

## The Great Tribulation - Discussion

There have been many articles about the great tribulation with warnings about its imminent arrival. I think a lot of the friends are very concerned if not frightened about it, especially since the imagery in JW publications seems to be designed to cause fear.

I would like to start a Bible based discussion about the great tribulation.

- What is the great tribulation?
- When does it begin?
- How long does it last?
- Who will it afflict?

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We are introduced to "the great tribulation" in Revelation:

**(Revelation 7:14)** So right away I said to him: "My lord, you are the one who knows." 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.

When the angelic elder said to John "*These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation,*" John did not have to ask 'What tribulation are you referring to?' because he knew.

Consider what was going on: John was watching as a scroll was being opened one seal at a time.

- 1) The first seal revealed a white horse whose rider went forth and conquered. (Re 6:1-2)
- 2) The second seal revealed a fiery-colored horse whose rider took peace away from the earth causing men to slaughter one another. (Re 6:3-4)
- 3) The third seal revealed a black horse whose rider caused famine. (Re 6:5-6)
- 4) The fourth seal revealed a pale (green) horse whose rider was given direct authority to kill using the long sword of war, food shortages, deadly plague, and wild beasts. The grave was his companion. (Re 6:7-8)
- 5) The fifth seal revealed those of the 144,000 that had already been killed for their faith, and these were told to rest a little longer until the number was filled of their fellow slaves who were about to be killed as they had been. (Re 6:9-11)
- 6) The sixth seal revealed the celestial signs to be seen just before Armageddon, and the reactions mankind will have to them. These things happen after "*the great tribulation*" has ended. (Mt 24:29; Re 6:12-17)

Before the seventh and final seal is broken John sees four angels holding back the four winds of Armageddon until the full number of the 144,000 are sealed, the fellow slaves of those who were revealed with the breaking of the fifth seal. (Re 7:1-4)

John also sees a great crowd standing before the throne. (Re 7:9-10) He is asked if he knows who that great crowd is. He does not, so the angel tells him that these are the ones who survived that great tribulation. (Re 7:13-14)

The four winds are still being held back (Re 7:1) so Armageddon has not yet occurred at this point. But we know that the tribulation that the horsemen caused has come to an end because John is shown the great crowd who survived it.

Finally the scroll is fully opened.

7) The seventh seal is opened and silence occurs in heaven for about a half an hour. (Re 8:1)

So "*the great tribulation*" is referred to during the process of the opening of the scroll. That is the context. That is the topic of discussion. The first horseman was given a crown and he went forth on a holy conquest. But the other three horsemen cause great tribulation on the earth. A great crowd survive that tribulation.

Yes, "*the great tribulation*" occurs on earth because of those three horsemen. When do they ride? Let's look to Christ's words in the gospels of Matthew and Mark for the answer.

**(Matthew 24:7-14)** "For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be food shortages and earthquakes in one place after another. <sup>8</sup> All these things are a **beginning** of pangs of distress. <sup>9</sup> "Then people will hand you over to tribulation and will kill you, and you will be hated by all the nations on account of my name. <sup>10</sup> Then, too, many will be stumbled and will betray one another and will hate one another. <sup>11</sup> Many false prophets will arise and mislead many; <sup>12</sup> and because of the increasing of lawlessness, the love of the greater number will grow cold. <sup>13</sup> But the one who has endured to the end will be saved. <sup>14</sup> And this good news of the Kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

**(Mark 13:8-13)** "For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in one place after another; there will also be food shortages. These are a **beginning** of pangs of distress. <sup>9</sup> "As for you, look out for yourselves. People will hand you over to local courts, and you will be beaten in synagogues and be put on the stand before governors and kings for my sake, for a witness to them. <sup>10</sup> Also, in all the nations, the good news has to be preached first. <sup>11</sup> And when they are taking you to hand you over, do not be anxious beforehand about what to say; but whatever is given you in that hour, say this, for you are not the ones speaking, but the holy spirit is. <sup>12</sup> Furthermore, brother will deliver brother over to death, and a father a child, and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. <sup>13</sup> And you will be hated by all people on account of my name. But the one who has endured to the end will be saved.

