

God's Wrath versus Tribulation

There is a popular teaching that the last seven years of the age are God's wrath. **But that's not what the Bible says.** Another teaching is that the events Jesus describes as birth pains and great tribulation in Matthew 24 are God's wrath. **That's not what the Bible teaches either. Great tribulation is not God's wrath!** The purposes and timing and nature of these two events are entirely different!

The first mention of God's wrath in Revelation is in regard to the trumpet judgments. After the sixth seal is broken in Revelation 6:12 and the signs of verses 12-14 take place, mention is made in verse 17 that the great day of their wrath has come. This is the first mention of God's wrath. If we follow the text down, we see that God's wrath begins to be poured out at the first trumpet judgment. **Therefore the events of the seals are not God's wrath!**

The fifth seal martyrs call out for vengeance from the Lord, but they are told to wait until an additional quota of martyrs comes in. These additional martyrs come in Revelation Chapter 7, after the breaking of the sixth seal but **before** the seventh seal is broken. Therefore the vengeance of God cannot take place until sometime after the sixth seal is broken. Following an interlude of silence and a sealing of the 144000, God's wrath begins in Revelation Chapter 8 with the blowing of the first trumpet. There is no indication of wrath before the first trumpet judgment.

The first five seals have to do with events leading up to and including the great tribulation that Jesus identifies in Matthew 24, and the church is very much involved and on earth during this time of great tribulation. Jesus compares the events leading up to great tribulation as the beginning of birth pains in Matthew 24:8. The beginning of great tribulation matches with the breaking of the fourth seal, and the martyrs of the fifth seal are the result of the persecution that takes place during that great tribulation.

So we see that the period of great tribulation that Jesus talks about in Matthew 24:21 is not God's wrath. Great tribulation is directed toward the church in order to purify her and birth her as a bride without spot or wrinkle. Hence we see a great multitude coming out of great tribulation in Revelation 7 having washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Wrath is God's response to the unbelieving and unrepentant on earth who have brought this great tribulation upon the church. Until we understand this difference between wrath and great tribulation, we will always be confused as to the calling and destiny of the church, and we will be confused when the events of the end of the age come upon us. The church is not appointed to wrath. But she can expect great tribulation to the extent that she does not repent (see the letter to the church at Thyatira where the members will be thrown into great tribulation if they do not repent).

In summary, the Bible mentions wrath only in association with the trumpets and the bowls. Wrath is not associated with the seals. Only great tribulation is associated with the seals. God's wrath begins with the first trumpet, and the trumpet judgments cover approximately one-third of the earth. The bowls are the final wrath of God, and they cover the entire earth. The church is on earth during the trumpets, but she is removed at the seventh trumpet just prior to the pouring out of the first bowl. As the Israelites were protected from the plagues poured out on the Egyptians, so will the church be protected during the trumpet judgments. These will be the days of the fulfillment of Psalm 91, when the judgments and plagues will not come near our tents provided we put our trust in God.

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Great Tribulation --- What is its Purpose?

One can learn about the purpose of something by observing what it produces. For instance, when people go into a grocery store, they come out with groceries. When people go into a gas station, they come out with a tank full of gas. When people go into a hospital, they hopefully come out in better health. When they go to school, they come out hopefully with some education.

When people go into great tribulation, they come out having washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

*After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands . . . Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?" I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "**These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation**, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (Revelation 7:9, 13-14)*

Hence we can say that a purpose of great tribulation is to make a people who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Just to make sure that we understand that these who come out of great tribulation are the church (at least some of the church), we need to read Jesus' warning to His church at Thyatira:

*'I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her **into great tribulation**, unless they repent of her deeds. And I will kill her children with pestilence, and **all the churches will know** that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.'*
(Revelation 2:21-23)

So we see the church can find herself in great tribulation if she does not repent. Notice that Jesus says that each one in the churches will receive in that time according to their (our?) deeds. There is no way to avoid this truth. People who wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb are by definition the church. And it is those in particular who need cleansing. They may not be the whole church, but it is a large number of the church for they are described as without number.

It seems like great tribulation can be compared to a washing machine. You go in dirty; you come out clean. And from the comment according to their deeds, it would seem that there are different cycles; i.e., power wash, normal cycle, and perhaps if one is not so dirty, gentle cycle. God will only give to each what is needed in order to emerge clean.

Why all of a sudden at the end of the age is there this thing called Great Tribulation? I think it is because Jesus is coming back for a bride without spot or wrinkle, and the only way He can get such a cleansed and holy bride is to put His saints through great tribulation. We have the promises of God with which to become holy and set apart from the world. But we also know that the flesh fights that sanctification every step of the way.

I heard a Bible teacher on TV once say that if Jesus puts His bride through great tribulation, the Bible would have to be rewritten. The idea was repugnant to him. The obvious letter of scripture can be completely ignored in favor of some doctrine that pleases man, but is a total lie. The truth is that Jesus can only get a bride by putting her through great tribulation, because it is only through great tribulation that His bride can be made ready.

