

## SERMON NOTES OF THE GREAT TRIBULATION

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### TITLE: THE GREAT TRIBULATION

MAIN TEXT: MATTHEW 24:1-35 (Begin by reading main text from v21-35)

The Great Tribulation is a time of divine judgment as God intervenes decisively in the affairs of unrepentant people to bring judgment upon a fallen world before the world's end, when the Son of Man shall return to earth, visibly and bodily, as the Judge of all humanity, and to consummate history and the eternal plan of God (*Rom. 2:11-16; Matt. 24:29-31; 25:31-46*), as our main text from Matthew reveals, and also other passages in the Bible particularly Rev. [7:1-14; 12:14-17; 13:1-10 & 16:1-21].

There are certain people who are not going to be on earth when this event in the history of mankind occurs, and there are certain people who are. God's word informs that many shall escape (Rev. 3:10; Luke 21:36). Some Christian spiritual leaders believe that all genuine Christians shall escape the Great Tribulation period—they say that it doesn't make any difference how a Christian has lived, whether or not he/she is a backslider, for all born again Christians shall be included in the rapture, when the Son of Man takes up His Church, just before the Great Tribulation breaks upon the earth. This view is known as *Pre-Tribulation Rapture doctrine*. This interpretation is very popular among Bible believers, but the main problem with this view is that it is contrary to the biblical records in Matthew (24:29-31), Mark (13:24-27) and Luke (21:25-27), which clearly reveal that the Son of Man [Christ] shall return after the great tribulation days to rapture His Church.

Some Christian spiritual leaders believe that there will be some Christians who will escape, and some who will not. Those who express this view particularly believe that only faithful Christians will escape, but others see the Church and Israel as two distinct identities with two individual redemptive plans. There shall be a seven-year period of tribulation [the worst part being the last three and a half years] during which there shall be a redemptive plan towards Israel, whilst faithful Christians in the Church will be raptured before a seven-year tribulation (*Dan. 9:24-27*).

There is another group of Christian spiritual leaders that believe that all Christians living at that time shall go right on through the Great Tribulation days. This view is known as *Post Tribulation Rapture doctrine*. Some past worthy saints such as George Muller and Benjamin Wills Newton believed this. This sermon aims to look at the possibility that all Christians living at that time shall go right on through the Great Tribulation, particularly focusing on:

1. The Multitude Delivered Out and Through the Great Tribulation
2. How the Great Tribulation Will Test the Faith of the Elect?
3. Is there Any Encouragement for the Elect during the Great Tribulation?

## 1. The Multitude Delivered Out & Through the Great Tribulation

Our main text from Matthew 24 reveals that the Great Tribulation must commence prior to the Son of Man's return (Matt. 24 v29-31; Mark 13:24-26). The first apostles lived in anticipation that the Son, Christ could return in their generation (1 John 2:18, 28), so should every generation live in anticipation that the Son of Man [Christ] could return on their watch (Matt. 24:42; Mark 13:35). However, some Bible commentators consider the Great Tribulation to be the Roman conquest of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, and the resulting persecution that followed—and such refer to the Jewish historian Josephus who witnessed the downfall of the city of Jerusalem to argue that the Great Tribulation has already taken place. Charles John Ellicott's commentary on Matt. 24:21 suggests that the catastrophes that occurred during the downfall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 qualified the end time prediction of the Great Tribulation. But Mike Oppenheimer has a different view, on an article titled "Why the Tribulation did not happen in 70 A.D.," he noted that the Son [Christ] adds the word great [Greek-*megas*] to mean exceeding or large, which intensifies the meaning, not limiting it to Jerusalem and Israel, but instead the whole earth and its environment will be afflicted and become a pressure cooker." There are certain scriptural texts in support of Oppenheimer's view. Firstly, "the end" stated in Matthew 24:6 does not refer to the end of Israel's political and religious system after the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in AD 70, but *the end of the age* as revealed in Matt. 24:3, which refers to the end of the world, it includes the rapture, the great tribulation, and the second coming of the Lord for judgment on the nations, all of which help usher in the age to come. Secondly, the Scripture makes a distinction in regards to the Great Tribulation from any other calamity—it is quite clearly a unique event which no other event shall ever equal it or ever surpass the catastrophic events that shall occur during it, we are promised it will be the last of its kind (Matt. 24:21-31). And thirdly, a closer look at the texts of Matt. 24:1-21 reveals that the Son [Christ] did not only predict the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem along with the city of Jerusalem itself, and the tribulations Israel would occur, but He also revealed *worldwide catastrophes* such as wars, famines, diseases, and earthquakes in various places which shall lead to an end time global tribulation, prior to His return (Matt. 24:6-31; Mark 13:24-27). Therefore, it appears that the Great Tribulation is [1] a unique event which shall be a sign prior to the second coming of the Son of Man [at *the end of the age*] (Matt. 24:3, 29-30), and [2] it also more likely signifies a worldwide devastation rather than the downfall of Jerusalem as the text of Matthew 24:21 reveals, "such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be." Moreover, there are other scriptural texts that also support the Great Tribulation days signifying a worldwide catastrophe such as the texts of Rev. 3:10, but particularly Rev. 7:9-10, 13-14 (let us read these verses):

