we should not be taken by surprise by persecution even to death. Jesus tells us to rejoice when we are persecuted because great is our reward in heaven.

(2 Tim 3:12 NIV) In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

The great distress described in Mat 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 is examined and it is clear that the elect are on earth during this period and that the rapture occurs after this event. These passages also make it clear that persecution will occur and false prophets will arise before the great distress. However there is significant evidence based on Luke's parallel account that the distress spoken about was fulfilled in AD 70 by the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans (Luke 21:20-24). Luke's account however mentions a second and distinct time, prior to the Second Coming, when there will be signs in the sun and moon and stars and perplexity and anguish on earth because of the tossing of the sea and shaking of the heavenly bodies (Luke 21:25-26). On examining the great tribulation of Rev 7:14 it is unclear about the timescale of this event. It is clear that a great multitude (who cannot be counted) come from the great tribulation from all parts of the earth. This author believes that it refers to the tribulation, which all of God's people pass through. A distinction is then made between tribulation and God's wrath, which is not directed at believers but at sinners. It is clear that Jesus delivers us from the wrath of God, but not from the hardships of life, the wrath of man or of the devil as the book of Revelation makes clear. The timing of the rapture is discussed and from 1 Thess 4:16-17 it is clearly stated that the rapture occurs after the resurrection of the dead in Christ. It is demonstrated from scripture that the resurrection of believers occurs on the last day (John 6:39). Therefore the rapture cannot occur before the last day. We also examine some other events in scripture that could deal with the great tribulation.

Finally we look at Satan's tactics in trying to destroy the church. He uses two main methods: persecution and false teaching. These are true to his character as a murderer and the father of lies. We show examples of this by looking at the seven churches in Revelation, some of whom are troubled by persecution and false prophets. We also look at Revelation chapter 13 in which Satan wages war against the saints using the beast out of the sea who persecutes the saints by imprisonment and death and the beast out of the earth who is a false Christ and false prophet. There is a final warning about false prophets.

(Acts 17:11 NIV) Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

Introduction.

People often talk about the great tribulation, but what do they mean? When I was in California in the late 80's I heard of a prophecy which said - Mt Fuji in Japan would erupt sending a tidal wave across the Pacific which would engulf and destroy LA and San Francisco, and that this would signify the start of the great tribulation. Now Mt Fuji is an extinct volcano, but if it did blow up as it erupted it is quite possible that the resulting tidal wave would destroy most of the West Coast of America. Tidal waves from Hawaii have been known to reach Australia. But is it the start of the great tribulation?

The phrase 'the great tribulation' is only found in Rev 7:14 and it is very difficult to pin down exactly what it refers to. My own conclusion is that this refers to the tribulation that all the saints have passed through down the centuries. However this is partly based upon the interpretive framework that I have used for Revelation as a whole which is based on the premise that Revelation is written for the church of all ages, not just the church of the distant past or of the last generation. There is however another period of 'great distress' described in Mat 24:21 and Mark 13:19 (the same Greek words are used as in Rev 7:14 but without the definite article). This appears to last a short while and appears to occur shortly before the Second Coming of Christ. However an examination of all three of the synoptic accounts in parallel reveals that this distress was fulfilled by the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70 (Luke 21:20-24). Luke also mentions a separate period of anguish and perplexity prior to the Second Coming (Luke 21:25). He speaks of the shaking of heavenly bodies and the roaring and tossing of the sea, Matthew and Mark mention the shaking of the heavenly bodies but not the events on earth (Mat 24:29, Mark 13:24). In addition 2 Thess 2:3 mentions the man of lawlessness who will be destroyed at the Second Coming (2:8). Some of us think of the seven trumpets and seven bowls of Revelation as well when we think of the 'great tribulation'. We should probably add the beast(s) of Rev 13 to the list as well as the time of distress spoken about by Daniel in Dan 12:1 and the hour of trial mentioned in Rev 3:10. We can list these events:

The Great Tribulation?

- The great tribulation of Rev 7:14
- The great distress of Mat 24:21, Mark 13:19 and Luke 21:20-24
- The time of anguish and perplexity in Luke 21:25
- The man of lawlessness in 2 Thess 2:3
- The seven trumpets and bowls of Revelation.
- The beast(s) of Rev 13
- The time of distress spoken about in Daniel 12:1
- The hour of trial (Rev 3:10)

People in the West today are asking whether the church will go through the great tribulation. In America in particular it is fashionable to think that the church will be raptured before the tribulation. This argument is fatally flawed because it is not what scripture teaches. It can be easily demonstrated that the rapture occurs after the Second Coming and after the resurrection of the dead in Christ. Further it can be shown that the resurrection occurs on the last day. Jesus repeatedly warns us about persecution and false prophets, which come before the great distress of Mat 24 and Mark 13 and continue to this day. The problem with the pre-trib rapture teaching is that it will leave people ill prepared when either tribulation or persecution occurs and many will fall away because they have no root. Many who do not fall away will find it a great struggle to deal with suffering and persecution. One of the qualities needed to deal with persecution is perseverance and the scriptures say that trials and suffering will produce perseverance. The scriptures even tell us to rejoice while in these circumstances because they lead to character and maturity. This bible study tries to introduce scriptures that deal with tribulation and persecution in the hope that God's elect will be strengthened when tribulation and persecution arise. I also introduce two of Satan's strategies to wage war against the church, that is persecution from outside the church (the world) and false teachers within.

(2 Cor 2:11 KJV) Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.

Those living in America may know that many of the earliest settlers came to America to escape

persecution and practise their religion in freedom. America is also one of the few countries in the world where there has not been widespread persecution of Christians. In this day there are many countries where Christians face persecution. Just today I heard of a Catholic priest who was murdered in India, earlier this year a western missionary was burned alive in his car in India. Watchman Nee was incarcerated in prison in China for twenty years. They cut off his tongue because his guards were getting converted, guards still got converted, then they cut off his arms, then they cut off his legs and finally they threw him into a river where he drowned (Prison Letters by Wurmbrand). OK so you say that could not happen here, maybe, but what about false teachers? Persecution is easy to recognise, false teachers are more difficult to spot. Satan does not need to use persecution to destroy the church he can weaken it gradually by introducing subtle errors from within and eventually it just withers away and dies.

(Acts 20:30 NIV) Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.

We all tend to have a morbid fascination about the future and we comfort ourselves with the thought that we will be raptured out of the way when difficult times come. However church history testifies to persecution from the time of the prophets through to Stephen and until today. When Jesus returns it would be good for us to be about our masters business (Mat 24:46). Peter tells us to make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him when He returns (2 Pet 3:14). Peter also tells us to hasten his return - we can do this by preaching the gospel to, and making disciples of, all nations (Mat 24:14, 28:18). Jesus tells us in Matthew that "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come". One of the subtle errors of the pre tribulation rapture doctrine is that during the great tribulation 144,000 Jews and the two witnesses will preach the gospel. This is a lie from the pit, it has the effect of reducing the churches responsibility to preach the gospel and make disciples. God is not going to use 144,000 Jews or raise up two super apostles to finish off the churches work. As I point out in my commentary on Revelation the 144,000 and the two witnesses *are* the church. When Jesus gave the church the great commission he said "I am with you always, to the very end of the age", he did not say *almost* to the very end of the age, he said *always*. Finally we need to heed the warnings Jesus gives us to "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come" (Mat 24:42 NIV).

(Isa 5:18-19 NIV) Woe to those who draw sin along with cords of deceit, and wickedness as with cart ropes, {19} to those who say, "Let God hurry, let him hasten his work so we may see it. Let it approach, let the plan of the Holy One of Israel come, so we may know it."

(Luke 21:34-36 NIV) "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. {35} For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. {36} Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."

What is the church?

The word church is peculiar to the New Testament, probably because it was written in Greek. There are similar Old Testament words (assembly, community, congregation). The Greek word used for church in the bible is *ekklesia*:G1577. Essentially it means *called out*. The church consists of those called out (of the world) by God. The church has been bought by Christ's blood

1577. *ekklesia*, ek-klay-see'-ah; from a comp. of G1537 and a der. of G2564; a calling out, i.e. (concr.) a popular meeting, espec. a religious congregation (Jewish synagogue, or Chr. community of members on earth or saints in heaven or both):--assembly, church.

Usually it is the local body of believers that is meant, i.e. a congregation or assembly, so that you have the church at Corinth or the church at Ephesus. So the word church is usually the collective noun for a group of Christians in a particular place.

(1 Cor 1:2 NIV) To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ--their Lord and ours:

There is a wider use of the word church, like when Paul persecuted the church of God (1 Cor 15:9). The church is also the body of Christ (Eph 5:23) and Christ Jesus is its head. The blood of Christ has bought the church universal.

(Acts 20:28 NIV) Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

The church is also called the bride of Christ (Rev 19:7, Eph 5:25 ff.).

We are individually members of the body of Christ (Eph 5:30). Paul also talks of the churches (plural) in Acts 16:5 and we have the example of the seven churches in the province of Asia (Rev 1:4). Frequently in the scripture the individual members of the church are called brothers, another common word is saints which simply means holy ones. Another common word for individual Christians is believers i.e. those have faith in Christ and another less common word is elect (which means chosen). In 2 Cor 1:1 Paul writes "to the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia" (the region).

In fact Paul when he writes to the church of the Thessalonians in his first letter he uses the term church only three times and he uses brother(s) twenty times, and he uses believers once.

One of the points I am making is that when we ask the question will 'the church' go through the great tribulation we could also state the same question by asking will 'the saints' go through the great tribulation. The only difference being that church is only used of NT saints while the word saints applies to both the NT and OT elect. In fact when asking whether the church is going to go through the great tribulation we imply that it is a future event in history. I would suggest that the church has been going through tribulation since the church was formed. The great tribulation may not be a future event but the combined tribulation throughout the church age, which we all participate in.

What is tribulation?

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

The Greek word translated as tribulation as in 'the great tribulation' of Rev 7:14 is *thlipsis*.

2347. *thlipsis*, thlip'-sis; from G2346; pressure (lit. or fig.):--afflicted, (-tion), anguish, burdened, persecution, tribulation, trouble.

(Mat 13:21 NIV) But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble

(*thlipsis*:G2347) or persecution (*diogmos*:G1375) comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.

The NIV translates *thlipsis* as trouble (14 times), distress (7), suffering (6), persecution (4), hardships (3), affliction (3), trials (3), anguish as in childbirth (1), hardpressed (1) and tribulation (1). It is used of marriage (1 Cor 7:28), widows and orphans (James 1:27), childbirth (John 16:21), famine (Acts 7:11) it is also used to describe the great distress of Mat 24:21 and also in Mark 13:19. It is only translated once as tribulation when it is used to describe the great tribulation (Rev 7:14).

Diogmos is found 10 times in the NT and is always translated as persecution by the NIV.

Dioko is found 48 times in the NT and is usually translated as persecute but sometimes as 'pursue' as in pursue righteousness. But if it says they will 'pursue you' then it means they will persecute you.

To summarise, *thlipsis* means the general troubles and hardships of the Christian life, which will also include persecution. It is also used to describe a period of great distress described in Mat 24:21 and Mark 13:19. It is used to describe the great tribulation of Rev 7:14.

Will the church go through tribulation?

Before asking whether the church will go through the great tribulation, let us first ask the question, will the church go through tribulation? The answer both from scripture and church history is clearly yes. In fact Revelation is written to encourage those going through persecution to endure it patiently even to death. When Revelation was written the church was at the start of a 200-year period of persecution from various Roman emperors up to the time of Constantine in 313 AD.

Jesus warns us that there will be tribulation (*thlipsis*).

(Mat 24:9 NIV) "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted (*thlipsis*) and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.

(John 16:33 NIV) "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble (*thlipsis*). But take heart! I have overcome the world."

The early church experienced tribulation.

(Acts 11:19 NIV) Now those who had been scattered by the persecution (*thlipsis*) in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews.

Paul tells the disciples that we must go through many hardships (*thlipsis*) to enter the kingdom of God.

(Acts 14:22 NIV) strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships (*thlipsis*) to enter the kingdom of God," they said.

Paul talks about tribulation in many of his epistles.

(Rom 5:3 NIV) Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings (*thlipsis*), because we know that suffering (*thlipsis*) produces perseverance;

(Rom 8:35-36 NIV) Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble (*thlipsis*) or hardship (*stenochoria*) or persecution (*diogmos*) or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? {36} As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

(Rom 12:12 NIV) Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction (*thlipsis*), faithful in prayer.

(2 Cor 4:17 NIV) For our light and momentary troubles (*thlipsis*) are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

(2 Th 1:4 NIV) Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance (*hupomone*) and faith in all the persecutions (*diogmos*) and trials (*thlipsis*) you are enduring.

Both the apostle John and the church at Smyrna experienced tribulation.

(Rev 1:9 NIV) I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering (*thlipsis*) and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

(Rev 2:9-10 NIV) I know your afflictions (*thlipsis*) and your poverty--yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. {10} Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution (*thlipsis*) for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

A biblical view of suffering

(Rom 5:1-5 NIV) Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, {2} through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. {3} Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; {4} perseverance, character; and character, hope. {5} And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

Much of this study of the great tribulation deals with suffering, especially persecution, and therefore I want to lay down a biblical view of suffering. I want to deal with suffering as a Christian in particular rather than suffering that comes our way through sickness or circumstances. The word Christian only occurs three times in the bible and in the last of these Peter says that 'if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name' (1 Pet 4:16).

(1 Pet 4:12-16 NIV) Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. {13} But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. {14} If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. {15} If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. {16} However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.

Now we need to look at suffering from its distinctly biblical point of view, and not as the world looks at it. For the world, suffering is something to be avoided at all costs, but for the Christian suffering for bearing that name can be endured with joy. Someone once said that Jesus would never let his bride suffer great hardship due to the tribulation just prior to the wedding. Such a statement should be seen for what it is; sentimental, unbiblical and worldly.

When God purposed his great plan of redemption he did not do it in such a way so as to minimise suffering, in fact suffering was at the heart of his plan. God could have dispatched Satan to the lake of fire as soon as he sinned. He could have dispatched Adam and Eve in a similar fashion and started again. Instead he allowed Satan to stay on and for Adam and Eve to produce children and in the fullness of time he sent his own Son to suffer death on a cross. After his death and resurrection Jesus says "Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" (Luke 24:26 NIV). God allowed suffering, in particular the suffering of his Son, ultimately because it would enhance his own glory and that of Jesus (John 12:28, 13:31, 17:1-5).

