

Straight Bible Talk

Manchester Church of Christ, Share Christ's Love and Share His Message

The Great Tribulation

The Gnostics were people in the second century, a hundred years or more after the death of Christ, who claimed "secret knowledge." They claimed to know things that had not been revealed to the apostles of Jesus. They taught things that were contrary to the teachings found in the Bible.

It is interesting that in the fifteenth century, John Gerson claimed that "as the Apostles knew more than the prophets, so the Church teachers know some things the Apostles did not know." In particular, he claimed that they knew that Mary was exempt from original as well as actual sin by an act of divine grace.

So we come to those who claim that they know all the details of the second coming of Jesus. While religious leaders are divided into postmillennialists, premillennialists and amillennialists, in each group are those claiming that they alone have "got it right."

Again, the premillennialists are divided into those who believe that Jesus will return **before** the great tribulation, those who believe that he will return **during** the great tribulation and those who believe that he will return **after** the great tribulation.

Each group claims that they alone have "got it right." But they all agree that there lies ahead a Great Tribulation though they are undecided whether Christians will pass through it or be taken away until it passes.

Consider, if you will, an Englishman living in the fifteenth century. He has been inspired by the teachings of John Wycliffe. He has heard such things as: "The supreme authority of the Scriptures appears from their contents, the beneficent aim they have in view, and from the witness borne

to them by Christ. God speaks in all the books. They are one great Word of God. Every syllable of the two Testaments is true, and the authors were nothing more than scribes or heralds. If any error seem to be found in them, the error is due to human ignorance and perverseness. Nothing is to be believed that is not founded upon this book, and to its teachings nothing is to be added."

Impressed with such language this Englishman has rejected transubstantiation (the church teaching that the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Jesus while remaining, in appearance, bread and wine). Church authorities are in an uproar. Laws are passed by parliament sanctioning the persecution of those who become followers of this movement.

People are arrested and given the opportunity to change their beliefs. Those who do change are allowed to live. Those who do not are burned in public. In the beginning, some of the leaders of the movement turn back to their former errors. Later, hundreds of people die rather than deny the truths that they have learned from the scriptures as taught by John Wycliffe. For such persons, it might seem as though the Great Tribulation had arrived.

Throughout history, beginning in the first century, there have been times of intense persecution directed at Christians. The followers of Jesus have been driven from their homes and deprived of life and property by those in authority. Such periods of persecution have raged in different places and at different times throughout the world.

For each persecuted group, a Great Tribulation has come. Many are those who have

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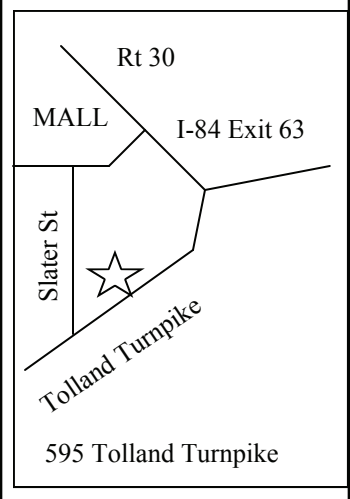
Meeting at
595 Tolland Turnpike

Sun Bible Classes—9 AM
Sun Worship—10 AM
Sun Eve Worship—6:00 PM
Wed Bible Class—7:00 PM

"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

Acts 17:31

All scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise indicated.



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endured as martyrs, remaining faithful to the Lord through all their trials.

Will the Great Tribulation, which some suppose to still lie ahead, be greater in its infliction of more cruel treatment of Christians? One cannot, upon reading from Foxe's Book of Martyrs, imagine that trials could be more severe. Will the Great Tribulation be greater in the numbers of victims that it claims? Without an exact count of those who died in previous outbreaks of persecution there cannot be any way of knowing that any later tribulation is greater.

Perhaps the truth lies in understanding what the Bible teaches about tribulation. Jesus refers to a tribulation that will come to his disciples before the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in Matthew 24. Paul writes in his second letter to Timothy, "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." And James writes to encourage us, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance."

Perhaps the most common phrase used in describing the return of Jesus is that the Lord will come "like a thief" in the night. At a time when he is not expected, Jesus will be sent on

his return by the Father. Jesus said, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone."

Sorry, but all those claiming special insight into the plan of God have not been let in on the plan. God alone knows the schedule. God alone will decide when Jesus shall return. No searching and scrutinizing of scripture will reveal the details. They are hidden in the counsels of God. Tribulation will not warn us.

When Paul wrote his first letter to the church at Thessalonica, he addressed a concern of some that their deceased loved ones had missed out on the glory of Jesus return. The Apostle comforts them with these words: "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the

archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord."

I do not want to miss out on this event. I want to be among the number that Jesus claims as his own. I want to go with the clouds to meet Jesus in the air. Do you?

God's plan for being in that number is clearly spelled out in scripture. Unlike the details of the second coming that remain hidden in the counsels of God, His plan for our salvation is made very clear. What we need to know is spelled out in exact detail. What God will do and when He will do it is not so clear, because that is God's business, not ours.

God requires that you believe in Him and in His only Son, Jesus Christ. God requires that you turn away from sin. To that end, God has made clear in the Scriptures exactly what He considers as sin. And God requires that you be baptized (immersed) in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and He will give you the Holy Spirit. All of this is carefully explained in the second chapter of Acts!