"After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!' . . . — Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, 'Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?' And I said to him, 'Sir, you know.' So, he said to me, 'These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.' "

It appears that the Great Tribulation will be global from the text of Rev. 7:9-14 in regards to “the great multitude from all nations” that shall gradually be “delivered” out of the Great Tribulation. But notice in our main text from Matt. 24:21-22 in regards to *the elect*, it also appears that there shall be a great multitude that shall be empowered to be “delivered through” the full duration of the Great Tribulation period, as immediately after the Tribulation of those days [*or perhaps during the Great Tribulation*], the Son [Christ] shall return and gather His elect from every part of the world (Matt. 24:29-31; Mark 13:24-27). As mentioned before, some Bible believers are in support of *the pre-tribulation rapture doctrine*. However, this view appears to be contrary to the texts of Matthew 24:29-31 and Mark 13:24-26, which both declares plainly that the Son [Christ] shall return after the commencement of the Great Tribulation days. Bible commentators that support the Post Tribulation rapture doctrine have a strong case, as the Bible reveals that the Great Tribulation is an event unveiling the end prior to the Lord’s second coming, and also that “the elect” must wait expectantly for the Son of Man (Matt. 24:42-46; Rev. 13:10; 14:12-13), and if necessary, must be prepared to endure patiently the full duration of the appointed Tribulation days (Dan. 7:25; 12:7-12; Rev. 13:5; 11:2; Matt. 24:13-31). Moreover, most Bible commentators who hold to the Post Tribulation doctrine agree that all Christians living at that time represent *the elect* saints, the Jewish-Gentile Church of God from every nation, the multitude who shall go right on through the Great Tribulation days, many gradually delivered out and also many delivered through the Great Tribulation (Rev. 7:9-10, 13-14). The text of John 17:15 reveals that while on earth, the Son [Christ] interceded on behalf of *His Church*, and His prayer to the Father was for His elect saints NOT to be taken out of the world (John 17:15, 20), but to focus on the mission as God’s witnesses who call people out of the world into the eternal kingdom of God (John 17:18; Col. 1:12-14; Matt. 28:18-20). In like manner, the elect saints that shall experience the Great Tribulation, are also sent into the world (*John 17:18*), to be light bearers who continue to spread the gospel to all nations until the end (Matt. 24:14). Those who respond positively to the gospel call are a chosen people (*1 Pet. 2:9-10*), whom God has set His love upon (*Rom. 8:31-39*), to draw to Himself (*John 6:44*), so to save them from final condemnation through the Son of Man, Christ (Rom. 8:1).