If we are going to suffer as a Christian we should first know that the following are true of us:

1. That Jesus has died for our sins (1 Cor 15:3)
2. That we are loved by God (1 Thes 1.4)
3. We are chosen by God (1 Thes 1.4)
4. That we are standing in God's grace (Rom 5.2)
5. That he is calling us into his kingdom and glory (1 Thes 2.12)
6. That we will be with the Lord forever (1 Thes 4.17)
7. That Jesus rescues us from God's wrath (1 Thes 1.10, 1 Thes 5.9)

8. That we will share God's glory in heaven (Rom 5.2)

This foundational stuff but without it, or some of it, we will fall at the first hurdle. For many, it is enough to know that Jesus died for our sins, that God loves us and that we will go to be with him when we die.

Suffering for Jesus is part of the package for a Christian, the problem for some is that we do not read the fine print (Phil 1:29).

(Phil 1:29 NIV) For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him,

Jesus tells us that if the world hates us we are to keep in mind that it hated him first. If they persecuted Jesus they will persecute us. As Christians we do not belong to the world and therefore the world hates us (John 15:18-21).

(John 15:18-21 NIV) "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. {19} If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. {20} Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. {21} They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me.

In our suffering Jesus is our example. He was unjustly tried, insulted, mocked, scourged and put to death. Even his close friends deserted him.

(1 Pet 2:19-24 NIV) For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. {20} But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. {21} To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. {22} "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." {23} When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. {24} He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

When Jesus went to the cross he looked beyond its suffering and to the joy set before him. Jesus is now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death (Heb 2:9). Because Jesus humbled himself, even to death on a cross God has exalted him to the highest place and given him the name that is above every name, Phil 2:9.

(Heb 12:1-4 NIV) Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. {2} Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. {3} Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. {4} In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

As well as looking at the example that Jesus gave us we should look at the reward that he promises to those who are persecuted.

(Mat 5:11-12 NIV) "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. {12} Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

In addition to the rewards to those who are persecuted, we should also remember the promise given to those who acknowledge Jesus before men and to those who disown Jesus before men (Mat 10:32-33). We need to take this to heart.

(Mat 10:32-33 NIV) "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. {33} But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.

We should not be surprised by persecution.

One of the lessons from Revelation is that it teaches us not to be surprised at persecution, imprisonment and even death. I doubt that there are many preachers in the West who preach on this aspect of Revelation. However for those going through persecution Revelation brings much comfort. Revelation has a blessing for those who take to heart its message (Rev 1:3).

To those about to suffer persecution Jesus says 'Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer'. To those who are faithful, even to the point of death he promises the crown of life.

(Rev 2:10 NIV) Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

To those living in a climate of persecution where one of their own called Antipas was persecuted to death, Jesus says 'I know where you live'. He knows what they are going through.

(Rev 2:13 NIV) I know where you live--where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city--where Satan lives.

Those who die for the faith are not alone, there are other fellow brothers who have died for the faith before and after us. In Rev 6:11 the martyrs are told to wait a little longer until the full number of martyrs come in.

(Rev 6:11 NIV) Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.

(Rev 11:7 NIV) Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them.

(Rev 12:11 NIV) They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.

Rev 13:7 makes the startling declaration that the beast makes war against the saints and conquers them.

(Rev 13:7 NIV) He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation.

Rev 13:10 confirms that the saints will be imprisoned and killed during the beast's reign. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.

Other NT scriptures confirm this:

Jesus says that the world would hate and persecute Christians just as it has hated and persecuted Jesus.

(John 15:18-20 NASB) "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. {19} "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. {20} "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' **If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you;** if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

Peter tells us not to be surprised by suffering in the name of Christ.

(1 Pet 4:12-14 NIV) Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. {13} But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. {14} If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

John in his first epistle tells us not to be surprised if the world hates you..

(1 John 3:13 NIV) Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you.

Look what the world did to Jesus, they nailed him to a cross, but that was not the end of the story because he rose from the dead. Even if we die as martyrs we will be resurrected to eternal life. Paul contrasts the temporary nature of suffering with its corresponding reward of eternal glory.

(2 Cor 4:17 NASB) For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,

Let Jesus have another word on persecution.

(Mat 10:28 NASB) "And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

In Mat 5:10-12 tells us that we are blessed when we are persecuted because of righteousness and because of him. We are to rejoice because our reward will be great in heaven.

(Mat 5:10-12 NIV) Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. {11} "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. {12} Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

(Luke 6:22-23 NIV) Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. {23} "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.

Our attitude to those who persecute us.

(Mat 5:43-45 NIV) "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' {44} But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, {45} that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

(Luke 6:27-36 NIV) "But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, {28} bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. {29} If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. {30} Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. {31} Do to others as you would have them do to you. {32} "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. {33} And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. {34} And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. {35} But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. {36} Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

(Rom 12:19-21 NIV) Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. {20} On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." {21} Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Victory through death.

Victory over the devil and the beast is through death, just as Jesus was victorious over the devil through his death. He rose from the dead and his resurrection is the guarantee of our resurrection also.

(John 11:25-26 NIV) Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; {26} and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

(Luke 21:16-19 NIV) You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and

they will put some of you to death. {17} All men will hate you because of me. {18} But not a hair of your head will perish. {19} By standing firm you will gain life.

(Rom 8:36-39 NIV) As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." {37} No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. {38} For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, {39} neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(2 Tim 2:11-12 NIV) Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; {12} if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us;

(Mat 10:21-22 NIV) "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. {22} All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

(Mat 24:9-13 NIV) "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. {10} At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, {11} and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. {12} Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, {13} but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

(Mark 13:12-13 NIV) "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. {13} All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

(Phil 3:10-11 NIV) I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, {11} and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

To the church in Smyrna Jesus writes:

(Rev 2:10 NIV) Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

In the fifth seal of Rev 6:9 we find those killed because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. There are quite a few commentators who compare the seals with Matthew 24. When we look at church history the fifth seal has been opened almost two thousand years. The first four seals deal with wars, famines, plagues and death - sounds familiar?

(Rev 6:9-11 NIV) When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. {10} They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" {11} Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.

The two witnesses seal their witness with their blood. But after three and a half days they are resurrected.

(Rev 11:7 NIV) Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them.

(Rev 11:11-12 NIV) But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them. {12} Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on.

Dying for ones faith is part of ones testimony before men. The Greek word for testimony *marturia* is where we get our word martyr.

(Rev 12:11 NASB) "And they overcame (*nikao*) him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony (*marturia*), and they did not love their life even to death.

In Revelation 13:15 all who refused to worship the image of the beast were killed and yet in Rev 15:2 we find those who had been victorious over the beast. Note that the word for victorious in 15:2 is the same as in overcome (*nikao*) see 12:11 above.

(Rev 13:15 NIV) He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed.

(Rev 15:2 NIV) And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious (*nikao*) over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God

In Rev 20:4 John sees the souls of those beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus, they come to life and reign with Christ for a thousand years. Man can destroy the body but not the soul (Mat 10:28).

(Rev 20:4 NIV) I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

(Mat 10:28 NIV) Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Suffering and glory - there is often a connection between suffering and glory in scripture.

(Luke 24:26 NIV) Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"

(Rom 8:17-18 NIV) Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. {18} I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

See also Eph 3:13, Heb 2:9-10, 1 Pet 1:11, 4:13, 5:1, 10 see also Phil 2:5-11.

Suffering and persecution produce perseverance.

The Greek word *hupomone* is translated as perseverance, patient endurance, standing firm, persistence, and patience, by the NIV.

5281. *hupomone*, hoop-om-on-ay'; from G5278; cheerful (or hopeful) endurance, constancy:--enduring, patience, patient continuance (waiting).

Paul tells us to rejoice in our suffering because suffering produces perseverance.

(Rom 5:3-4 NIV) Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings (*thlipsis*), because we know that suffering (*thlipsis*) produces perseverance (*hupomone*); {4} perseverance, character; and character, hope.

James tells basically the same story but says that its end is maturity.

(James 1:2-4 NIV) Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, {3} because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance (*hupomone*). {4} Perseverance (*hupomone*) must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Peter includes perseverance in his list of things that we are to add to our faith.

(2 Pet 1:5-8 NIV) For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; {6} and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance (*hupomone*); and to perseverance, godliness; {7} and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. {8} For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He continues by saying that if you do these things you will never fall (KJV stumble).

(2 Pet 1:10-11 NIV) Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, {11} and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Luke includes persevering as one of the essential ingredients required to produce a crop. Those who lack it fall away in a time of testing Luke 8:13. The account in Mat 13:21 has 'when trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.'

(Luke 8:15 NIV) But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering (*hupomone*) produce a crop.

(Mat 13:21 NIV) But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble (*thlipsis*) or persecution (*diogmos*) comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.

Paul tells Timothy to pursue endurance.

(1 Tim 6:11 NIV) But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance (*hupomone*) and gentleness.

Paul boast about the perseverance and faith of the Thessalonians as they go through trials and persecutions.

(2 Th 1:4 NIV) Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.

In the book of Revelation patient endurance (perseverance) is usually linked to suffering or persecution.

(Rev 1:9 NIV) I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance (*hupomone*) that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

(Rev 2:2-3 NIV) I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance (*hupomone*). I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. {3} You have persevered and have endured (*hupomone*) hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

(Rev 3:10 NIV) Since you have kept my command to endure patiently (*hupomone*), I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.

In the next two verses in Revelation perseverance is required because of persecution.

(Rev 13:10 NIV) If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance (*hupomone*) and faithfulness on the part of the saints.

(Rev 14:11-12 NIV) And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name." {12} This calls for patient endurance (*hupomone*) on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.

Other verses on endurance are: Rom 15:4, 1 Th 1:3, 2 Th 3:5, Heb 10:36, Heb 12:1.

The point about this section is that we need to take a scriptural view of suffering and persecution. The biblical writers were well acquainted with suffering and persecution and they knew that it develops perseverance and character. Not only Paul but also James tells us to rejoice in our sufferings and trials because it produces character and maturity. Perseverance is one of the qualities that we are going to

need when tribulation and persecution come to us. Let us develop these qualities now ahead of time so that we will not fall away.

Jesus delivers us from God's wrath:

(Isa 26:20-21 NIV) Go, my people, enter your rooms and shut the doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until his wrath has passed by. {21} See, the LORD is coming out of his dwelling to punish the people of the earth for their sins. The earth will disclose the blood shed upon her; she will conceal her slain no longer.

Jesus certainly delivers us from God's wrath but not from the anger of man or of the devil. God's wrath is never directed at his children.

(Rom 5:9 NASB) Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.

(1 Th 1:10 NIV) and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead--Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

(1 Th 5:9 NIV) For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the NT God's wrath is directed at unbelieving sinners. There is a day of God's wrath. This day will come when Christ returns (1 Th 1:10 see also Rev 6:17, 11:18)

(Rom 2:5 NIV) But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up **wrath** against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

(Eph 5:5-6 NIV) For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person--such a man is an idolater--has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. {6} Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's **wrath** comes on those who are disobedient.

See also Col 3:5-6 Rev 6:15-17, 11:18, 14:9-11. The seven bowls in Revelation are bowls of God's wrath Rev 16:1-2, 16:19.

Paul reveals that the punishment of unbelievers occurs on the day that when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire.

(2 Th 1:6-10 NIV) God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you {7} and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. {8} He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. {9} They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power {10} on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

God delays the return of his Son so that people may have time to repent, he does not want to pour out his wrath on you, but that day will come one day, the last day. He wants heaven to be full, the Father wants the wedding banquet of his Son to be full of guests, will you be one? Are you good, bad, poor, crippled, blind or lame? All these were invited. Even tax collectors and prostitutes enter the kingdom of heaven ahead of the religious.

(2 Pet 3:9-10 NIV) The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. {10} But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

(Mat 22:10 NIV) So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could

find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

(Luke 14:21 NIV) "The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'

(Mat 21:31 NIV) "Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered. Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.

If we look at the time when God pouring out his wrath on the Jews who had rejected him during the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 66-70 as prophesied by scripture (Luke 11:47-51, 19:41-44, 21:20-24, 23:28-31). We can see how God had protected his people. Firstly because of persecution by the Jews all Christians except the apostles had left Jerusalem (Acts 8:1). Secondly Jesus had left specific instructions that when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies those who are in Judea should flee to the mountains, those in the city should get out, and those in the country should not enter the city (Luke 21:21).

When does the rapture happen?

There are some who teach that the church is raptured seven years prior to the Second Coming of Jesus. It would be disingenuous of me to say that I don't know where that idea came from. However it is not taught in scripture; it is a cleverly disguised story produced by distorting and twisting scripture. This teaching promises relief from suffering and persecution during the reign of the beast. The scriptures clearly indicate that the saints will be imprisoned and killed during the reign of the beast. The beast kills the two witnesses when they have finished their witness (Rev 11:7). Thus they seal their testimony with their death. The beast wages war against the saints and conquers them (Rev 13:7). We are clearly warned that the saints will be imprisoned and killed (Rev 13:10).

The following scriptures deal with the Second Coming, the resurrection and the rapture.

(1 Cor 15:51-52 NIV) Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- {52} in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

(1 Th 4:13-18 NIV) Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. {14} We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. {15} According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. {16} For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. {17} After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. {18} Therefore encourage each other with these words.

The above two passages are more about resurrection than the rapture. The first passage in 1 Cor 15:51 is part of a very long passage about the resurrection (58 verses). The second passage in 1 Thess 4:15-17 is the only one that gives a time order to the sequence of the Second Coming, the resurrection and the rapture. Yes it is in that order, Jesus comes down from heaven and the dead in Christ rise first and after that those who are still alive will be caught up with them in the clouds.

1. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God
2. and the dead in Christ will rise first
3. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever

It will be a noisy event, loud enough to wake the dead: "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a **loud** command, with the **voice** of the archangel and with the **trumpet** call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first".

If we look at the 1 Thess 4 passage in more detail it says; 'we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him' (v 14). Paul then goes into more detail and describes what will actually happen. The dead in Christ rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

There is only one Second Coming; it is when Jesus comes with the dead in Christ and for those who are still alive.

We also know when the resurrection of believers will happen:

(John 6:39-40 NIV) And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, **but raise them up at the last day.** {40} For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and **I will raise him up at the last day."**

(John 6:44 NIV) "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will **raise him up at the last day.**

(John 6:54 NIV) Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, **and I will raise him up at the last day.**

Jesus says it four times. The resurrection of the dead in Christ occurs on the last day. Since we know that the rapture occurs **after** the resurrection of the dead in Christ it cannot be seven years before the last day. Daniel 12:13 also mentions the resurrection at **the end of the days.**

(Dan 12:13 NIV) "As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance."

Do not be deceived the pre-tribulation rapture doctrine is not scriptural. It conflicts with the plain teaching of scripture.

What about those passages in Revelation when Christ comes with the saints.

In the pre-tribulation wrath teaching the Second Coming is split up into two stages. In the first Jesus comes for his people who are (secretly) raptured. Then there is the tribulation and then Jesus returns another time after the tribulation with his people. The usual passage cited is:

(Rev 19:11-15 NIV) I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. {12} His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. {13} He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. {14} The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. {15} Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.