We know that the fulfillment of those prophecies In Matthew and Mark began at the start of the last days when the horsemen began their ride to give the earth wars and famine and pestilence and death. So since "*the great tribulation*" is caused by the ride of those horsemen, which began at the beginning of the last days, that means that "*the great tribulation*" is **not** some future event. We have been living in it our entire lives.

Do you say: "How can that be? People are living their lives normally."

True, all of mankind is not cowering in a cave somewhere starving to death. Outside of warzones things are not great, but things are continuing-on pretty much as usual. But that is how it is prophesied to be, right up until Armageddon strikes:

**(Matthew 24:36-42)** "Concerning **that day** and hour nobody knows, neither the angels of the heavens nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>37</sup> For **just as** the days of Noah were, so the presence of the Son of man will be. <sup>38</sup> For as they were in those days before the Flood, eating and drinking, men marrying and women being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, <sup>39</sup> and they took no note until the Flood came and swept them all away, so the presence of the Son of man will be. <sup>40</sup> Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken along and the other abandoned. <sup>41</sup> Two women will be grinding at the hand mill; one will be taken along and the other abandoned. <sup>42</sup> Keep on the watch, therefore, because you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

**(Luke 17:26-30)** Moreover, **just as** it occurred in the days of Noah, so it will be in the days of the Son of man: <sup>27</sup> they were eating, they were drinking, men were marrying, women were being given in marriage until that day when Noah entered into the ark, and the Flood came and destroyed them all. <sup>28</sup> Likewise, **just as** it occurred in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building. <sup>29</sup> But on the day that Lot went out of Sod'om, it rained fire and sulfur from heaven and destroyed them all. <sup>30</sup> It will be the same on **that day** when the Son of man is revealed.

"*That day*" refers to Armageddon. And "*that day*" of destruction will be "*just as*" the day of the flood in Noah's day, and "*just as*" the day that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, with life carrying on as usual.

I think that Christ knew that this misunderstanding would happen here in the last days, and that is why he said that he will be arriving before we expect him to:

**(Matthew 24:44)** On this account, you too prove yourselves ready, because the Son of man is coming at an hour that you do not think to be it.

**(1 Thessalonians 5:1-6)** Now as for the times and the seasons, brothers, you need nothing to be written to you. <sup>2</sup> For you yourselves know very well that Jehovah's day is coming exactly as a thief in the night. (Mt 24:43-44) <sup>3</sup> Whenever it is that they are saying, "Peace and security!" then sudden destruction is to be instantly on them, just like birth pains on a pregnant woman, and they will by no means escape. <sup>4</sup> But you, brothers, you are not in darkness, so that the day should overtake you as it

would thieves, <sup>5</sup> for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We belong neither to night nor to darkness. <sup>6</sup> So, then, let us not sleep on as the rest do, but let us stay awake and keep our senses.

What are the conditions of a home when a thief chooses to strike in the night? What is the situation of a pregnant woman before her birth pangs suddenly strike? The answer to both questions is calm and quiet. The thief waits till all are asleep and there are no disturbances to strike. The birth pangs of a woman are startling because she is at ease. Yes, there is an air of *"peace and security."*

Do you ask: "Doesn't Matthew 24:7-8 describe a world-wide tribulation just before Armageddon?"

Let's look at those scriptures:

**(Matthew 24:7-8)** "For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be food shortages and earthquakes in one place after another. <sup>8</sup> All these things are a beginning of pangs of distress.

**(Mark 13:8)** "For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in one place after another; there will also be food shortages. These are a beginning of pangs of distress.

**(Luke 21:10-11)** Then he said to them: "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. <sup>11</sup> There will be great earthquakes, and in one place after another food shortages and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and from heaven great signs.

In all three instances the original Greek (kata topous) is translated in the NWT as *"in one place after another"*. Those Greek words mean "in various places". They do not mean everywhere at once. Nor do they mean that every place on earth will eventually experience those things at some point in time.