## 2. The Great Tribulation Will Test the Faith of the Elect

It is so important to prepare for the great tribulation days rather to be unprepared for it, because if it does occur under our watch, and we are unprepared, this could actually result in many offended, which is one of the major reasons for the apostasy in the last days. The Son [Christ] has warned all disciples beforehand (Matt. 24:25; Mark 13:23) that in the world we shall experience tribulations and trials (John 16:33; Matt. 24:9) and may even testify for Him at the cost of our lives (Rev. 6:9-11; 12:11), so that when it happens, we should not be surprised or offended (John 16:1). This may appear to be depressing news, but when we recall the Lord’s faithfulness in times past in adverse situations such as with Daniel’s friends who were saved in the fiery furnace (Dan. 3:19-25), or Daniel in the lions’ den (Dan. 6:10-23), we can trust Him in the midst of any difficulty, and trust Him to keep His promises to His disciples that He will be with us always (Matt. 28:20), and also to bear in mind that the Lord has a purpose for all things, which may include tribulation for some Christians [as was the case of the persecuted church of Smyrna – Rev. 2:8-11], *along with encouragement that persecution particularly brings a spiritual blessing in the end* (Matt. 5:10-12; Rom. 5:1-5; 1 Pet. 1:5-9).

Turning again to Matthew 24—reading verse 13, “But he who endures to the end shall be saved.” This requires *faith* in order to endure the disastrous events recorded in Matthew 24 to the very end. “Faith” is assurance of things hoped for, which also leads onto action, even though what one believes

to be true is not currently seen (Heb. 11:1-3). Since Christ's ascension, many genuine Christians in the Jewish-Gentile Church have never seen Him yet have strong belief in what the word of God says about salvation in Him (*John 20:29-31; 2 Tim. 3:15*), and this should generally lead to each individual Christian yielding our lives to Christ for the hope of eternal life in Him (1 John 5:11). Moreover, *faith* has to be exercised by actions [or steps] of obedience and trust in God while in the waiting process until the fulfilment of the desired end hoped for (*Heb. 11:1; 1 Pet. 1:7-9; Jam. 2:26*). Christ has set the example in focusing on the desired end hoped for, while in the process, or if necessary, prepared to suffer for faith onto the successful end rather than surrendering and giving up hope (*Heb. 10:38-39; 12:2; 1 Pet. 2:21*). The Scriptures reveal that Christians are called to do good works (*Eph. 2:10*), and to also partake in His suffering (1 Pet. 2:18-25; 4:12-13). In the days of the apostles, persecution for faith in the Son [Christ] was seen as one of the highest honours given to Christians (*Act. 5:17-41*), *besides the reward at the end* (*Matt. 5:10-12; Eph. 2:4-10; Rom. 5:3-5*). *In like manner*, Moses by faith looked ahead at the reward at the end, and his conclusion was that the reproach for Christ was far better than the treasures in Egypt (*Heb. 11:26*). [*Past worthies must also be commended for setting such a wonderful example, lest the honour for suffering for Christ is forgotten*]. Certain denominations focus on materialism, particularly financial prosperity [not to say that wealth is a bad thing, but such have forgotten what an honour it is to suffer for Christ – *John 21:18-19*], and even disregarded the positives such as character, spiritual maturity, or dependency on God, etc., that can occur during a time of suffering for Christ. The early Jewish-Gentile Church seemed to grasp that in order to participate in Christ's glory, that Christians if necessary, must also be prepared to participate in Christ's suffering (*Act. 5:41; Rom. 8:17-18; 1 Pet. 4:12-15*), whether by persecution or tribulation, which the Scriptures reveal that some Christians are also "appointed to" (1 Thess. 3:1-3). Moreover, Christ has conquered both *tribulation* and *death* (*John 16:33; Rev. 1:18*). Therefore, whoever appointed particularly to *tribulation*, this represents one of many things mentioned by the apostle Paul that in the end work for eternal good, and also cannot separate genuine Christians in the Jewish-Gentile Church from God (*Rom. 8:28-29*). The Great Tribulation for the elect saints in Christ [*genuine Christians in the Jewish-Gentile Church*] represents the ultimate *test of faith* in Christ, in a sense to be refined as gold through fire (*1 Pet. 1:6-9; Is. 43:2-7; Jam. 1:2-4; Prov. 17:3*) during a spiritual warfare which shall see an increase of martyrdom of the people of God (*Rev. 6:9-11; 11:7; 13:1-10; 17:6-14; Dan. 7:25*). One way one can know whether their faith is genuine is through trials and tribulation (1 Pet. 1:6-9; *Act. 14:22*), but this suffering is only for a little while compared to the eternal blessing (1 Cor. 13:4-7; 2 Cor. 4:17-18). In short, *the test of faith* during the Great Tribulation serves a purpose of developing particularly [1] character (*Rom. 5:3-5*), and [2] trust in God (*Prov. 3:5-6; Rev. 2:10-11; 21:1-7; Matt. 25:31-46; 2 Pet. 3:10-13; Matt. 5:10-12*). The challenge during the great tribulation days is great, but so is the God who is able to keep His own people from stumbling through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and God empowers His people to stand up and be counted for the faith, enduring patiently to the end and overcoming (*Rev. 2:10-11; Matt. 24:13*) this most difficult period in history (*Rev. 13:10; 1 Pet. 1:6-7*).