This is a picture of the Second Coming in which the armies of heaven follow the rider on the white horse. There is another even earlier passage, which is not usually cited, but which also includes his called, chosen and faithful followers (17:14).

(Rev 17:14 NIV) They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings--and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."

Most people can recognise the symbolism of the armies of heaven because they are dressed in fine

linen, white and clean (even though the word church is not mentioned). Throughout Revelation those wearing white are the saints (3:4-5, 3:18, 6:11, 7:9, 7:13-14) there is one exception to this and that is the elders in 4:4 who are dressed in white, but they probably represent the church. The only description of the dress of angels in Revelation is in 15:6 'They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests' thus the armies of heaven does not refer to the angels.

In the Rev 19:14 passage cited above we see Christ returning with the saints. This is confirmed by the parallel passage in 17:14 where they are called 'his called, chosen and faithful followers'. Now one could make a very strong argument that these are in fact the dead in Christ and I could cite 1 Thess 4:14 as proof.

(1 Th 4:14 NIV) We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

However I would be wrong because we see that in the full passage 1 Thess 4:14-17 the dead in Christ rise first and after that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

The point that I am making is that the description of Jesus coming with the saints at the Second Coming in Revelation is fully compatible with the description of the Second Coming, resurrection of the dead and the rapture in 1 Thess 4:14-17. There is only one Second Coming at which the resurrection of the dead in Christ occurs first followed by the rapture of those who are still alive.

The great tribulation of Rev 7:14.

(Rev 7:9-17 NIV) After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. {10} And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." {11} All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, {12} saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!" {13} Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes--who are they, and where did they come from?" {14} I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. {15} Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. {16} Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. {17} For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

This passage is difficult to interpret because Revelation is a symbolic book. Unfortunately this passage does not indicate when the tribulation period starts or ends. The passage concerning the great tribulation occurs immediately after the sealing of the 144,000, who are sealed in preparation for the sounding of the seven trumpets. In turn the sealing of the 144,000 occurs just after the sixth seal in which the wicked hide from the wrath of the Lamb on the day of wrath. Unfortunately the book of Revelation does not seem to follow an orderly time sequence, there is evidence that it repeats some scenes in more detail later on. It is difficult to determine the timing of the great tribulation from its position in the book of Revelation.

In his vision John says 'After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count' (7:9), after what? After he hears the number of the 144,000 sealed servants of God from all the tribes of Israel. Then he looks and sees a great multitude. A number of commentators have remarked that John sometimes uses this literary device of hearing first and then seeing. So that the 144,000 are a symbolic representation of the great multitude. There are 12,000 from each of twelve tribes indicating completeness, 144,000 in all, perfect completeness. The 144,000 is examined in detail later and there is reasonable evidence that they are not literal Israel, but spiritual Israel.

We should note that the elder asks two questions. Who are they? And where have they come from?

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

Where have they come from?

In answer to the question 'where did they come from?' The elder answers the question himself by saying, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation". The word used for 'come out of' (*erchomai*:G2064) is the normal word, equivalent to the English word 'come', meaning that they came from the great tribulation. It does not imply that they are delivered out from great tribulation. The KJV omits the definite article and says; "These are they which came out of great tribulation". We have already seen that the Greek word used for tribulation *thlipsis* is a general word for hardships of many different kinds including persecution. The Greek word for great *megas* is a very popular word in Revelation and occurs 82 times in 75 verses within the book of Revelation alone. In order to understand better the great tribulation that they came out of, we had better look to see *who* they are.

Who are they?

From the description we can clearly see that they are saved. White robes indicates that they were cleansed of their sins, they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (7:14).

(Rev 7:9-10 NIV) After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. {10} And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

Also they are a great multitude that no one could count and they come from every nation, tribe, people and language. This sounds similar to the group of people described in 5:9-10. This four-fold description sounds like the universal redeemed that Christ died for. They are from every national, tribal, ethnic and linguistic group in the world. See also the description the redeemed in 5:9.

(Rev 5:9-10 NIV) And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. {10} You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

We should note that people from the same universal group gloat over the death of the two witnesses. The kingdom of the beast also has a universal reign (13:7) and the gospel also has a universal extent (14:6)

(Rev 11:9-10 NIV) For three and a half days men from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial. {10} The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth.

The universal nature of this group from the great tribulation fulfils the requirement for the Second Coming or the end of the age. That is that the gospels must be preached to all nations and then the end will come (Mat 24:14, 28:19-20, Mark 13:10). So this group could be the final harvest that is the total of the redeemed. According to Paul when Christ returns the dead in Christ rise first followed by the rapture of the living, so all the saints are 'harvested' together (1 Th 4:15-17). We see the final harvest in Rev 14:15 and Mat 24:31, Mark 13:29.

(Mat 24:14 NIV) And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

(Mat 28:19-20 NIV) Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, {20} and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

(Mark 13:10 NIV) And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.

They also sound like the countless descendants of Abraham which would include the church (Rom 4:16, Gal 3:7)

(Gen 16:10 NIV) The angel added, "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count."

They are further described in Rev 7:15-17. From this description it seems that they also participate in the New Jerusalem which is hardly surprising since they are saved.

(Rev 7:15-17 NIV) Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. {16} Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. {17} For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

1. They serve God, compare with Rev 1:6, 5:10 and 22:3.
2. They will never thirst see Rev 21:6
3. Springs of living water see Rev 21:6
4. God will wipe away every tear from their eyes see Rev 21:4

(Rev 21:3-4 NIV) And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. {4} He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

(Rev 21:6-7 NIV) He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. {7} He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son."

While one cannot be certain, it seems reasonable from the information that is available to us, that those who have come out of the great tribulation are the believers from all ages. They are great multitude, this is a general description. They are countless in number and come from every national, tribal, ethnic and linguistic group in the world. It looks like they are harvested at the end of the age because their universal nature fulfils the condition of Mat 24:14, which is that gospel is preached to all nations. From scripture we know that all of the saints over all time are harvested together at the same time. Now knowing *who* these people are, we can then say that the great tribulation is the tribulation that all the saints have gone through.

If the great tribulation only refers to a short period of intense tribulation, occurring at the end of the age. Then we should point out that a huge number of people get saved during this period (they are countless) and from all national, geographical, ethnic and linguistic areas. What about all the saints, who have been martyred or tortured or imprisoned for the faith, should not these be in the group who have come out of the great tribulation?

Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that the great tribulation coincides with the reign of the beast of Rev 13, and assume that it is a short time at the end of the age. Scripture tells us that he will either imprison or kill the saints (Rev 13:7, 10) and that many saints will be killed by the beast out of the earth because they refuse to worship the image of the beast (Rev 13:15). In addition the beast out of the Abyss kills the two witnesses in 11:7. Is it likely that the 144,000 will not get off any less severely if they are preaching the gospel during this period, remembering that the beast is making war against the saints. While it is possible that many will be saved through the preaching of the saints in prison, is it going to be a countless number? And if the saints have been raptured and are in heaven as some suggest, I doubt if many will be saved at all.

What tribulation do the saints go through in Revelation?

If we look at the book of Revelation itself this should show us the sort of tribulation which the saints had come from. We should keep in mind that tribulation includes hardships as well as persecution. Here is a partial list from Revelation, which indicates the sort of tribulation the saints have come through in the great tribulation. The majority refers to persecution, I have excluded references to false prophets in this section. I have included the second, third and fourth seals because they are general and affect all mankind (see Mat 24). We should note that the Greek word for tribulation is only used in Rev 1:9, 2:9-10, 2:22 and in 7:14 itself.

1:9 I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering (*thlipsis*) and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

2:2 Ephesus - had persevered and have endured hardships for my name,

2:9 Smyrna - I know your afflictions (*thlipsis*) and your poverty--yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

2:10 Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution (*thlipsis*) for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

2:13 Pergamum - I know where you live--where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city--where Satan lives.

2:19 Thyatira I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

3:7-10 Philadelphia: I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.

6:3 Second seal. Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other.

6:5 Third seal. Scarcity of the basic food

6:8 Fourth seal. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.

6:9 Fifth seal. I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained.

9:4 Fifth trumpet: They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads.

11:7 Two witnesses: Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them.

12:11 They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.

12:17 Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring--those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

13:7 The beast out of the sea: He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation.

13:10 If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.

13:15 The beast out of the earth; He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed.

13:16-17 He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, {17} so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.

14:9-12 A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, {10} he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. {11} And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name." {12} This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.

17:6 The great prostitute: I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.

18:4 Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues;

18:20 Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you."

18:24 In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth."

20:4 I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

20:9 They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them.

The church is not mentioned after Rev 3:22.

There are those who see the passage where John told to 'Come up here' in 4:1 as representing the church. The church then reappears with Christ at his Second Coming depicted in 19:11 (the church being the armies of heaven in 19:14). However the same event is depicted in 17:14 where the armies of heaven are called "his called, chosen and faithful followers."

(Rev 17:14 NIV) They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings--and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."

The Greek word for church (*ekklesia*) is mentioned 19 times up to Rev 3:22 and only occurs once again in Rev 22:16, does this mean that the church misses out on the new heaven the new earth and New Jerusalem too? It seems that most people can recognise the church in Rev 19, in a rather obscure passage, but not before, which is rather strange since there is abundant evidence for the church prior to Rev 19.

(Rev 22:16 NIV) "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."

The word 'church' is the collective noun for a group of God's people, usually locally, as in the church in Ephesus or the church in Laodicea. It can also refer to God's people over all the earth (and time). In the bible the individuals within a church are often called brothers, saints, believers, servants etc. The argument that the church is missing after Rev 3:22 because the word 'church' is missing is frankly ridiculous. There are many examples of God's people after 3:22.

The book of Revelation is for God's servants (see 1:1) and the word 'servant' occurs 11 times after 3:22 (6:15, 7:3, 10:7, 11:18, 13:16, 15:3, 19:2, 19:5, 19:18, 22:3, 22:6).

(Rev 1:1 NIV) The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John,

The word 'saints' occurs 12 times in the NIV after 3:22 and it occurs 13 times in the KJV (5:8, 8:3-4, 11:18, 13:7, 13:10, 14:12, 16:6, 17:6, 18:20, 18:24, 19:8).

Those who testify (*marturia*) about Jesus occurs 6 times (6:9, 11:7, 12:11, 12:17, 19:10, 20:4).

The word brothers occurs 4 times after 3:22 (6:11, 12:10, 19:10, 22:10)

We should also note that the word church (*ekklesia*) is also missing from 2 Tim, Titus, 2 Pet, 1 and 2 John and Jude not to mention Mark, Luke and John.

The word Jesus or Christ is missing between 1:9 and 11:15 but of course Jesus actually appears various times as the Lamb. 13 times.

Here are a few verses that indicate that the church is on earth and comes under attack after Rev 3:22.

(Rev 6:9-11 NIV) When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. {10} They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" {11} Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.

(Rev 13:7 NIV) He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation.

(Rev 13:10 NIV) If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.

(Rev 14:12 NIV) This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.

(Rev 17:6 NIV) I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly astonished.

In Rev 18:4 God warns his people to come out from Babylon the great, so that they will not share in her sins, so that they will not receive any of her plagues: death, mourning, famine and fire.

Other examples of the church on earth are 7:3, 8:4, 12:11, and 12:17.

The church at Philadelphia kept from the hour of trial coming upon the whole world.

Christ makes a promise to the church in Philadelphia to keep them from the hour of trial coming upon the whole world. Some use this an argument for the church not going through the great tribulation.

(Rev 3:10-11 NIV) Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. {11} I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.

Firstly this promise is to just one of the seven churches. Secondly it is made because they have kept Christ's command to endure patiently (this phrase 'endure patiently' normally refers to persecution).

It would be highly speculative to take this promise made to the church at Philadelphia and apply it to the whole church. Especially so in the light of those scriptures that indicate that the elect will

participate in the great distress.

(Mat 24:21-22 NIV) For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now--and never to be equaled again. {22} If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.

(Mark 13:19-20 NIV) because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now--and never to be equaled again. {20} If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them.

We also have to ask whether the hour of trial is the same as the great tribulation? We just do not know. The phrase 'hour of trial' only occurs here in the bible. The most likely candidates are Dan 12:1 and Luke 21:25-26. It cannot be Mat 24:21 because this localised to Judea and not world-wide. There are some other candidates from Revelation 9:15, 11:13, 14:7, 17:12, 18:10,17 and 19.

For those who take the seven churches to be seven successive church ages please note that Philadelphia is the sixth church. The last of the seven churches Laodicea was so lukewarm that Jesus was about to vomit them out of his mouth.

What the commentators say about the great tribulation.

Mounce

The white-robed multitude are those who have come out of the great tribulation. Charles interprets the scene as one in which martyrs are *still* arriving from the great persecution. The larger context favors a point in time when the complete number of the redeemed stand before God and the blessings of the eternal state are about to be realized.

The use of the definite article in the phrase "the great tribulation" indicates that the angel is referring primarily to that final series of woes which will immediately precede the end. It is the hour of trial that is to come upon the whole world (3:10). It is not "the awesome totality of tribulation which from century to century has been the experience of the people of God" (Hughes) nor does it correspond to "the entire history of the church -- past, present, and future" (Wall). It is that specific period of distress and cruel persecution which will take place prior to the return of Christ. Prophesied by Daniel (12:1) and reflected on the screen of history at the fall of Jerusalem (Mark 13:19 and parallels), it finds its fulfillment in that final persecution which supplies the full complement of Christian martyrs (6:11). John views the entire company of faithful believers in the light of the 144,000 who have just come through the final period of testing. Not all are martyrs. There is no mention here of being slain (as in 6:9) or beheaded (as in 20:4) for the testimony they bore. Their robes are white by virtue of the redemptive death of the Lamb. Their rewards are those of all the faithful. Persecution has always been the lot of those who follow the Lamb (John 16:33; 2 Tim 3:12). The intensity of the final conflict of righteousness and evil will rise to such a pitch as to become *the great tribulation*.

Beasley-Murray

The definite article employed with tribulation is significant. It refers not to the trials to which Christians are always subject (Jn 16:33), but the tribulation which forms the climax of history prior to the revelation of the kingdom (cf. Dan 12:1, Mk13:19), and to which reference was made earlier in 3:10. Strictly speaking the main verb is in the present tense: they 'come' out of the tribulations. Some expositors, therefore, have interpreted this of martyrdoms, present and to come in the future. The RSV and NEB are almost certainly right, however, in viewing the verb as having a past reference, just as the next verb has (they have washed...); for the vision is written from the standpoint of the future, after the conclusion of the tribulation, in the happy estate of the kingdom.

Caird.