It is just like with the earthquakes. There is one here, and some time later there is another one over there, and so on. But most places on earth are not threatened by earthquakes. It is the same with pestilence and food shortages, they do not occur everywhere at once, nor will they occur everywhere eventually. It is bad for the people in those places where those things are happening, but everywhere else on the planet life is carrying on as usual. And even where those things have occurred, once the problem is over, life eventually returns to normal again. That is just as it is described in Matthew 24:36-42 and Luke 17:26-30.

Do you ask: How about Matthew 24:21-22? Doesn't that describe a great tribulation that occurs at the end of the last days just before Armageddon?

**(Matthew 24:21-22)** for then there will be great tribulation such as has not occurred since the world's beginning until now, no, nor will occur again. <sup>22</sup> In fact, unless those days were cut short, no flesh would be saved; but on account of the chosen ones those days will be cut short.

Let's examine the context of those scriptures. Christ had just told his disciples that all of the stones of the temple area would be thrown down, so they ask him two questions: 1) When will that happen, and 2) What will be the sign of his presence and of the conclusion of the system of things.

Christ begins by answering their second question first and tells them about the last days:

**(Matthew 24:4-14)** In answer Jesus said to them: "Look out that nobody misleads you, <sup>5</sup> for many will come on the basis of my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many. <sup>6</sup> You are going to hear of wars and reports of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for these things must take place, but the end is not yet. <sup>7</sup> "For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be food shortages and earthquakes in one place after another. <sup>8</sup> All these things are a beginning of pangs of distress. <sup>9</sup> "Then people will hand you over to tribulation and will kill you, and you will be hated by all the nations on account of my name. <sup>10</sup> Then, too, many will be stumbled and will betray one another and will hate one another. <sup>11</sup> Many false prophets will arise and mislead many; <sup>12</sup> and because of the increasing of lawlessness, the love of the greater number will grow cold. <sup>13</sup> But the one who has endured to the end will be saved. <sup>14</sup> And this good news of the Kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

None of those things apply to the Roman attack of Jerusalem in the first century. The Israelites were not being misled by men claiming to be Christ. Rome is attacking Jerusalem, but nations and kingdoms all around the earth were not attacking each other everywhere else. There were no earthquakes and pestilences in the Roman attack. At the end the Israelites experienced a shortage of food during the Roman siege, but Christ foretold of food shortages *"in one place after another."* That does not describe what happened during the attack on Jerusalem, nor does the description of false prophets misleading many or the good news being preached in all the inhabited earth. No, those things describe the last days, not the attack on Jerusalem.

Next Christ answers the apostle's first question about when the stones of the temple mount will be thrown down:

**(Matthew 24:15-22)** "Therefore, when you catch sight of the disgusting thing that causes desolation, as spoken about by Daniel the prophet, standing in a holy place (let the reader use discernment), <sup>16</sup> then let those in Ju-de'a begin fleeing to the mountains. <sup>17</sup> Let the man on the housetop not come down to take the goods out of his house, <sup>18</sup> and let the man in the field not return to pick up his outer garment. <sup>19</sup> Woe to the pregnant women and those nursing a baby in those days! <sup>20</sup> Keep praying that your flight may not occur in wintertime nor on the Sabbath day; <sup>21</sup> for then there will be great tribulation such as has not occurred since the world's beginning until now, no, nor will occur again. <sup>22</sup> In fact, unless those days were cut short, no flesh would be saved; but on account of the chosen ones those days will be cut short.

Is that prophesying what will happen here in the last days? Do the prophesied events described to be done by the disgusting thing of Matthew 24:15 parallel the prophesied events described to be done by the UN as laid out in Revelation?

**(Revelation 17:15-18)** He said to me: "The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is sitting, mean peoples and crowds and nations and tongues. <sup>16</sup> And the ten horns that you saw and the wild beast, these will hate the prostitute and will make her devastated and naked, and they will eat up her flesh and completely burn her with fire. <sup>17</sup> For God put it into their hearts to carry out his thought, yes, to carry out their one thought by giving their kingdom to the wild beast, until the words of God will have been accomplished. <sup>18</sup> And the woman whom you saw means the great city that has a kingdom over the kings of the earth."

