

What is the Great Tribulation?

When the Bible speaks of tribulation, is it the Great Tribulation? If not, what is the difference? Will Believers experience this or either?

When Jesus mentions that the Temple will be completely destroyed, His disciples ask when this event will occur, and His answer is recorded in three gospel accounts (Matt 24:4-31; Mark 13:5-27; Luke 21:8-28). Because each account varies in their details, comparing each narrative allows a fuller understanding of what Jesus intended His disciples to know.

Although His disciples do not understand, Jesus begins with a prelude to the birth of His kingdom.

And Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many. You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. 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. (Matt 24:4-8)

And Jesus began to say to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. Many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He!' and will mislead many. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be frightened; those things must take place; but that is not yet the end. For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will also be famines. These things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. (Mark 13:5-8)

And He said, "See to it that you are not misled; for many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and, 'The time is near.' Do not go after them. When you hear of wars and disturbances, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end does not follow immediately." (Luke 21:8-9)

Observations:

1. Many will attempt to deceive people into following them by saying "I am the Christ."
2. There will be wars, famine and earthquakes, but do not fear.

Jesus portrays tribulation as something all Believers will experience after He is gone from earth.

"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." (Matt 24:9-14)

"But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them. The gospel must first be preached to all the nations. When they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by all because of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved." (Mark 13:9-13)

Then He continued by saying to them, "Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be great earthquakes, and in various places plagues and famines; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name's sake.... (continues)

It will lead to an opportunity for your testimony. So make up your minds not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves; for I will give you utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute. But you will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death, and you will be hated by all because of My name. Yet not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives." (Luke 21:10-19)

Observations:

1. Be prepared. Believers will be persecuted, punished and murdered for their faith locally and nationally (John 16:2-3).
2. People will hate Christians, and genuine Believers will be betrayed to authorities by loved ones and by many who call themselves Christians.
3. Rampant sin will extinguish agape love.
4. Do not prepare a defense of innocence, because the persecution of your faith is an opportunity for your testimony; the Holy Spirit will help you with the words and wisdom for that testimony. The gospel shall be preached to the whole world.
5. Persevere in your faith, because you can trust that the promises of Jesus Christ are true.

While the tribulation, the lethal persecution of one's faith, is an existent risk, Jesus pinpoints the start of the Great Tribulation to the emergence of the "abomination of desolation standing in the holy place." When the Antichrist is standing within the Temple, the Great Tribulation is upon Believers.

"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." (Matt 24:15-28)

"But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where it should not be (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. The one who is on the housetop must not go down, or go in to get anything out of his house; and the one who is in the field must not turn back to get his coat. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! But pray that it may not happen in the winter. For those days will be a **time of tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation** which God created until now, and never will. Unless the Lord had shortened those days, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom He chose, He shortened the days. And then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ'; or, 'Behold, He is there'; do not believe him; for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But take heed; behold, I have told you everything in advance." (Mark 13:14-23)

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“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near. Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are in the midst of the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city; because these are days of vengeance, so that all things which are written will be fulfilled. Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days; for there will be great distress upon the land and wrath to this people; and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” (Luke 21:20-24)

Observations:

1. The Great Tribulation is days of vengeance against God's people “such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation.”
2. Jerusalem will be surround and conquered; death and destruction awaits God's people.
3. Anyone around Jerusalem should leave immediately; the hearts of non-Believers are so hard that sharing the gospel is futile.
4. Do not find your hope in false prophets.

After the Great Tribulation, the Kingdom of God is born when Jesus Christ returns as Savior King and Judge.

“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.” (Matt 24:29-31)

“But in those days, **after that tribulation**, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then He will send forth the angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven.” (Mark 13:24-27)

“There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” (Luke 21:25-28)

Observations:

1. The Great Tribulation ends when there are no more professing Believers to persecute and murder.
2. Natural phenomena will cause people around the world to be anxious and lament.
3. Jesus Christ, supernaturally be seen around the world in the sky, arrives as Daniel's prophetic Son of Man (Dan 7:13-14) in power and glory.
4. With His angels, Jesus Christ will gather (rapture) Believers who are alive on earth and dead in heaven. This begins the process of resurrection (1 Cor 15:42-54).

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When carefully observing the deceased Believers reported in Revelation, the apostle John presents them as having a distinct quality – **they all died for their faith**. There is no mention of any who died naturally.

When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest... (continues)

for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also. (Rev 6:9-11)

A little later in heaven, the apostle John records a multitude of saints clothed with a white robe who were murdered for their faith during the 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; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, “Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.” 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. (Rev 7:9-14)

The Great Tribulation was not a local event around Jerusalem, it was a world wide lethal persecution of people who openly professed a faith in Jesus Christ.

The apostle John reports that this special class of Believers would be resurrected first and reign with Him for a thousand years before a new heaven and earth is ushered in. This special class of Believers is comprised of just martyrs:

Those who died because of their testimony of Jesus Christ and the word of God before the end times and during the Great Tribulation, because they refused the mark of the Beast and did not worship him.

Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years. (Rev 20:4-6)