We do indeed know that it is the testing time for which the Conquerors were being prepared by the letters to the seven churches (3:10), and that it will involve the completion of the roll of martyrs (6:11). ...The present participle (are coming), however, gives the impression not only that the great ordeal is a

prolonged process, which from John's temporal standpoint was partly past and partly future (cf. 6:9-11), but also that, for the martyrs at least, entry into heaven follows immediately on physical death.

Morris.

The elder explains that the multitudes are those who are coming (present tense) out of the great tribulation. The article in the Greek seems to indicate the great trouble at the end of things (cf. 3:10). But it is likely that it also refers to tribulation in general (cf. John 16:33; Acts 14:22), for not all will undergo the great tribulation. Cf. Niles, 'The great tribulation! That certainly meant the persecution in which we were caught. But it also meant that constant tribulation of life which was the result of evil's warring against God. Out of that tribulation, and because of it, came the host of the redeemed' (Ladd has a similar comment).

Wall

The definite article used with the singular great tribulation envisions a particular period of salvation history rather than human history per se. In that the history of God's salvation is worked out within the history of God's people, the 'great tribulation' corresponds to the entire history of the church -- past, present and future. The issue, then is not whether believers escape the suffering every person must endure in a fallen world; the real issue is whether all believers are saved from God's eschatological wrath. Clearly they are, according to the evidence provided by this visionary interlude. The present tense of the participle, 'have come', looks back over this period of history as the continual gathering together of the great multitude for the salvation of God. All believers from every generation have met the single criterion that allows them to stand before God's throne and in front of the Lamb in their white robes: they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

G E Ladd

The theology behind the great tribulation is the age-long conflict between God and Satan. One of the main motifs in our Lord's ministry was his conflict with Satan and demonic powers. By his incarnation and earthly mission, our Lord has rendered a decisive defeat to the devil (Matt 12:28-29; Luke 10:18; Heb 2:14) that men may be delivered from darkness and brought into the Kingdom of Christ (Col 1:13). While delivered from the spiritual power of Satan, the church is not spared from tribulation and persecution, which expresses the fierce hatred of Satan for the people of God. In fact, tribulation -- persecution -- is the normal expectation of the church in the world (John 16:33; Acts 14:22; Rom 8:35). The great tribulation will be but a concentration of the same satanic hostility which the church has experienced throughout her entire existence when Satan, in one final convulsive effort, tries to turn the hearts of God's people away from their Lord.

Hailey:

But what is this great tribulation out of which they were coming? Several answers may be considered:

1. Jesus had told His disciples of "great tribulation" which would befall the people of Jerusalem in its destruction (Matt 24:21, 29). However that tribulation had already occurred some twenty or thirty years before John wrote, and these saints are said to "come" out of the tribulation as though it was continuing at the time.
2. Some religious groups teach that "the great tribulation" spoken of here is to take place at the end of the present age between what they call "the rapture" and "the revelation" of Jesus. At this time, according to the theory, the saints are caught up to the marriage supper of the Lamb. This idea or assumption has no foundation in Scripture.
3. Speaking of afflictions that would come upon his disciples, Jesus had forewarned them that in the world they would have tribulation (John 16:33). Paul foretold "that through many [note: not one only] tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22), and "all that would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim 3:12). The saints were passing through tribulation at the time John wrote and they have continued to pass through tribulations since. This position makes "the great tribulation" the sum of all tribulations from Pentecost to the coming of the Lord.
4. A fourth view is that "the great tribulation" took place in the Roman period through which the saints contemporary with John were passing, beginning with Nero's persecution (AD 64) and continuing until the edict of Constantine (AD 313). Those saints are now beyond this life, before

the throne of God, having gained the victory. Word of such victory offered tremendous assurance and encouragement to men and women facing trials and death, and likewise encourages all since who face similar tests of faith. The great persecution of this passage was thus confined to the Roman period covering 249 years of Roman-Christian conflict. This view is preferred, since it is in harmony with the theme of the book.

Johnson

John now sees a great multitude from every nation and cultural background standing before the throne of God and clothed in white robes. They are identified by the angel as those "who have come out of the great tribulation" (v. 14). Again, the question is that of identity. Are they the Gentiles who are saved in the Tribulation in contrast to the Jews in vv. 1-8? Beckwith answers no because they are described as coming from every nation and tribe and language, and this would mean both Jews and Gentiles (p. 539). Are they, then, martyrs who have given their lives in the Great Tribulation and have been slain by the beast? If martyrs, are they the remainder of those to be killed referred to when the fifth seal is opened (6:11)? Are they the complete group of martyrs? Or do they represent the whole company of the redeemed in Christ as seen in glory?

Although there is no direct evidence that the great multitude are martyrs, there are some indications of this: (1) they are seen in heaven "before the throne" (v. 9) and "in his temple" (v. 15); (2) they are described as those "who have come out of the great tribulation" (v. 14). Thus it is assumed that, since they have died in the Great Tribulation, they have most likely been martyred because the Tribulation will be a time of great killing of the saints (17:6; 18:24; 19:2, 20:4, etc.).

The multitude would not be the whole company of the martyred throughout history but only those who were victims of the beast persecution during the Great Tribulation. The group is probably those future martyrs referred to under the fifth seal as those "who were to be killed as they had been" (6:11). Neither, then, would they be the whole redeemed church as Beckwith and Eller suggest, unless all Christians are to be identified with the martyrs.

The identification of this second group is related to the identification of the first one (vv. 1-8). Some argue that the two groups must be different because the first is numbered, the second innumerable; the first is limited to Jews, the second refers to every nation (Gundry, *Church and the Tribulations*, p. 81). These objections are not serious if we recall the exposition of vv. 1-8, where it was noted that (1) the number of the sealed was symbolic and not literal and that (2) the delineation of the Twelve Tribes was seen as John's deliberate attempt to universalize the election of God. Thus, what some have seen as contrasts may actually be designed to complement each other and show the continuity of the first group with the second. Furthermore, we should bear in mind that John does not see any group at all in vv. 1-8 but merely hears the number of the sealed, whereas in vv. 9-17 he actually sees a group and describes what he sees and hears. Therefore, the unity of both groups can be maintained and vv. 9-17 understood as the interpretative key to the 144,000. John's vision then leaps ahead to a scene in heaven after the Great Tribulation has run its course and views the glorified Tribulation saints as being in God's presence, at rest from their trial, and serving him continually.

Two slightly different variations of the more literal Jewish identity of those in vv. 1-8 and the relationship of this first group to the second (vv. 9 ff.) are quite popular today. Some see the 144,000 as a select group of Jews who will be converted to Jesus shortly after the rapture of the church to heaven. These Jewish evangelists will preach the gospel to the world during the Tribulation. As a result of their preaching, a great multitude of Gentiles will be converted to Christ (A.C. Gaebelein, *The Revelation*, [New York: Our Hope, 1915], pp. 58-59).

Others, accepting a posttribulation view of the church's rapture, understand the 144,000 as a literal Jewish remnant preserved physically through the Tribulation and converted immediately after the Rapture. They will be the people who will constitute the beginning of the restored Jewish Davidic Kingdom at the inception of the millennial reign of Christ on the earth (Gundry, *Church and the Tribulation*, pp. 82-83).

The Bible speaks of three different types of tribulation or distress, and it is important to distinguish between them:

1. There is tribulation that is inseparable from Christian life in the world (John 16:33; Acts 14:22; Rom 5:3; 2Tim 2:11-12; 1 Peter 4:12; Rev 1:9; 2:10, etc.). All Christians during all ages participate in tribulation. Thus they share in the continuing sufferings of Christ (Col 1:24).

2. The Bible also speaks of an intense tribulation that will come on the final generation of Christians and climax all previous persecutions. Daniel 12:1 refers to such a time: "There will be a time of distress [*thlipseos*, LXX] such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then." Likewise, Jesus predicts such an unprecedented persecution: "For then there will be great distress [*thlipsis*], unequalled

from the beginning of the world until now--and never to be equaled again" (Matt 24:21). Paul's mention of "the rebellion" (*apostasia*) and "the man of lawlessness" surely refers to this same period (2Thess 2:3 ff.). In Revelation this more intense persecution is mentioned in 7:14; 11:7-10; 13:7; 16:6, and possibly the events under the fifth seal should be included here (6:9-11; so J. Barton Payne, *The Imminent Appearing of Christ* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962], p. 115). This future tribulation is distinguished from previous persecutions of the church in its intensity, in its immediate connection with Christ's second coming, and in the presence of Antichrist during it.

3. Scripture also speaks of a future time of God's intense wrath on unbelievers. Revelation refers to this as "the great day of their wrath" (6:17) and "the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth" (3:10). Such wrath from God comes especially under the trumpets and bowls (8:2 ff.; 16:1 ff.). Probably drawing on the teaching of Jesus in the Olivet Discourse (Matt 24), Paul refers to this punitive action of God in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10 and even uses the word *thlipsis* ("trouble"). While for Christians the Great Tribulation may be concurrent with a portion of the period of God's wrath on the rebellious, the final and more intense judgment of God seems to follow the Great Tribulation itself and is directly connected with the coming of Christ (Matt 24:29; Rev 6:12 ff.; 19:11 ff.).

Walvoord

In the Greek the expression is far more specific. Literally it could be translated, "These are those who came out of the tribulation, the great one." It is undoubtedly a reference to the specific period of the great tribulation of which Christ spoke (Matt 24:21).

The common tendency to ignore the definite terminology of the prophecies in the book of Revelation is illustrated in the interpretation which would make this throng refer to all the elect of all ages and the great tribulation as "the whole sum of the trials of the saints of God, viewed by the Elder as now complete." One must not read into a passage something that is foreign to its express statement. The group here described is a particular group coming from a particular time.

Larkin attempts to explain away the reference to "great tribulation" (7:14) in order to place this company in the first half of Daniel's seventieth week. His explanation is beside the point as this seventh chapter is not necessarily in chronological order, and further, there is no reason why the great tribulation should not have already begun at this time.

Ottman, because of his opposition to the view that the saints of all ages are in view here, also insists that the prophetic narrative is a projection forward to the time of the millennium itself. He bases his conclusion largely on the fact that neither death nor resurrection is mentioned regarding the Gentile multitude. He does not explain, however, the reference to the throne (7:9-13) that is clearly parallel to the throne in heaven in chapters 4-5. His objection is unnecessary, as the throng are not saints of all ages but only saints of the tribulation time who are martyred. The saints, then, who are before the throne coming from every kindred, tongue, and nation, are those who have come out of the great tribulation.

This passage clearly teaches that many Gentiles will be saved during the tribulation. The command to preach the gospel to every nation throughout the world (Matt 24:14; 28:19-20) will have its ultimate fulfillment in this way before Christ comes back to establish His millennial kingdom. The concept sometimes advanced that the rapture cannot occur because all the world has not heard the gospel is a faulty conclusion. The requirement that all the world hear the gospel pertains not to the rapture but to the coming of Christ to set up His kingdom. Though the church should press on with all zeal in presenting the gospel to every creature, it is not necessary for the rapture to wait until this task be completed. In spite of the difficulties, there will be worldwide preaching of the gospel during the tribulation time.

The question has been raised concerning the time pictured in this vision. Two explanations are possible, the first is that this chapter is a preview of the beginning of the millennium. Under this interpretation John is considered to be carried beyond the coming of Christ to establish His kingdom and is chronologically already in the millennial kingdom. Jennings considers this chapter a foreview of the millennial earth rather than a picture of heaven, with the passage teaching that in the millennium both Jews and Gentiles will be blessed. The difficulty with this view, however, is that the only throne and temple introduced thus far are those in heaven, seen in chapters 4 and 5; and there is little justification for arbitrarily putting this chapter in the millennium. The scene here obviously is in heaven, rather than on earth, and the living tribulation saints are not caught up to heaven.

Another interpretation is therefore preferred. This view understands the passage to teach that those here described are martyrs who have sealed their testimony with their own blood. Some believe that the majority of saints in the tribulation will die as martyrs. Many will be killed by earthquakes, war, and

pestilences. Others will be the object of special persecution by the world ruler. They will be hounded to death much as the Jews were in World War II. Because they will not worship the beast, they will be under a death sentence (Rev 13:15). Those who accept Christ in that time may be faced with the solemn alternative of either renouncing their faith in Christ and worshipping the beast or being slain. The result will be multiplied thousands of martyrs.

The scene before us, then, is not earth but heaven, not the millennium but the time of the tribulation. The martyrs are before the throne and before the Lamb. The picture is similar to chapters 5 and 6. The "great multitude" represents an important portion of those mentioned in 6:9-11 who are given white robes as faithful witnesses to the Word of God and to the testimony of the Lamb. The main facts in the case are clear regardless of which interpretation is followed. During the tribulation, countless people of all nations will come to know Christ. It will be a time of salvation for them in spite of persecution and even martyrdom.

Chilton

While this text may and should be used to comfort Christians going through any period of suffering and persecution, its primary reference is to "the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the Land" (3:10), the "Great Tribulation" of which Jesus warned as he spoke to his disciples on the Mount of Olives (Matt 24:21; Mark 13:19) -- a tribulation that as He stated would take place during the then existing generation (Matt 24:34; Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32); the greatest tribulation that ever was, or ever will be (Matt 24:21; Mark 13:19).

Hughes

The identity of the great multitude is then communicated: These are they who come ('come' being a timeless present indicating the totality of those who come from every generation⁰ out of the great tribulation, by which is signified not some particular period of tribulation, as some commentators have supposed, but the awesome totality of tribulation which from century to century has been the experience of the people of God. The perennial hatred of the gospel and the brutal attempts to extinguish its light are unparalleled in history. One has only to recall the sufferings of the saints and prophets of the Old Testament and of the apostles and fathers and reformers and uncounted others in our era, including those who even now are enduring affliction because of the witness they bear to Jesus as their Redeemer and Lord. Such is the company of those who have been 'tortured, refusing to accept deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection', who have been 'tested by mockings and scourgings, and chains and imprisonment', who have been 'stoned, sawn in two, put to the sword', and who 'went in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated -- of whom the world was not worthy -- wandering over deserts and mountains and in dens and caves of the earth' (Heb 11:35-38).

To his followers Jesus has said:

If the world hates you, you know that it has hated me before hating you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own, but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you... But they will do all these things to you for my names sake, because they do not know him who sent me (Jn 15:18-21)

It is in this perspective that the great tribulation of Christ's servants throughout the course of history is to be understood. Nor do such sufferers regard their afflictions as a cause of sorrow or regret. On the contrary, they rejoice that they are counted worthy to suffer dishonour for his name (Acts 5:41), and they know that their brief sufferings are infinitely transcended by the eternal glory that awaits them hereafter (Rom 8:18; 2 Cor 4:17; Mt 5:12)

The great distress of Mat 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21.

Introduction to the great distress.