Is there a way to escape great tribulation? It would seem so. There is a company of believers seen in heaven before the onset of great tribulation who are called first fruits of the greater harvest to come. These are found at the beginning of Revelation chapter 14. The final harvest comes at the end of that chapter. Why do they escape great tribulation? Because they are pure and holy and no lie is found in them and they follow the Lamb wherever He goes. In other words, they hear His voice and obey and they have applied the promises of God to their lives. When God said, Be holy, for I am holy, they took Him seriously. Satan consequently has nothing in them in which to gain a claw hold. They are already clean and they don't have to go through the washing of tribulation. That should be a lesson to us all. We can apply the promises of God to our lives now, or He will take us to the woodshed and apply the scrub brush for us.

There may be other purposes for great tribulation, but considering that God has created all things in order to demonstrate His wisdom through the church and this is His eternal purpose in Jesus Christ, I venture to say that purification of the church is the most important purpose and the very reason for which it is created. We cannot be those through whom God demonstrates His wisdom if we are trapped and mired in sin. There will be no victory without holiness, and God's intent is for His church to be victorious because it will be to His glory!

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Great Tribulation --- when will it start?

Three Bible verses tell us when it will start. Jesus defines the start of it in Matthew 24:15 by referring back to the book of Daniel. Daniel 9:27 and 12:11 together reveal that the abomination of desolation will take place in the middle of the final week (seven years), or 1290 days before the very end of the age. It is then that Jesus says then there will be great tribulation.

"Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand) . . . "For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. "Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. (Matthew 24:15, 21-22)

"And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate." (Daniel 9:27)

"From the time that the regular sacrifice is abolished and the abomination of desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. (Daniel 12:11)

So in summary, we read that great tribulation begins about three and a half years before the end of the age (about the midpoint of the final seven years) and that it is cut short for the sake of the elect, otherwise everyone on the planet would die. Which leads us into the next question: [Great Tribulation --- Who is in it?](#)

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Great Tribulation --- Who is in it?

We can tell about who is in it from Revelation 7:9-14 where we read that a **great multitude that no one could count** comes out of this Great Tribulation **having washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb**. These obviously are a portion of the church --- irrespective of rapture timing --- because of their description. **Those who wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb** is the clearest definition of the church that I can think of. There may be others as well in Great Tribulation, but we know without any shadow of a doubt that a **great multitude without number of the church is in Great Tribulation!**

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands . . . Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?" I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Revelation 7:9, 13-14)

This is further verified in Revelation 2:21-23, where we read that those in the church at Thyatira who do not repent **will be thrown into Great Tribulation**.

I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. 'Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. 'And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds. (Revelation 2:21-23)

Just in case we miss the point: it is the **members of the Church at Thyatira** in Revelation 2:21-22 that Jesus threatens to throw **into** Great Tribulation unless they repent. And then He goes on to say that **all the churches will know** that it is He who searches the minds and hearts; and He will give to each one

of them (**the members of the churches**) according to their deeds. It is clearly written that the church is appointed to great tribulation to the extent that she does not repent.

Great tribulation is not God's wrath. The church is not appointed to wrath. But we should expect tribulation in this life, as Jesus told us. And if we do not repent, we should expect Great Tribulation in this life to the extent of our need to be cleansed and emerge as a bride without spot or wrinkle.

The events of Great Tribulation are compared to advanced birth pains in Matthew 24. There is a redemptive purpose involved. It is designed to mature and purify the saints. Do we desire to be mature in Christ? Do we desire to be pure as Christ was pure?

*"For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. "But all these things are merely the **beginning of birth pangs**. "Then they will deliver **you** to tribulation, and will kill **you**, and **you** will be hated by all nations because of My name. "At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. "Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. "Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. "But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come. (Matthew 24:7-14)*

Jesus now goes over that tribulation in greater detail.

*"Therefore when **you** see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (**let the reader understand**), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. "Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. "Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. "But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! "But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath. "For then there will be a great tribulation, such as*

has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. "Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the **elect** those days will be cut short. **"Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There He is,' do not believe him. "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. "Behold, I have told you in advance.** "So if they say to **you, 'Behold, He is in the wilderness,' do not go out, or, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe them. "For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. "Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather. "But immediately **after the tribulation of those days** THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and **THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect** from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. (Matthew 24:15-31)**

How often we hear that the church will not be in great tribulation. But the Bible says she will be --- to the extent that she needs to repent. The Great Tribulation is cut short for the sake of the elect in Christ. And that is yet further evidence that the elect, the church, is in Great Tribulation.

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The Church in Great Tribulation






These are the definitive verses from the book of Revelation which clearly reveal a portion of the church in great tribulation: 

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands . . . Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?"  I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.  (Revelation 7:9, 13-14)

As to what portion of the church this might be, we gain understanding of that from  Jesus  warning to the church at Thyatira:

*'I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. 'Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds.  'And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.  
(Revelation 2:21-23)*

So we see the church finds herself in great tribulation if she does not repent.  Notice that Jesus says that each one in the churches will receive in that time according to their deeds.

Jesus teaches more about the great tribulation in Matthew 24.  He is speaking here to His disciples and saying  you  will see and experience these things.  There is only one definition of elect, and that is those who are the elect in Jesus Christ. 

"Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. "At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. "Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. "Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. "But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then

the end will come. "Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. . . "For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. "Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short . . . "But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ♦ "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. ♦ (Matthew 24:9-16, 21-22, 29-31)

The church experiences great tribulation to the extent needed to be purified into a bride without spot or wrinkle. ♦ When the process is complete, and the bride is made ready, then He comes back for her and gathers her in the rapture.

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