The disgusting thing of Matthew 24:15 attacked the city of Jerusalem and all of its occupants. The UN will attack Babylon the great, the prostitute who sits on many waters. The UN is not said to attack those waters that she sits upon, which represent the people who follow her false teachings. Only the harlot, meaning the religious leaders, are attacked.

The occupants of the city of Jerusalem who wished to avoid the attack by the disgusting thing were instructed to flee to the mountains. But there is no means of escape for Babylon the great.

The attack on Jerusalem was cut short, otherwise no flesh would have been saved. But the attack on Babylon the great is not to be cut short. She is to be completely destroyed.

If the Romans had not stopped their attack, they would have killed all of the Jews. They had already killed about 90% of the Jews so it wouldn't have taken much for them to finish the job. But they stopped for some reason and took the rest captive. (Mt 24:22; Ps 105:8; 2Ki 13:23; Joel 3:2) But the UN (the wild beast) will carry on until it completely destroys Babylon the great leaving no survivors. (Re 17:16-17)

So there doesn't seem to be much of a similarity between the disgusting thing of Matthew 24:22 which attacked Jerusalem and the wild beast of Revelation 17:16 that attacks Babylon the Great in the last days. The former attacks all, but leaves survivors. The latter only attacks the leaders, and leaves no survivors.

And it also seems that the ending of those two episodes of tribulation will be quite different as well. At the end of the great tribulation caused by the Roman attack, it is so bad that none in Jerusalem would have survived if it were not cut short. (Mt 24:22) But at the end of our present great tribulation, on the day that Armageddon strikes, we are told that life will be carrying on normally. (Mt 24:36-42; Lu 17:26-30) There will be *"peace and security."* (1Th 5:3)

(For my take on who the harlot is, see my article "Babylon the Great".)

Matthew 24:16 warns those *"in Judea begin fleeing to the mountains."* (Lu 21:21) Why is that? Because as Christ says at Luke 21:20, *"when you see Jerusalem surrounded by encamped armies, then know that the desolating of her has drawn near."* Yes, Christ is talking about the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, not the destruction of Babylon the Great at the end of the last days. Neither Judea nor Jerusalem are used in the bible to symbolize Babylon the Great, so this part of Christ's prophecy covered in Matthew 24:15-22 is not referring to the last days. That includes the part about the *"disgusting thing that causes desolation."* (Mt 24:15; Mr 13:14) And

what does the disgusting thing refer to? Christ tells us in Luke 21:20 that it is the *"encamped armies"* of Rome surrounding God's *"holy city"* Jerusalem (Mt 27:53), which means this army is *"standing in a holy place"* (Mt 24:15), therefore it is *"standing where it should not be."* (Mr 13:14)

This army destroyed Jerusalem and ended the constant feature of sacrifices to Jehovah. True, Jesus' sacrifice ended the need for sacrifices, but the Jews did not accept Christ so they never stopped sacrificing to Jehovah until the Romans ended this centuries-long constant feature of their worship.

If you read the scriptures that describe the events that occur from the beginning of the last days until Armageddon strikes, (Mt 24:7-42; Mr 13:6-37; Lu 21:8-36; Re 6:1-11) you will notice that there is no description of a final and terrible tribulation that occurs planet-wide at the end of the last days just before Armageddon.

Luke sums up the timeline very well for us:

**(Luke 21:10, 11)** Then he said to them: "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. <sup>11</sup> There will be great earthquakes, and in one place after another food shortages and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and from heaven great signs.

So there will be wars, earthquakes, food shortages, and pestilences. All of those things have been happening here and there around the world since the last days began. What follows? The fearful sights and signs from heaven that mark the beginning of Armageddon. There is no reference to some extra, terrible tribulation that happens just before Armageddon.

### Timeline

Let's examine the timeline a little more.