In Greek words use for the 'great tribulation' of Rev 7:14 is *megas thlipsis* this phrase is also found in Mat 24:21, in which Jesus says: 'for then there will be great distress (*megas thlipsis*), unequalled from the beginning of the world until now--and never to be equaled again'. In the parallel passage in Mark it is just called distress (*thlipsis*). In Luke's version he uses different Greek words *anagke* (Luke 21:23), this is translated crisis in 1 Cor 7:26, hardships in 2 Cor 6:4 and in 2 Cor 12:10. The fact that Jesus says

'never to be equalled again' in Mat 24:21 should be a hint that he is not talking about the end of the world. Luke confirms this by talking about another period of anguish just prior to the Second Coming.

(Luke 21:23 NIV) How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress (*megas anagke*) in the land and wrath (*orge*) against this people.

In Mat 24 and Mark 13 Jesus talks about a time of great distress (*thlipsis*), whether this is the same time period as the great tribulation of Rev 7:14 is difficult to determine. But in the time of great distress that Jesus talks about, that time will be shortened for the sake of the elect who must therefore be on earth at this time. Luke's parallel version is clearly talking about the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. All the synoptic authors warn those in Judea to flee to the mountains, it would therefore seem to be a localised event rather than world-wide. The horrors of this are described in detail by Josephus in 'The Jewish War' and one can get an idea of the horrors by reading Deu 28:49-58. David Chilton also records some of the details in his commentary on Revelation 'Days of Vengeance'. The comments about pregnant woman are particularly apt if one reads Deu 28.

(Mat 24:21-22 NIV) For then there will be great distress (*megas thlipsis*), unequalled from the beginning of the world until now--and never to be equaled again. {22} If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.

(Mark 13:19-20 NIV) because those will be days of distress (*thlipsis*) unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now--and never to be equaled again. {20} If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them.

(Luke 21:23-24 NIV) How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress (*megas anagke*) in the land and wrath (*orge*) against this people. {24} They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

However Luke also talks about **another** period of anguish and perplexity just prior to the Second Coming. Mark and Matthew's version merely refer to the 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' (Isa 13:10, Ezek 32:7, Joel 2:10, 3:15, Mat 24:29, Luke 21:25, Rev 6:12). This is clearly a world-wide phenomenon visible to all just as Christ's return will be visible to all.

(Luke 21:25-27 NIV) "There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. {26} Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. {27} At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

Luke's next verse indicates that the church will be on earth to see this as well.

(Luke 21:28 NIV) When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Do the elect get raptured before or after the distress?

Both Matthew and Mark show that the gathering of the elect by the angels occurs after the distress of those days. In the case of Luke the Second Coming occurs after the period of distress and after the period of anguish and perplexity, although he does not mention the gathering of the elect as do Matthew and Mark.

(Mat 24:29-31 NIV) "**Immediately after the distress of those days**" "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' {30} "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. {31} And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they

will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

(Mark 13:24-27 NIV) "**But in those days, following that distress,** "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; {25} the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' {26} "At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. {27} And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

The other section, which could describe the rapture, in which 'one is taken and one is left' occurs even later in Matthew (24:37-42) in the section that concerns warnings. From this passage and Luke parallel passage destruction comes upon the people once the godly (Noah and Lot) are safe. The context of the 'rapture' passage in Matthew is 'at the coming of the Son of Man'.

(Mat 24:37-42 NIV) As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. {38} For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; {39} and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. {40} Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. {41} Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. {42} "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

Significantly in Luke's passage about Sodom 'marrying' is omitted.

(Luke 17:26-32 NIV) "Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. {27} People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. {28} "It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. {29} But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. {30} "It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. {31} On that day no one who is on the roof of his house, with his goods inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. {32} Remember Lot's wife!

A parallel comparison of the distress from Matthew, Mark and Luke.

In order to understand the Mat 24 passage it is best to look at the three synoptic versions in parallel (Mat 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21). A study of these three passages together in parallel will greatly help to clarify your thinking on them. I highly recommend that you try a parallel examination of the three accounts.

These three passages fall into five sections:

1. Deception by false Christ's. Wars, earthquakes and famines.
2. Persecution and witness to the nations. Matthew mentions false prophets.
3. The period of great distress.
4. False Christ's and false prophets with signs and miracles. Signs in the sun, moon and stars; with anguish and perplexity on earth. Followed by the Second Coming and rapture.
5. Warnings to always be on watch because Jesus comes at an hour we do not expect.

The disciples ask Jesus some questions:

As Jesus and the disciples leave the temple in Jerusalem, the disciples call Jesus attention to the temple and its buildings. And Jesus responds with a comment that not one stone will be left on another. Now this must have come as a shock to the disciples because it was a massive stone structure built from massive stone blocks (Mark 13:1).

Luke	Mark	Matthew
(Luke 21:5-7 NIV) Some of his	(Mark 13:1-4 NIV) As he was	(Mat 24:1-3 NIV) Jesus left the

<p>disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said,</p> <p>{6} "As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down."</p> <p>{7} "Teacher," they asked, "when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?"</p>	<p>leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!"</p> <p>{2} "Do you see all these great buildings?" replied Jesus. "Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."</p> <p>{3} As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately,</p> <p>{4} "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?"</p>	<p>temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings.</p> <p>{2} "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."</p> <p>{3} As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"</p>
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In Mat 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 the disciples ask Jesus a number of questions in response to his comments about the temple in Jerusalem being destroyed.

The question that the disciples asked is slightly different in each account. The problem for scholars has been that in Matthew they ask three different questions and Jesus is answering all three questions in his discourse.

- i. when will this happen?
- ii. what will be the sign of your coming?
- iii. and of the end of the age?

In Mark and Luke the question is phrased differently:

- i. when will these things happen?
- ii. what will be the sign that they are about to be fulfilled?

1. Deception, wars, earthquakes and famines.

This passage falls into three sections:

1. Deception
2. Wars and rumours of wars
3. Earthquakes, famines and pestilences

Jesus starts to answer his disciples by warning them to watch out that false Christs saying 'I am he' and false prophets saying 'the time is near' do not deceive them. He then goes on to tell us not to be alarmed by rumours of wars. He continues by saying that there will be wars, earthquakes and famines (Luke adds pestilences) and that these only the beginning of the birth pains. Birth pains get more rapid and intense as the end draws near (ask your mum). Luke also adds 'and fearful events and great signs from heaven'.

Luke	Mark	Matthew
Section 1. Deception, wars, earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains. Birth pains get more intense and more frequent as the birth approaches.		
(Luke 21:8-11 NIV) He replied: "Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and, 'The time is near.' Do not follow them. {9} When you	(Mark 13:5-8 NIV) Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you. {6} Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many. {7} When you hear of wars and	(Mat 24:4-8 NIV) Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. {5} For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ, ' and will deceive many. {6} You will

<p>hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away." {10} Then he said to them: "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. {11} There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places,</p> <p>and fearful events and great signs from heaven.</p>	<p>rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. {8} Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines.</p> <p>These are the beginning of birth pains.</p>	<p>hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. {7} Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places.</p> <p>{8} All these are the beginning of birth pains.</p>
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2. Persecution, false prophets, witnessing and preaching:

This passages falls into six closely connected categories:

1. Persecution
2. Witnessing in the power of the Holy Spirit
3. Preaching the gospel
4. Betrayal by close family members and hated by the world even to death
5. Matthew adds false prophets.
6. Increase in wickedness and love growing cold

It is also pertinent to the Mat 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 passages that they contain warnings about persecution and false prophets. Matthew Mark and Luke all talk about persecution before the great distress and Matthew and Mark both talk about false Christ's and false prophets after the distress of those days and prior to the second coming. Matthew also mentions false prophets appearing before the great distress. Significantly Luke adds 'but before all this' (referring to wars, earthquakes etc) and both Luke and Mark include the word synagogue referring to a Jewish assembly. Persecution would start from the Jews as Acts confirms. However persecution would extend to all nations and all men would hate you. One of the results of the persecution will be that you will stand before govensors and kings as witnesses to them (Mark 13:9, Luke 21:12-13) in the power of the Holy Spirit (Mark 13:11). Just as the two witnesses of Revelation 11 witnessed in the power of the Holy Spirit (11:4). The gospel was first preached in Jerusalem and it was from Jerusalem that persecution first came, it is reasonable to infer that as the gospel spreads then so will be the extent of the persecution. When the gospel reaches the entire world then all men will hate Christians. In the section about persecution and witnessing (Mat 24:9-14) Matthew says " And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come". It seems that as long as the gospel is preached there will be persecution, and the end will not come before the church has finished its work of preaching the gospel to all nations. In the great commission of Mat 28:18-20, in which we are told to make disciples of all nations, Jesus says that he is with us to the very end of the age. I think that it is reasonable to say that the end that Jesus is talking about in Mat 24:14 is then end of the age rather than the end of Jerusalem. That presumably means that we are to be making disciples right up to the end. The idea that the church is raptured before the tribulation and that during the tribulation the 144,000 Jewish missionaries or the two witnesses will complete what the church failed to do, namely to preach the gospel and make disciples of all nations is a very serious error and one that will seriously weaken the evangelistic efforts of the church in the West.

Even if you believe that the church will be raptured before the great tribulation that does not mean that you escape persecution or deception by false prophets. False prophets and persecution has occurred over the last 2000 years (or more -- there were false prophets and persecution in the Old Testament too).

Both Luke and Mark warn of being betrayed by close family members (parents, brothers, and children)

relatives and friends. Matthew extends this list by saying that during persecution many will turn away from the faith and betray and hate each other. In the midst of all this he talks of false prophets who will deceive many people. He goes on to talk of increasing wickedness leading to the love of most growing cold. All three end by saying that he who stands firm to the end will be saved (Luke; gain life). The Greek word used for standing firm is *hupomeno*. The idea being that we remain under, endure and persevere through these circumstances even to death if necessary.

5278. *hupomeno*, hoop-om-en'-o; from G5259 and G3306; to stay under (behind), i.e. remain; fig. to undergo, i.e. bear (trials), have fortitude, persevere:--abide, endure, (take) patient (-ly), suffer, tarry behind.

It is the same word used of Jesus in Heb 12:2-3. If we are to endure such difficult times we need to fix our eyes upon Jesus who endured even death on a cross.

(Heb 12:2-3 NIV) Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured (*hupomeno*) the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. {3} Consider him who endured (*hupomeno*) such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Peter uses this word *hupomeno* when we suffer for doing good and then gives Christ as our example in 1 Pet 2:20-24.

(1 Pet 2:20-24 NIV) But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure (*hupomeno*) it, this is commendable before God. {21} To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. {22} "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." {23} When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. {24} He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

James pronounces blessing for the man who endures trial, that blessing is the crown of life.

(James 1:12 NIV) Blessed is the man who perseveres (*hupomeno*) under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

In 1 Cor 2:9 Paul writes about the reward that God has for those who love him.

(1 Cor 2:9 NIV) However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"--

In Rev 2:26-28 Jesus speaks of the reward given to him 'who overcomes and does my will to the end'.

(Rev 2:26-28 NIV) To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations-- {27} 'He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery' -- just as I have received authority from my Father. {28} I will also give him the morning star.

In Rev 2:10 Jesus tells the church at Smyrna not to be afraid of what they are about to suffer. He tells them that the devil is going to imprison them to test them - Jesus says be faithful even to the point of death and I will give you the crown of life. We need to take these words to heart; do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. He tells them the source of such persecution, it is from the devil even though it may come through the hands of men.

(Rev 2:10 NIV) Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

There is a parallel section to this in Matthew 10 that amplifies what Matthew is saying in 24:9-14. It includes the next two verses, which are especially pertinent to what we have been saying.

(Mat 10:28 NIV) Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

(Mat 10:32-33 NIV) "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. {33} But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him

before my Father in heaven.

<p>Section 2. Persecution and the preaching of the gospel to all nations. Witnessing in the power of the Holy Spirit. Betrayal by close family. Hated by the world because of Jesus. There will be apostasy but those endure till the end will be saved.</p>		
<p>(Luke 21:12-19 NIV) "But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. {13} This will result in your being witnesses to them. {14} But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. {15} For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. {16} You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. {17} All men will hate you because of me. {18} But not a hair of your head will perish. {19} By standing firm you will gain life.</p>	<p>(Mark 13:9-13 NIV) "You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. {10} And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. {11} Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit. {12} "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. {13} All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.</p>	<p>(Mat 24:9-14 NIV) "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. {10} At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, {11} and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. {12} Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, {13} but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.</p> <p>{14} And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.</p>

After the great distress and before the Second Coming there are further warnings about false prophets and false Christ's who will perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect -- if that were possible.

<p>Section 4a. A warning about false Christ's and false prophets after the distress.</p>		
	<p>(Mark 13:21-27 NIV) At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ !' or, 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it. {22} For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect--if that were possible. {23} So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.</p>	<p>(Mat 24:23-31 NIV) At that time 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 appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect--if that were possible. {25} See, I have told you ahead of time.</p> <p>{26} "So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. {27} For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. {28} Wherever there is a carcass,</p>

		there the vultures will gather.
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Note: If the great distress spoken about in Mat 24:21, Mark 13:19 and Luke 21:23 is right at the end of the age and the church is raptured before the distress then the warnings about false prophets would be futile.

3. The great distress

The following table compares the three passages about the distress from Luke, Mark and Matthew. Luke was writing for the gentiles and therefore he spells out the great distress in a clearer manner than Mark and Matthew. This is the third of five sections taken from Luke 21:8-36, Mark 13:5-36, Mat 24:4-44, an examination of the complete table shows that there is a high degree of correlation between the different authors.

Section 3. The great distress.		
<p>(Luke 21:20-24 NIV) "When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. {21} Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. {22} For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written.</p> <p>{23} How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers!</p> <p>There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. {24} They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.</p>	<p>(Mark 13:14-20 NIV) "When you see 'the abomination that causes desolation' standing where it does not belong--let the reader understand--then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. {15} Let no one on the roof of his house go down or enter the house to take anything out. {16} Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak.</p> <p>{17} How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! {18} Pray that this will not take place in winter,</p> <p>{19} because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now--and never to be equaled again. {20} If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them.</p>	<p>(Mat 24:15-22 NIV) "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel--let the reader understand-- {16} then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. {17} Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. {18} Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak.</p> <p>{19} How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! {20} Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath.</p> <p>{21} For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now--and never to be equaled again. {22} If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.</p>

In the section about the great distress all three authors talk about:

1. Those in Judea fleeing to the mountains
2. How terrible those days will be for pregnant women
3. Great distress

It would be reasonable to assume that they are all talking about the same event.

All three writers tell those in Judea to flee to the mountains so the great distress spoken of is limited to

the area of Judea, it is not a world-wide event.