It appears that the Great Tribulation will test the faith of the elect saints in Christ (*Rev. 13:5-10*) "in following Christ's example in living, and if necessary, in dying" (*Heb. 12:2; Rev. 2:10*). But like many past worthies who were faithful, and many who were martyred for their faith (*Act. 8:1-3; Heb. 11:37-40*), "the elect saints in Christ" who go through the Great Tribulation must also be prepared to lose their life (*Luke 9:23-24; Rev. 12:11*) in suffering for the will of God (1 Pet. 4:19; 2:19-21), which may sometimes be to test one's faith in the Son of Man [Christ] through persecution, but with a great reward expected at the end (*Matt. 5:10-12; Rom. 5:1-5; 1 Pet. 5:9*). Moreover, the Scriptures paint a picture of a marriage between Christ and His Church at the time of His return and reveals how He is coming for a glorious Church without spot or wrinkle or blemish, but holy (*Eph. 5:25-27; 2 Thess. 1:10; 2:1-4*). This appears to imply that prior to the Son's [Christ] return, that persecution comes during the

Great Tribulation, and that the Lord will use it in a way, to shift *the tares* from *the wheat* (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43), so that only those who are [1] *holy* (Rev. 22:11-12), and [2] *faithful* (Rev. 2:10)—*the wheat* [or the elect] will stand during the worst of all tribulations (1 John 5:4; John 16:33; Matt. 24:21-22).

### 3. Is there Any Encouragement for the Elect during the Great Tribulation?

Yes, there certainly is. But for any person who is solely earthly minded, then it is a difficult task to encourage him/her during such a perilous period ahead. As mentioned before, the Scriptures paint a picture of “martyred saints” crying out for God’s judgment to avenge their blood upon the wicked who dwell upon the earth (Rev. 6:9-10), and they are told to wait patiently until the full number of the elect are killed for the word of God and their testimony (Rev. 6:11), which accords with the great multitude gathered from every nation (Rev. 7:9) that shall gradually come out of the Great Tribulation (Rev. 7:13-14). The apostle Paul under inspiration metaphorically likens the suffering of persecuted Christians *as sheep to the slaughter*, which can also apply to the elect saints prior to Christ the Son’s return who shall suffer tribulation (Matt. 24:9-10; Ps. 34:19), yet through all of this they are referred to as “more than conquerors in Christ” (Rom. 8:36-37). The elect saints are more than conquerors in Christ the Lord because death has been conquered by Christ (Rom. 6:5-9). Therefore, the main encouragement during the Great Tribulation is primarily the assurance of being in Christ, and the glorious future that awaits the people of God. The elect saints during the Great Tribulation can also take encouragement from the following:

1. Firstly, “the soul” is eternal (Eccl. 3:11), and therefore shall continue to live (Rev. 20:4; Luke 21:18-19). Therefore, the elect saints in Christ are not to fear those who kill the body but cannot touch “the soul which is eternal” (Luke 12:4; Eccl. 3:11).
2. The elect saints can also take comfort from Christ the Son’s suffering, which resulted in Him overcoming the world (John 16:33), Satan (John 16:11) and Death (Rev. 1:18), and so the Lord’s suffering can also help His elect not to fall under pressure. Moreover, Christ’s warnings about the Great Tribulation prepares the elect saints beforehand, so that the generation that goes through the Tribulation days may be able to endure the big trouble ahead, and overcome this most difficult moment in the history of mankind (Matt. 24:21-22), by remaining faithful to the end (Rev. 2:10).
3. The elect saints can also take courage from past experience of God’s faithfulness, how God is able to protect those in Christ the Son (Act. 7:60; 1 Pet. 2:25), and also ensure that none shall be lost or perish (John 6:39; 3:16-18) during these difficult times, as seen by the saints and the prophets of the past, who by their faith have overcome being tortured to death, mocking, scourging, imprisonment and affliction (Heb. 11:30-40).
4. The elect saints during the Great Tribulation can also draw encouragement from the future, with the knowledge that the future is in God’s hand (Eccl. 9:1; Rev. 4:1), and that nobody is able to snatch any out of His hand (John 10:28-30; 1 John 5:11-18; John 6:39-40). And God is more than able to bring about good out of bad situations (Rom. 8:28), as seen in the life of Joseph (Gen. 50:15-21), Job (Job 42:10-16), and the Son of Man, Christ (Luke 23:6-43).

5. And finally, encouragement can be drawn from this, in that God in His mercy has promised that for the sake of the elect saints in order to endure, those appointed Tribulation days shall be shortened, which also seems to imply that [1] the Son [Christ] could possibly return even during the Great Tribulation days to bring an end to it, or [2] because of the severity and intensity of those days, it is comforting to know that the appointed Great Tribulation days will not exceed the duration of the period that Scripture has indicated of three and a half years, or approximately 1,290 days or 42 months (Dan. 7:25; Rev. 11:2; 13:5). And the Scriptures also reveal with certainty, that *after the commencement of the Great Tribulation days*, the Son of Man [Christ] shall return (Matt. 24:29-31; Mark 13:24-26).

In Matthew 24 & 25, Christ the Son [briefly] answers three questions raised after He revealed that *the temple would be destroyed*. The Lord was asked [1] “when this would happen?” Then [2] “what would be the sign of His coming?” And [3] the sign of “the end of the age?” (Matt. 24:3). It appears that the answers to these questions recorded in the chapters of Matthew 24 and 25 unfolds the events leading up to the world’s end, and particularly reveal the certainty of two prophecies before the world’s end—*the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem* and *the Great Tribulation*. Firstly, Christ the Son prophesied about *the destruction of the temple*, saying, “Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down.” In answer to [1] *when this would happen?* The destruction of the temple was fulfilled in the Lord’s generation (Matt. 23:36-39; 24:1-2) in A.D. 70. In answer to [2] *what would be the sign of His coming?* And [3] *the sign of the end of the age?* The Son [Christ] answered these questions through the various events particularly recorded in our main text of Matthew 24, *which are signs* that shall occur prior to His second coming, until the final event or sign of His coming as a Judge at the end of the age in (Matt. 24:4-30; 25:31-46; Act. 17:31; Rev. 21:1-8; 2 Tim. 4:1; Rom. 8:1-5). The Son [Christ] prophesied yet further, saying, “this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place” (Matt. 24:21-34)—Christ the Son gives the impression here that *all these things* would take place in His generation [*all these things* would include (1) the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem; (2) the Great Tribulation; (3) His second coming and (4) the world’s end – Matt. 24:21-34]. Did the Lord [Christ] get it wrong? The short answer is “No.” But a more elaborate answer is that most Bible commentators would agree that Matthew 24:34 was [1] a prophecy primarily for the Lord’s generation in regards to the main subject of discourse which was the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, and also [2] secondly, most Bible commentators would agree that prophecy can be twofold, revealing both short-term and long-term prophecies. The short-term prophecy of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem was actually the initial sign from the Lord’s generation to every generation onwards, to clearly indicate the certainty of the long-term prophecies such as the Great Tribulation days, and the other events leading up to the world’s end. It appears that the Lord [Christ] was not predicting the certainty of all these events occurring in His generation, for two reasons extracted from Matthew 24. Firstly, the Lord strongly warned about *deception* (Matt. 24:4-5, 11, 24-25)—any such prediction of the certainty of these events occurring in any generation would prove just as deceptive as any predictions of the day of His return, because the day and hour of the Lord’s 2<sup>nd</sup> coming shall always remain unpredictable to all, except to God alone (Matt. 24:36). And secondly, a closer look at this prophecy of Matthew 24:34 reveals that the Lord was actually teaching us a lesson about *the signs to look out for prior to His coming, so not to be deceived*—so the Lord [Christ] used *the parable of the fig tree*, to explain that just like with the fig tree, one can tell when summer is near, so it is when “all these things” that He mentioned begin to happen, we shall know that His coming is near (Matt. 24:32-33; Mark 13:28-29; Luke 21:28-31). Turning briefly to *Luke 21*, reading the first part of verse 28 states, “Now when these things begin to happen...”—from this text, one may conclude that Matt. 24:34 was a twofold prophecy [short and long term]. The short-term prophecy refers especially to Christ’s generation witnessing the commencement of these