**(Revelation 6:12-17)** And I saw when he opened the sixth seal, and a great earthquake occurred; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the entire moon became as blood, <sup>13</sup> and the stars of heaven fell to the earth as when a fig tree shaken by a high wind drops its unripe figs. <sup>14</sup> And the heaven departed as a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and every island was removed from its place. <sup>15</sup> Then the kings of the earth, the high officials, the military commanders, the rich, the strong, every slave, and every free person hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains. <sup>16</sup> And they keep saying to the mountains and to the rocks: "Fall over us and hide us from the face of the One seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, <sup>17</sup> because the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

The gospels also speak of this. This is immediately after the tribulation causing ride of the horsemen ends and the sixth seal is broken open:

**(Matthew 24:29)** "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 heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

**(Mark 13:24-25)** “But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, <sup>25</sup> and the stars will be falling out of heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken.

**(Luke 21:25-26)** “Also, there will be signs in the sun and moon and stars, and on the earth anguish of nations not knowing the way out because of the roaring of the sea and its agitation. <sup>26</sup> People will become faint out of fear and expectation of the things coming upon the inhabited earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

Joel also speaks of it:

**(Joel 2:30, 31)** And I will give wonders in the heavens and on the earth, Blood and fire and columns of smoke. <sup>31</sup> The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood Before the coming of the great and awe-inspiring day of Jehovah.

What else happens after the tribulation but before Armageddon?

**(Revelation 7:1-4)** After this I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding tight the four winds of the earth, so that no wind could blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. <sup>2</sup> And I saw another angel ascending from the sunrise, having a seal of the living God; and he called with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, <sup>3</sup> saying: “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until after we have sealed the slaves of our God in their foreheads.” <sup>4</sup> And I heard the number of those who were sealed, 144,000, sealed out of every tribe of the sons of Israel:

**(Matthew 24:31)** And he will send out his angels with a great trumpet sound, and they will gather his chosen ones together from the four winds, from one extremity of the heavens to their other extremity.

**(Mark 13:27)** And then he will send out the angels and will gather his chosen ones together from the four winds, from earth’s extremity to heaven’s extremity.

**(1 Thessalonians 4:15-17)** For this is what we tell you by Jehovah’s word, that we the living who survive to the presence of the Lord will in no way precede those who have fallen asleep in death; <sup>16</sup> because the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a commanding call, with an archangel’s voice and with God’s trumpet, and those who are dead in union with Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Afterward we the living who are surviving will, together with them, be caught away in clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and thus we will always be with the Lord.

According to 1 Thessalonians, at Armageddon, when Christ descends from heaven, the “*chosen ones*” (Mt 24:31) who have died will be gathered, and those who are living will be gathered, and all of them together will “*be caught away in clouds to meet the Lord in the air.*” And then Armageddon is carried out.

Although the 5th seal reveals those "*chosen ones*" that were dead, they are told to continue resting "*a little while longer*", apparently in the grave, since 1 Thessalonians tells us that they are not resurrected until Christ descends from heaven at Armageddon. (Re 6:11)

Why do you suppose that the seventh seal brings silence to heaven? Well with the commencement of Armageddon, heaven is mostly emptied since all of the angels come with him:

**(Matthew 25:31)** "When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit down on his glorious throne.

**(Matthew 13:39)** The harvest is a conclusion of a system of things, and the reapers are angels.

Even the resurrected and gathered "*chosen ones*" are not in heaven, but are with him "*in the air.*" (1Th 4:17)

**(Revelation 17:14)** These will battle with the Lamb, but because he is Lord of lords and King of kings, the Lamb will conquer them. Also, those with him who are called and chosen and faithful will do so."

No doubt those who are still in heaven have their subdued attention focused on what is happening on earth where all of the activity is taking place, making heaven quiet and uneventful.

So the basic timeline for the end of the last days is:

- 1) The great tribulation finally comes to an end
- 2) Supernatural signs occur as the chosen ones are gathered to him
- 3) Armageddon takes place.

### **my conclusion**

What is my take-away from this? That we don't need to be preparing for a coming great tribulation. We are living in it, and it is soon to end.

What do *you* think?

There are many other scriptures that touch on this topic that i did not cover. Do you think that they disprove my theory? Share those scriptures with me and tell me what you think they mean.

Do you think i have misunderstood the scriptures i used? Which ones?

:^)

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