If we compare the parallel scriptures from Luke, Mark and Matthew we find that Luke sheds much light on this obscure topic. From Luke's account it seems clear that the distress accounted in Matthew and Mark is the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 66-70. When Roman armies under siege surrounded it and then destroyed the city. Those that were left alive were deported to various other countries and Jerusalem was in the hands of gentiles until 1967. This of course answers one of the disciples' original questions regarding the destruction of the temple, which was also completely destroyed by the Romans, in fulfilment of Jesus words. We tend to overlook this obvious fulfilment of prophecy because our knowledge of history is lacking, but Jesus himself made other prophecies concerning the destruction of Jerusalem which we should not overlook.

Jesus prophecies about Jerusalem

Mat 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 record a prophecy that Jesus made about the destruction of the temple which was fulfilled in AD 70. Jesus gave other prophecies regarding the destruction of Jerusalem, which are given below.

(Luke 19:41-44 NIV) As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it {42} and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace--but now it is hidden from your eyes. {43} **The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. {44} They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you.**"

(Luke 23:28-31 NIV) Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; **weep for yourselves and for your children.** {29} For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' {30} Then "'they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!"' {31} For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

(Mat 23:34-36 NIV) Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. {35} And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. {36} **I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation.**

(Luke 11:49-51 NIV) Because of this, God in his wisdom said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.' {50} Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, {51} from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. **Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all.**

There is evidence that evil spirits ran amuck during the siege of Jerusalem (see Chilton).

(Mat 12:43-45 NIV) "When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. {44} Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. {45} Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first. **That is how it will be with this wicked generation.**"

Luke talks about wrath coming upon this people Luke 21:24. We need to understand that the Christians escaped this distress because they were scattered by persecution and fled Jerusalem (Acts 8:1). Luke's account warns any remaining Christians in Judea to escape to the mountains when they see Jerusalem surrounded by armies (see also Mat 24:16 and Mark 13:14). Also the Jews had rejected Christ in favour of Caesar (John 19:15) and were therefore under God's wrath (John 3:36). They also told Pilate "Let his blood be on us and on our children" (Mat 27:24-25).

John 19:15 But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!" "Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked. "**We have no king but Caesar,**" the chief priests answered.

(Mat 27:24-25 NIV) When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!" {25} All the people answered, "**Let his blood be on us and on our children!**"

(John 3:36 NIV) Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

After they rejected Jesus the kingdom of God was taken from them and handed to the gentiles.

(Mat 21:42-43 NIV) Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone ; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes"? {43} "**Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.**

Paul preached the gospel to the Jews first but the Jews refused to listen to Paul's words so he turned to the Gentiles instead (Acts 13:45-48, 18:6, 26:16-18). Not only had they rejected Jesus Christ they had rejected Paul's teaching as well.

(Acts 28:26-28 NIV) "Go to this people and say, "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving." {27} For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.' {28} "Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!"

At this point we should also note that there is significant evidence that many Jews will turn to Christ before the Second Coming.

(Mat 23:39 NIV) For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

(Rom 11:25 NIV) I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.

(2 Cor 3:15-16 NIV) Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. {16} But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

(Rom 11:11 NIV) Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious.

(Rom 11:23 NIV) And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.

See also Lev 26:40-45.

4. The Second Coming and gathering of the elect.

<p>Section 4. A warning about false Christs and false prophets. But in those days, following that distress, "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken." (Isa 13:10, Ezek 32:7, Joel 2:10, 3:15, Mat 24:29, Luke 21:25, Rev 6:12). At that time the Son of Man will come in clouds with great power and glory.</p>
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<p>(Luke 21:25-27 NIV) "There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. {26} Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.</p> <p>{27} At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.</p>	<p>(Mark 13:21-27 NIV) At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ !' or, 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it. {22} For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect--if that were possible. {23} So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.</p> <p>{24} "But in those days, following that distress, "'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; {25} the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'</p> <p>{26} "At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.</p> <p>{27} And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.</p>	<p>(Mat 24:23-31 NIV) At that time 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 appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect--if that were possible. {25} See, I have told you ahead of time.</p> <p>{26} "So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. {27} For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. {28} Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.</p> <p>{29} "Immediately after the distress of those days "'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'</p> <p>{30} "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.</p> <p>{31} And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.</p>
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This passage falls into four sections:

1. Warnings about false Christs and false prophets.
2. Signs in the heavens and Luke adds on the earth
3. The Son of Man coming in great power and great glory
4. The gathering of the elect.

Difficulties with the passage.

The major problem in this passage is the phrase "Immediately after the distress of those days" in Matthew 24:29. We have already seen that Luke is clearly talking about the destruction in his 'distress' passage (Luke 21:20-24). Could it be that Matthew and Mark are speaking about a different distress to

Luke or did the events that Matthew describes in Mat 24:29-31 actually happen close to AD 70, in which case we are the ones left behind.

Both Matthew and Mark quote Isa 13:9-13.

(Isa 13:9-13 NIV) See, the day of the LORD is coming --a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger-- to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it. {10} The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. {11} I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless. {12} I will make man scarcer than pure gold, more rare than the gold of Ophir. {13} Therefore I will make the heavens tremble; and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the LORD Almighty, in the day of his burning anger.

If we look at another time when OT scripture is quoted, like when Peter quotes Joel 2:28-31 on the day of Pentecost. We can see that Peter includes God pouring out his Spirit and the signs in the heaven and on earth that precede the day of the Lord in one event when in fact they are separated by a long time interval. The events that Peter describes start with the start of the last days, which started at Pentecost, and end with the signs in the heavens and the coming of the Lord.

(Acts 2:16-21 NIV) No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: {17} "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. {18} Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. {19} I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. {20} The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. {21} And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

(Joel 2:28-31 NIV) 'And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. {29} Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. {30} I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. {31} The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

We should ask then whether Jesus is using the same principle here in that the last days start with the destruction of Jerusalem and end with the signs in the heavens, with no apparent gap between them?

Other difficult passages of the same kind are:

(Mat 16:27-28 NIV) For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. {28} I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

(Mat 26:64 NIV) "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

(Mark 8:38-9:1 NIV) If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels." 9:1 And he said to them, "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power."

(Mark 14:61-62 NIV) But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" {62} "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

False prophets

Both Matthew and Mark warn us about false Christs and false prophets prior to the Second Coming. The false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect--if that were possible. Jesus then says in Mat 24:25 'See, I have told you ahead of time'. Now this is a strong warning from the Lord and we need to take heed of what he says. However this does not mean that all signs and wonders are performed by false prophets, but he warns us not to be deceived by signs and wonders. He warns us not to follow after false Christs on earth because when the true Christ returns he will be visible to all men and nations, who will mourn on account of the coming of the son of man. His coming will be visible to unbelievers and they will mourn. After this he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

5. Warnings - to be on guard, to be alert, to keep watch, to be careful.

Section 5. He then tells his disciples that this generation will not pass away until all these things have happened. There follow warnings to watch and pray so that we can escape all that is about to happen and stand before the Son of Man.

<p>(Luke 21:28-36 NIV) When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."</p> <p>{29} He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. {30} When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. {31} Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. {32} "I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. {33} Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.</p> <p>{34} "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. {35} For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth.</p>	<p>(Mark 13:28-37 NIV) "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. {29} Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. {30} I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. {31} Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.</p> <p>{32} "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.</p> <p>{33} Be on guard! Be alert ! You do not know when that time will come. {34} It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.</p>	<p>(Mat 24:32-44 NIV) "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. {33} Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. {34} I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. {35} Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.</p> <p>{36} "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.</p> <p>{37} As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. {38} For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; {39} and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. {40} Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. {41} Two women will be grinding with a</p>
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<p>{36} Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."</p>	<p>{35} "Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back--whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. {36} If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. {37} What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"</p>	<p>hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.</p> <p>{42} "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. {43} But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. {44} So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.</p>
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The great difficulty with this passage is "I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened" spoken of in Matthew, Mark and Luke. If the 'all these things' refers to the destruction of Jerusalem, which did occur in the generation that Jesus was speaking to, then there is no problem. You could of course say that Jesus did come again in judgement against Jerusalem, however what about the gathering of the elect? Josephus does tell us that there were signs in the heavens during the siege of Jerusalem, but what about the nations being in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea of Luke 21:25? All in all it is difficult to know what Jesus means by 'this generation'.

<p>{29} He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. {30} When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. {31} Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. {32} <u>"I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.</u> {33} Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.</p>	<p>(Mark 13:28-37 NIV) "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. {29} Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. {30} <u>I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.</u> {31} Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.</p> <p>{32} "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.</p>	<p>(Mat 24:32-44 NIV) "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. {33} Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. {34} <u>I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.</u> {35} Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.</p> <p>{36} "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.</p>
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Luke has a parallel passage.

(Luke 17:20-37 NIV) Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, {21} nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you." {22} Then he said to his disciples, "The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. {23} Men will tell you, 'There he is!' or 'Here he is!' Do not go running off after them. {24} For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other. {25} But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. {26} "Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. {27} People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and

destroyed them all. {28} "It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. {29} But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. {30} "It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. {31} On that day no one who is on the roof of his house, with his goods inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. {32} Remember Lot's wife! {33} Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. {34} I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. {35} Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left." {36} {37} "Where, Lord?" they asked. He replied, "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather."

If the great distress occurred in AD70 then it has come and gone. However we still need to be on our guard against false prophets. The church is still being persecuted. Luke 21:34 and Mark 13:33 both warn us to be careful, be on guard, be alert, to keep watch because we do not know on what day he will return.

{Luke 21:34 NIV} "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. {35} For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth.

Compare Luke's warning with Paul's in 1 Thess 5:1-3.

(1 Th 5:1-3 NIV) Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, {2} for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. {3} While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

{Mark 13:33 NIV} Be on guard! Be alert ! You do not know when that time will come. {34} It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

Persecution is easy to recognise and the bible says that we must persevere to the end. False prophets work through deception and are much more difficult to spot. They may say a lot of truth but with a little error cleverly disguised. The false prophet of Rev 13 looks like a lamb but speaks like a dragon (Satan) and when Satan speaks he speaks lies because he is the father of lies.

(John 8:44 NIV) You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Significantly at the end of the Luke passage our Lord tells us to be careful, and to watch and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen (Luke 21:36). This passage would not make any sense if the saints were raptured prior to the period of distress.

(Luke 21:34-36 NIV) "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. {35} For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. {36} Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."

The Matthew and Mark warnings refer to the Second Coming itself.

(Mark 13:32-33 NIV) "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. {33} Be on guard! Be alert ! You do not know when that time will come.

(Mark 13:35-37 NIV) "Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come--whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. {36} If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. {37} What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"

(Mat 25:13 NIV) "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

Jesus will be away a long time - Mat 24-25

Matthew has another chapter following 24, which warns us that Jesus will be **a long time** coming. We need to be ready because he will come unexpectedly.

The 'long times' of Mat 24-25.

(Mat 24:48 NIV) But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away **a long time**,'

(Mat 25:5 NIV) The bridegroom was **a long time** in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

(Mat 25:19 NIV) "After **a long time** the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them.

Two of these parables end with a warning to be ready when the master returns because he will return unexpectedly.

(Mat 24:50-51 NIV) The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. {51} He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

(Mat 25:10-13 NIV) "But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. {11} "Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!' {12} "But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.' {13} "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

The final parable in the Matthew 25 series is the parable of the sheep and goats. Which clearly depicts the judgement.

(Mat 25:31-32 NIV) "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. {32} All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

The 'all nations' of scripture.

Matthew notes that we will be hated by all nations. Both Mark and Matthew indicate that the gospel must be preached as a testimony to all nations. Matthew says that the end will come after the gospel has been preached to all nations. The great commission says that we must make disciples of all nations. Luke says that repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached to all nations. Romans says that through the proclamation of Jesus Christ all nations might believe and obey him. Revelation reveals that all nations will come and worship before God.

(Mat 24:9 NIV) "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be **hated by all nations** because of me.

(Mat 24:14 NIV) And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a **testimony to all nations**, and then the end will come.

(Mat 28:19 NIV) Therefore go and **make disciples of all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

(Luke 24:47 NIV) **and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations**, beginning at Jerusalem.

(Rom 16:25-26 NIV) Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages

past, {26} but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that **all nations might believe and obey him--**

(Rev 15:4 NIV) Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. **All nations will come and worship before you**, for your righteous acts have been revealed."

Pentecost

We need to examine Pentecost to see if this fulfils the Second Coming described in Mat 24:29-30.

(Mat 24:29-30 NIV) "Immediately after the distress of those days "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' {30} "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.

At Pentecost Peter says that the following verses from Joel were fulfilled then:

(Acts 2:19-20 NIV) I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. {20} The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

Due to the similarity between these verses and Mat 24:29-30 we need to examine Pentecost to see if this fulfilled the second coming as described in Matthew.

Jesus told his disciples that he would not leave them orphans, but he would come to them.

(John 14:16-18 NIV) And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever-- {17} the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. {18} I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

Peter when he preached at the time of Pentecost said that this event fulfilled the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32. In which he quotes "I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord." (Acts 2:19-20) This sounds very similar to Matthew 24:29-30.

(Acts 2:16-21 NIV) No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: {17} "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. {18} Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. {19} I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. {20} The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. {21} And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

Peter was quoting Joel 2:28-32.

(Joel 2:28-32 NIV) 'And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. {29} Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. {30} I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. {31} The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. {32} And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the survivors whom the LORD calls.

The main problem with this theory is that later on Paul writes that the coming of the Lord had not

already occurred.

(2 Th 2:1-5 NIV) Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, {2} not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. {3} Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. {4} He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. {5} Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things?

Peter, speaking of the Second Coming, says that the heavens will disappear with a roar. This has not yet happened.

(2 Pet 3:10 NIV) But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

It would seem to me that the 'last days' that Peter is talking about begin at Pentecost and finish with the "wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord." The last days will climax with the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

As Jesus was taken up from the disciples a cloud hid him from sight and two angels told the disciples that Jesus would come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven (Acts 1:9-11). He left in a body and will return with a body.

(Acts 1:4-12 NIV) On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. {5} For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." {6} So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" {7} He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. {8} But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." {9} After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. {10} They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. {11} "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." {12} Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city.

When Jesus came at Pentecost he came as the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Jesus) to endue the disciples with power to preach the gospel. But when he comes again he will return bodily.

(Acts 1:8 NIV) But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

(Luke 24:46-49 NIV) He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, {47} and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. {48} You are witnesses of these things. {49} I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

Jesus last command to the disciples is to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations beginning at Jerusalem. Let us do this and hasten his bodily return.

The Seven Trumpets and seven bowls of Revelation.

The seven trumpets a seven bowls of Revelation are sometimes associated in peoples minds with the great tribulation. You frequently hear phrases like 'we are about to enter the third trumpet'. So we would do well to examine the scriptures to see what they say. An examination of the seven seals shows that they affect all mankind. The first four seem to be of a general nature: wars, famine, plague and death. The fifth seal speaks of persecution and the death of Christians. The sixth seal speaks about God's wrath against sinners.