prophecies beginning with the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. And the long-term prophecy refers notably to the generation that encounters the Great Tribulation days (*Matt. 24:29-31*; *Mark 13:24-26*). It can therefore be argued that Christ has prophesied about a certain generation in the last days [a period referring to the Lord's generation until His return – *Act. 2:14-20*] that shall experience the Great Tribulation and shall also see [1] the sign of His coming and [2] the end of the age (*Matt. 24:21-36*; *Mark 13:14-31*; *Luke 21:25:33*). These prophecies are certain—emphasized by the Lord's [Christ] words about *heaven and earth will pass away*, but His words *will not pass away* (*Matt. 24:35*).

In summary, the first heading: *The Multitude Delivered Out & Through the Great Tribulation*—we looked at the possibility that during the Great Tribulation, some elect Christians shall be killed, but delivered out of the Great Tribulation (*Rev. 7:14*; *11:7-9*; *13:1-10*; *Ps. 34:19*), while others shall have to endure patiently to the end [with some degree of protection on earth], and be delivered through the Great Tribulation (*Rev. 12:14-17*; *Matt. 24:21-22*). The second heading: *How the Great Tribulation Will Test the Faith of the Elect?* — we looked at how the Great Tribulation will test the faith of the elect in Christ (*Rev. 13:5-10*), and serve a purpose of building character and trust in God in suffering for the will of God (*1 Pet. 4:19*; *2:19-21*), which may sometimes be to test one's faith in Christ the Lord through persecution, with a great reward expected at the end (*Matt. 5:10-12*; *Rom. 5:1-5*; *1 Pet. 5:9*). But I cannot emphasize this any more about the importance of preparing for the great tribulation days rather than to be unprepared which could lead to many offended when it occurs. The great tribulation, although a frightening period of time, yet it is one of the signs the Lord has informed us to look out for to know that our redemption is near (*Luke 21:28*). And the third heading: *Is there Any Encouragement for the Elect during the Great Tribulation?* The main encouragement during the Great Tribulation is primarily the assurance of being in Christ, and the glorious future that awaits the people of God. But also, the elect saints can take encouragement in that God in His mercy has promised that for the sake of the elect saints to endure the Great Tribulation, that those appointed Tribulation days shall be shortened, which also implies that the Lord could return even during the great tribulation days to bring an end to it.

I hope this message has been helpful to you and may God bless you richly in Christ's name.