The Seven trumpets:

Prior to the seven trumpets the 144,000 servants of God are sealed on the forehead (7:1-3). This seal protects the 144,000 from the trumpets, just as in Ezek 9:4-6 a mark on the foreheads protected the righteous during the slaughter.

(Ezek 9:4-6 NIV) and said to him, "Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it." {5} As I listened, he said to the others, "Follow him through the city and kill, without showing pity or compassion. {6} Slaughter old men, young men and maidens, women and children, but do not touch anyone who has the mark. Begin at my sanctuary." So they began with the elders who were in front of the temple.

Who are the 144,000?

We should also ask who the 144,000 are? While the 144,000 are popularly known as 144,000 Jewish missionaries a closer examination shows that it is not so simple. One of the twelve tribes is missing Dan. Normally Joseph is not listed and his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh are listed, but here Joseph is listed and one of his sons Manasseh is listed. The list of the twelve tribes is also a census and in a census the priestly tribe of Levi is never listed, but here it is included in the list. The tribe of Judah is listed first in the position of the firstborn rather than Reuben the actual firstborn. The fact that there are exactly 12,000 from each tribe would indicate that there is symbolic significance to the census of the 144,000. Further the numbers 12,000, 144 are found when describing the New Jerusalem in 21:12-17. The city is a cube whose length, width and height are 12,000 stadia and the width of the walls is 144 cubits. We find that the city has twelve foundation upon which are the names of the twelve apostles and the city has twelve gates upon which are written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Judah is listed first because Jesus is from the tribe of Judah and he is the firstborn from the dead and the firstborn of many brothers. Dan is not listed because he went into idolatry and there will be no idolaters amongst the saints. Joseph is listed because he is a type of Christ, he was sold unjustly for a sum of money, he was unjustly imprisoned, he was raised to glory. Levi is listed because he is the priestly tribe and the saints are now a kingdom of priests. The New Jerusalem has twelve foundations named after the twelve apostles and the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles. The New Jerusalem has its twelve gates named after the twelve tribes and has twelve foundations named after the twelve apostles and it must therefore contain both saints from both the old and new testaments. I would therefore say that the 144,000 are the elect of God.

Looking at Rev 8:2-5 it seems that the seven trumpets are in answer to the prayers of the saints who are presumably still on earth at this time. The same censer that is used to offer the incense and the prayers of the saints is also used to hurl fire to the earth. If we look at the first six trumpets each one involves fire.

(Rev 8:1-6 NIV) When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. {2} And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets. {3} Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. {4} The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand. {5} Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake. {6} Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them.

First trumpet (8:1) - fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down upon the earth.
Second trumpet (8:8) - something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea.

Third trumpet (8:10) - a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers
Fourth trumpet (8:12) - and a third of the sun was struck,
Fifth trumpet (9:2) - smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace.
Sixth trumpet (9:18) - A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur

Only the seventh trumpet mentions God's wrath and that is against the nations not God's people (11:18). The trumpets come in a group of four and three. The last three are called the three woes. These are directed at the inhabitants of the earth (8:13).

In the fifth trumpet (first woe) the locusts are only allowed to torment those who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads (Rev 9:4). It would seem then that God's servants are on earth during the fifth trumpet.

The sixth trumpet or second woe is directed at unrepentant mankind (9:20). The purpose of the trumpets is to warn mankind to repent.

In addition to the sounding of the trumpets the two witnesses prophecy up to almost the end of the sixth trumpet (the second woe), see 11:14. They are raptured in 11:12. The seventh trumpet involves wrath upon the nations, judging the dead and rewarding God's servants the prophets and saints. The church would not suffer wrath at this stage; instead they get rewarded (11:18).

The seven bowls of God's wrath.

The seven bowls are bowls of God's wrath (15:1). Before the bowls are poured we see those victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name standing by the sea of glass; these were killed by the beast, see 13:15.

We can see that the first bowl is directed at those who have the mark of the beast and worshipped his image (16:2). The fifth bowl was poured on the throne of the beast.

After the sixth bowl was poured on the Euphrates (16:12) and we find that the spirits of demons performing miraculous signs gather the kings of the earth for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. There is a suggestion that there are some saints on earth at this stage in the warning and blessing of 16:15. This suggests to me that the Second Coming is very close at this time.

(Rev 16:15 NIV) "Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed."

The battle of Armageddon is mentioned in the next verse.

(Rev 16:16 NIV) Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

This battle is further mentioned in 17:14. This mentions the Lamb and with him his called, chosen and faithful followers. This suggests to me that the Second Coming and rapture have already occurred because we will be with him forever after the rapture (1 Th 4:17).

(Rev 17:14 NIV) They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings--and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."

And in 19:19.

(Rev 19:19 NIV) Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army.

On both of these occasions Jesus is accompanied by his army - his called, chosen and faithful followers.

The beasts of Revelation 13.

Satan uses these beasts to wage war against God's people, see 12:17. There are two beasts in Rev 13. The first is the beast out of the sea who exercises political power on behalf of Satan. The second beast is the one out of the earth who is also called the false prophet. He exercises economic and religious power on behalf of the first beast.

The beast out of the sea:

1. He derives his power, his throne, and authority from Satan.
2. He is a king or emperor, he has world-wide kingdom (Dan 7:23, Rev 16:10)
3. The whole world will worship the beast (apart from the saints)
4. In worshipping the beast they worship Satan who had given the beast his authority
5. He blasphemes God and slanders his name
6. He wages war against the saints and conquers them by imprisonment or death. Rev 13:7-10, Dan 7:21
7. He is given authority over the whole world, which he exercises for forty-two months.
8. He attacks and kills the two witnesses (11:7)
9. The number of the beast is man's number. His number is 666
10. He leads the inhabitant of the world to wage war against Christ (16:13, 19:19)

The beast out of the earth:

1. He looks harmless like a lamb but he speaks lies like Satan.
2. He exercises all the authority of the beast out of the sea.
3. He makes those on earth worship the first beast
4. He performs great miraculous signs before men
5. He deceives those on earth.
6. He sets up an image of the first beast and causes it to speak
7. He kills all those who refuse to worship the image
8. He forces everyone to receive the mark of the beast on the right hand or forehead
9. Without the mark no one could buy or sell (economic power)
10. He is later called the false prophet (16:13, 19:20)

To go into great details about these two beasts will take a long time. To many the first beast is Nero or the antichrist or the man of lawlessness. One thing is clear and that is he has power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. He uses prison and death to wage war against the saints. The saints are on earth during the reign of the beast, and they are either killed or imprisoned. The beast out of the Abyss (sea) also kills the two witnesses.

(Rev 13:7 NIV) He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation.

(Rev 13:9-10 NIV) He who has an ear, let him hear. {10} If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.

We see in 15:2 those who had overcome the beast and his image, for many this meant death.

(Rev 15:2 NIV) And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God

We see in 14:9-12 the eternal consequences of worshipping the beast and his image.

(Rev 14:9-12 NIV) A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, {10} he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. {11} And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name."

{12} This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.

Again we see in 20:4 those who had not worshipped the beast and his image, they had been beheaded. (Rev 20:4 NIV) I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

Here is a comparison between the beast of Revelation 13 and the beast from Daniel 7

Daniel 7	Revelation 13
<p>(Dan 7:3-8 NIV) Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea. {4} "The first was like a lion, and it had the wings of an eagle. I watched until its wings were torn off and it was lifted from the ground so that it stood on two feet like a man, and the heart of a man was given to it. {5} "And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, 'Get up and eat your fill of flesh!' {6} "After that, I looked, and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard. And on its back it had four wings like those of a bird. This beast had four heads, and it was given authority to rule. {7} "After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast--terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns.</p> <p>{8} "While I was thinking about the horns, there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them; and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth that spoke boastfully.</p> <p>(Dan 7:9-14 NIV) "As I looked, "thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. {10} A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened. {11} "Then I continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn was speaking. I kept looking until the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire. {12} (The other beasts had been stripped of their authority, but were allowed to live for a period of time.) {13} "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached</p>	<p>(Rev 13:1-2 NIV) And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. {2} The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority.</p> <p>(Rev 13:5-7 NIV) The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. {6} He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. {7} He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation.</p> <p>(Rev 19:20 NIV) But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.</p>

the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. {14} He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

(Dan 7:17-27 NIV) 'The four great beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth. {18} But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever--yes, for ever and ever.' {19} "Then I wanted to know the true meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others and most terrifying, with its iron teeth and bronze claws--the beast that crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. {20} I also wanted to know about the ten horns on its head and about the other horn that came up, before which three of them fell--the horn that looked more imposing than the others and that had eyes and a **mouth** that spoke **boastfully**. {21} As I watched, this horn was **waging war against the saints and defeating them**, {22} until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom. {23} "He gave me this explanation: 'The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth. It will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it. {24} The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom. After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings. {25} He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. **The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time.** {26} "'But the court will sit, and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever. {27} Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.'

(Rev 13:5-7 NIV) The beast was given a **mouth** to utter **proud** words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for **forty-two months**. {6} He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. {7} **He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them.** And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation.

(Rev 13:5 NIV) The beast was given a **mouth** to utter **proud** words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for **forty-two months**.

(Rev 15:4 NIV) Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."

Regarding the church's attitude to the beast these words from Daniel are appropriate:

(Dan 11:32 NIV) With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him.

The hour of trial (Rev 3:10).

(Rev 3:10 NIV) Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial (*peirasmos*) that is going to come upon the whole world to test (*peirazo*)

those who live on the earth.

The Greek word used for trial is *peirasmos*:G3986 which can mean trial, testing, temptation. The hour of trial is mentioned in Dan 12:1, Mark 13:19 and it is likely that it is depicted by the seven trumpets and Ch 7-19 later in Revelation. The hour of trial is for the world not for the church, which will be spiritually but not physically protected from it. The spiritual protection of the church is indicated in the sealing of the 144,000 (7:3), see also God's care of the woman in the desert (12:6, 14). The best example of this is the fifth trumpet in which the locusts are specifically told only to harm those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads (9:4 cf. Isa 18:3). The term 'the inhabitants of the earth', which is similar to 'those who live on the earth' (see 11:10, 14:6) always refers to the world not to the church (Rev 6:10, 8:13, 11:10, 13:8, 13:14, 17:8). This promise is not just for the church at Philadelphia but for all that fulfil the requirement of the promise, which is to endure patiently (see 1:9, 13:10, 14:12). Just as Satan tests the church in Smyrna through persecution (2:10), so God tests the world through trial or adversity. The meaning of the word 'keep' (Gk. *tereo*) is to guard, to watch over, so that the idea of this verse is preservation through the hour of trial.

(Rev 2:10 NIV) Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test (*peirazo*:G3985) you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

We should note from John's first letter that he says that 'this is the last hour' and he gives his reason for saying that this the last hour because many antichrists have come.

(1 John 2:18 NIV) Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour.

Other uses of 'hour' in Revelation

(Rev 9:15 NIV) And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind.

(Rev 14:7 NIV) He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

(Rev 17:12 NIV) "The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast.

(Rev 18:10 NIV) Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry: "Woe! Woe, O great city, O Babylon, city of power! In one hour your doom has come!"

The hour of trial is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. If we look through Revelation there are plenty of trials coming on the inhabitants of the earth. See 6:4, 6:8, 8:5, 8:7, 8:13, 9:3, 11:6, 12:12, 13:8, 13:2, 14:19, 16:1-2.

The time of distress spoken of by Daniel.

(Dan 12:1-2 NIV) "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 nations until then. But at that time your people--everyone whose name is found written in the book--will be delivered. {2} Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.

The definition of the Hebrew word translated as distress is given below:

6869. tsarah, tsaw-raw'; fem. of H6862; tightness (i.e. fig. trouble); trans. a female rival:--adversary, adversity, affliction, anguish, distress, tribulation, trouble.

First this passage is mentioned in close connection to the resurrection of the dead both of the righteous and evil. I think that we can safely say that the book is the book of life. Unfortunately it does not say

whether Daniel's people will be delivered at the start, during or at the end of the distress. It does seem that Michael will protect Daniel's people during this time of distress.

In answer to the question 'how long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled' one of the angels answered 'It will be for a time, times and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed.' To me this sounds like the death of the two witnesses when the gospel is no longer preached and God's people are imprisoned or killed.

(Dan 12:6-7 NIV) One of them said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, "How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?" {7} The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and I heard him swear by him who lives forever, saying, "It will be for a time, times and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed."

The angel says that 'the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end'. Therefore it is probably futile to speculate what he means.

(Dan 12:9-12 NIV) He replied, "Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end. {10} Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand. {11} "From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. {12} Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days.

We have already noted that the abomination that causes desolation refers to the destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple in AD 66-70. Whether there will be a second fulfilment of this no one knows. If a new temple is built and the daily sacrifice is resumed it will only further add to the guilt of the Jews. We should not be praying for a new temple or animal sacrifice, as it is a further rejection of the sacrifice that Jesus made. We should have nothing to do with that; I am sure that Satan would be delighted if it happens.

The man of lawlessness.

(2 Th 2:1-12 NIV) Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, {2} not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. {3} Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. {4} He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. {5} Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? {6} And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. {7} For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. {8} And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. {9} The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, {10} and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. {11} For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie {12} and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

The man of lawlessness (*hamartia*:G266) is called the man of sin by the KJV. Hamartia is usually translated as sin. 1 John 3:4 says that sin is lawlessness.

(1 John 3:4 NIV) Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.

There is a general correspondence between the man of sin and the two beasts of Rev 13 as the following table shows.

2 Thess 1	Rev 13
<p>{4}He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.</p>	<p>(Rev 13:5-7 NIV) The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. {6} He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. {7} He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation.</p>
<p>{8} And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming</p>	<p>(Rev 19:20 NIV) But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.</p>
<p>9} The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, {10} and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. {11} For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie {12} and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness</p>	<p>(Rev 13:13-14 NIV) And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. {14} Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived.</p>

We need to know that the NIV speaks of the rebellion in verse 3, which occurs prior to the Second Coming. The Greek word is apostasia:G646, the KJV translates this as a falling away and the NASB translates this as apostasy

646. apostasia, ap-os-tas-ee'-ah; fem. of the same as G647; defection from truth (prop. the state) ["apostasy"]:-falling away, forsake.

The apostasy is spoken of in Matthew and the cause is persecution.

(Mat 24:9-13 NIV) "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. {10} At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, {11} and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. {12} Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, {13} but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

(Mat 13:21 NIV) But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.

The man of lawlessness will appear shortly before Jesus comes again because he will be destroyed when Jesus appears. His coming will be associated with counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders that deceive the world. We need to be on our guard, Jesus warns us that false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect--if that were possible (Mat 24:24, Mark 13:22). The man of lawlessness is called the false prophet in Revelation and we should expect him to work counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders greater than anyone before him.

The day of the Lord will not come until the man of sin is revealed.

In answer to the question, will the church be on earth during the time that the man of lawlessness is revealed? We need to look at Paul's letter in more detail. Paul is writing to the Thessalonians because

some are saying that the day of the Lord has already come. He starts his letter with the main subject 'Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him'. He later equates these two things with 'the day of the Lord'.

(2 Th 2:1-3 NIV) Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, {2} not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. {3} Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction.

Paul is clearly say that these two things happen on the day of the Lord: the coming of the Lord and our being gathered to him. Now I think it is reasonable to say that the coming of the Lord refers to the day of the Second Coming and that our being gathered together refers to the rapture. He then says that 'that day', that is the day of the Lord, will not happen until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed. Therefore it seems that the church will be on earth during the manifestation of the man of lawlessness.

After Paul's discourse on the Second Coming, the resurrection and the rapture in 1 Thess 4:13-18. Paul continues with the next section concerning the times and dates of the day of the Lord (1 Thess 5:1-11). I think that it is quite reasonable to infer that the day of the Lord refers to what Paul had been speaking about in his previous section on the Second Coming, the resurrection and the rapture.

(1 Th 5:1-11 NIV) Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, {2} for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. {3} While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. {4} But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. {5} You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. {6} So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. {7} For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. {8} But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. {9} For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. {10} He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. {11} Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

The Antichrist.

When we come to look at the antichrist in scripture we are apt to be a little disappointed because scripture tells us very little. The fact is that the antichrist has been hyped beyond recognition by the secular media and some Christian sources. The Antichrist is only mentioned in the bible by John in his letters.

(1 John 2:18 NIV) Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour.

(1 John 2:22 NIV) Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist--he denies the Father and the Son.

(1 John 4:2-3 NIV) This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, {3} but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

(2 John 1:7 NIV) Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.

From these verses we can see that John distinguishes between the antichrist who is to come and the many antichrists who are here already. The distinguishing feature of the antichrist is that he denies the humanity and deity of Jesus Christ. He denies that Jesus came in the flesh (his humanity) and that Jesus is the Christ (his deity). He denies that 'I and the Father are one' (John 10:30) i.e. he denies the Father and the Son (1 John 2:22). We can be reasonably certain that the man of lawlessness that Paul describes

in 2 Thess 2 is the same future antichrist that John refers to in 1 John 2:18. While there are many who now deny the humanity and deity of Christ, the future antichrist will proclaim himself to be God (2 Thess 2:4).

The International Bible Commentary gives the following definition of the antichrist: '[Antichrist: one who assuming the guise of Christ opposes Christ--to be distinguished from 'false Christs' (Mat 24:24), i.e. messianic pretenders. Origen taught that 'all that Christ is in reality, Antichrist offers in false appearance; and so all false teaching which assumes the guise of truth, among heretics and even among heathen, is in some sense antichrist. The incarnation reveals the true destiny of man in his union with God through Christ; the lie of Antichrist is that man is divine apart from Christ'. Abbreviated from Westcott, pp. 69,90.]'. Vine says that antichrist can mean either 'against Christ' or 'instead of Christ' or perhaps, combining them both quotes Westcott above 'one who assuming the guise of Christ opposes Christ'.

The antichrist is the counterfeit of Christ because he proclaims himself to be God (2 Thess 2:4) and authenticates his claim by counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders (2 Thess 2:9). Instead of being the Holy One of God he is totally evil, he will evidence the work of Satan just as Jesus did the work of his Father. Just as the Father lives in Jesus so Satan will live in the antichrist. Judas is a type of the antichrist because Satan came into him as he was to betray Jesus (John 13:27) and both are doomed to destruction (John 17:12 & 2 Thess 2:3).

A comprehensive study of OT and NT references to the antichrist is given by Arthur W Pink in his book 'The Antichrist'. Much has been written on this subject but it should be noted that the antichrist is mentioned only four times as such in scripture and only by John (1 John 2:18, 22, 4:3, 2 John 1:7). It is clearly relevant in ones interpretation of Revelation whether the same John wrote both books because Revelation clearly figures a person who fits the description of the antichrist (Rev 13). However we owe more to Paul's description of the 'man of lawlessness' in 2 Thess 2:1-12 for what we know about the antichrist. John, it seems in his epistles, is more concerned about describing a test for heresy than *the* coming of the future antichrist.

It is clear from 1 John 2:18 and 1 Thess 2:5 that the early church was clearly taught about the coming of the antichrist, but unfortunately we do not have all of Paul's teaching on this subject. John says that *the* antichrist is *coming* and that even now *many* antichrists have *come* (1 John 2:18) just as the spirit of the antichrist is coming and is already in the world (1 John 4:3). Similarly Paul talks about the revealing of the man of lawlessness (2 Thess 2:3, 9) and that the secret power of lawlessness is already at work (2 Thess 2:6). John contrasts the Spirit of God with the spirit of the antichrist who does not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh (1 John 4:3, 2 John 1:7). Or the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ, 'Such a man is the antichrist--he denies the Father and the Son' (1 John 2:22). That is he denies the most fundamental truth of the gospel that Jesus is the Son of God, God's anointed one, who lived bodily on the earth. The two truths that John is referring to are that Jesus lived on earth as a man (he came in the flesh) and that he was God (he is the Christ). The antichrist denies the unique relationship between the Father and the Son. This is the unique truth of Christianity, which Christians believe and any departure from this is heresy and the first test for heresy. In his gospel John spells out the divinity of Jesus (John 1:1) and the fact that he lived in the world bodily as a man (John 1:14). The whole of John's gospel gives us a description of the relationship between the Father and the Son, which also the antichrist and the spirit of the antichrist would deny.

Stott points out from 1 John 2:18-23 that our confession before men of who Jesus Christ is (his humanity and deity) determines whether we possess the Father or not (v22, 23). While in 1 John 4:2-6 our confession of who Jesus Christ is determines whether we have the Spirit of God or not. In 2 John 1:7 those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh (both his humanity and divinity) are both deceivers and the antichrist. The antichrist will carry this to its extreme by proclaiming himself to be God (1 Thess 2:4), counterfeiting miracles to authenticate his claim (v9) and deceiving those refuse to believe the truth about Jesus Christ and delight in wickedness (v12). Thus the antichrist clearly denies both the humanity and deity of Christ because he proclaims himself to be God. This also demonstrates that the new age teaching that men are gods is most dangerous.

Berkhof points out that (a) the anti-Christian principle (of the antichrist) was already at work in the days of Paul and John according to their own testimony; (b) that it will reach its highest power towards the end of the world; (c) the Daniel passages about the antichrist (Dan 7:8, 23-26, 11:35 ff.) point to the

political and Paul the ecclesiastical (power of the antichrist). While in Revelation 13 both sides are depicted together; the two may be successive revelations of the anti-Christian power; and (d) that probably this power will finally be concentrated in a single individual, the embodiment of all wickedness.

2 Th 2:1-12	Mat 24	Daniel	Revelation
{1-2}	(Mat 24:4-5)		Rev 13:11
{3}	(Mat 24:10)	(Dan 8:12)	(Rev 17:8)
{4}	(Mat 24:15)	(Dan 7:25; 9:27; 11:31)	(Rev 13:5-6)
{5-6}			
{7-8}		(Dan 7:11; 7:22)	(Rev 19:20)
{9-10}	(Mat 24:24)	(Dan 8:25)	(Rev 13:13-14, 16:14)
{11}	(Mat 24:5)		

Satan's tactics:

We have already seen that in Mat 24 and Mark 13 Jesus refers to persecution and false prophets. If we now examine the seven churches found in Revelation we can see that some of them also suffer persecution and from false prophets. It is commonly held that the seven churches of Revelation were chosen because they represent the various conditions of churches both in history and geographically. They also serve to describe the boundary of conditions that can apply to the church and we should note that they are all part of the church of Christ. Even Laodicea who Jesus was about to vomit out of his mouth, see how tenderly he speaks when he says 'those whom I love I rebuke and discipline' (Rev 3:19).

In the letters to the seven churches you can see Satan's tactics. Namely persecution (murder) and false doctrine (lies). He is a murderer and father of lies (John 8:44). The Devil means slanderer or false accuser and Satan means accuser (Zech 3:1). Three times in the letters to the seven churches Satan is mentioned in relation to the slander (lies) of the Jews (2:9); where Satan has his throne and Antipas was put to death (2:13); the synagogue of Satan who are liars (3:9). These fit the pattern of Satan - lies and murder.

- Ephesus - does not tolerate false apostles, they persevere but they have lost their first love
- Smyrna - suffers persecution and slander (lies)
- Pergamum - suffer persecution and false teaching
- Thyatira - false prophet who deceives the people to sexual immorality and idolatry
- Sardis - reputation of being alive but are dead
- Philadelphia - patient endurance under persecution and slander
- Laodicea - lukewarm

Satan could safely leave Sardis and Laodicea alone since they were spiritually close to death. These are two churches that are untroubled by false prophets or by persecution. The Lord has virtually nothing good to say about them. A careful study of the seven churches has much to teach us but it might be uncomfortable reading as we find our church there.

Note that not all the churches are persecuted, not all the churches are infiltrated by false prophets and some are persecuted and infiltrated by false prophets. Since when was Satan fair. The church in China is facing persecution and the problem of false teaching arises because they have few bibles and teaching materials.

Revelation 13:

We can see Satan's tactics in Rev 13 as he wages war against Christians (Rev 12:17, 13:7). The beast from the sea persecutes Christians by imprisonment and death (13:10). The beast out of the earth looks like a lamb (the false Christ or prophet) but speaks like a dragon (lies). He kills all those who refuse to

worship the beast and its image. Satan is a murderer and a liar (John 8:44).

(Rev 12:17 NIV) Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring--those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

(Rev 13:7 NIV) He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation.

(Rev 13:10 NIV) If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.

(Rev 13:11 NIV) Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon.

The false prophet uses coercion and deception (false miracles) to deceive those living on the earth.

(Rev 13:13-15 NIV) And he **performed great and miraculous signs**, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. {14} Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he **deceived** the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. {15} He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and **cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed.**

Remember the three classic enemies of the Christian - the world, the flesh and the Devil.

(1 John 2:15-16 NIV) Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. {16} For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--comes not from the Father but from the world.

(1 Pet 5:8 NIV) Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

(Gal 5:17 NASB) For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.

The seduction of the world.

In Revelation it the great prostitute who represents the world and its seduction, who holds her gold cup up to the world. Like the devil's other henchmen she also persecutes the saints.

(Rev 17:6 NIV) I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly astonished.

(Rev 18:24 NIV) In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth."

Here Jesus issues a warning to his people.

(Rev 18:4 NIV) Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues;

The millstone in Rev 18:21 should remind us of the causes of sin (Mat 18:6).

(Rev 18:21 NIV) Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: "With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again.

(Mat 18:6-7 NIV) But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. {7} "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!

The parable of the Sower.

In the parable of the sower we can see that the things of the world come in like weeds and choke the word so that it proves unfruitful. The worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth, life's riches and pleasures, they choke the word so that they do not mature and produce fruit. We need to put the next life before this life.

(Mat 13:22 NIV) The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.

(Mark 4:18-19 NIV) Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; {19} but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.

(Luke 8:14 NIV) The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.

Watch out for false prophets.

We have seen Satan's tactics against the church; he is a murderer and a liar. Therefore he fights the church with persecution and false prophets who bring false teaching. While the church in the West is relatively free from persecution it is wide open to false teaching. False prophets work by deception and most commonly with subtle half-truths. The main way we can protect ourselves is to examine new teaching in the light of scripture. If any prophecy, revelation or teaching conflicts with scripture we should reject it. Even if it is associated with miracles that does not authenticate it. That does not mean that all miracles are from Satan, it is not as easy as that. Satan is a spirit being and he works through men. As the last day approaches we can expect greater power from both heaven and the pit.

(Eph 4:14 NIV) Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.

(Acts 20:30 NIV) Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.

(Rom 16:17-18 NIV) I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. {18} For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.

(2 Tim 4:3-4 NIV) For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. {4} They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

(2 Pet 2:1-3 NIV) But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them--bringing swift destruction on themselves. {2} Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. {3} In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

(1 John 4:1-3 NIV) Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. {2} This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, {3} but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

(Mat 7:15-16 NIV) "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. {16} By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?"

(Mat 24:11 NIV) and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.

(Mat 24:4-5 NIV) Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. {5} For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many.

(2 Cor 11:13-15 NIV) For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. {14} And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. {15} It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.

(1 Tim 4:1-5 NIV) The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. {2} Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. {3} They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. {4} For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, {5} because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.

(1 Tim 1:3-7 NIV) As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer {4} nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work--which is by faith. {5} The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. {6} Some have wandered away from these and turned to meaningless talk. {7} They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.

Miracles:

We should note that miracles do not authenticate a prophet, Jesus warns us about false prophets who will perform miracles. Both the man of lawlessness of 2 Thess 2:9-10 and the beast out of the earth (the false prophet) of Rev 13:13-14 do miraculous signs which deceive those on earth. We should also note that the two witnesses (true prophets of God) also do miracles Rev 11:5-6.

(Mat 24:24-25 NIV) For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect--if that were possible. {25} See, I have told you ahead of time.

(Mat 7:22-23 NIV) Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' {23} Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

(2 Th 2:9-10 NIV) The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, {10} and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

(Rev 13:13-14 NIV) And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. {14} Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived.

(Rev 16:13-14 NIV) Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. {14} They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.

Pergamum and Thyatira

We should take note of the experience of Pergamum and Thyatira, both of whom suffered from false prophets. Their teaching led to sexual immorality and idolatry.

Pergamum

(Rev 2:14-15 NIV) Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. {15} Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

Thyatira

(Rev 2:20 NIV) Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads (deceives) my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.

False teaching in the early church.

There was false teaching in the early church. Some said that the resurrection had already come and others said that the day of the Lord i.e. his Second Coming had already occurred. Others said that there was no resurrection of the dead. There were the Judiasers in Galatians who want to drag the church back under the law rather than faith and the Gnostics in Colossians.

(2 Tim 2:18 NIV) who have wandered away from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some.

(2 Th 2:1-2 NIV) Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, {2} not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come.

(1 Cor 15:12-13 NIV) But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? {13} If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

(Gal 1:6-7 NIV) I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-- {7} which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.

(Col 2:20-23 NIV) Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: {21} "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? {22} These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. {23} Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

Finally do not confuse false teachers with sincere teachers who make mistakes. James says that we all stumble in many ways.

(James 3:1-2 NIV) Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. {2} We all stumble in many ways. If

anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.

(2 Cor 4:2 NIV) Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

(2 Tim 2:15 NIV) Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly (accurately, carefully) handles the word of truth.

(2 Tim 4:2 NIV) Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction.

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