

STUDIES IN PREMILLENNIALISM (5) The Great Tribulation and surrounding events (1)

As we continue our study of the false theory of premillennialism, we now examine the 7 year tribulation that happens after the rapture, and surrounding events. Again, note that this doctrine is formulated by piecemealing verses of scriptures together to formulate their timeline. A detailed study of the various elements of this system of doctrine are extensive and confusing. It is not something that can be explained with simplicity or something that our time will permit to cover in exhaustive detail. I am only highlighting some of the tenets of this doctrine.

I. What is the great tribulation?

- a. Defined in the timeline – the predominant view of premillennialism says that as the “last days” approach, the saints – dead and alive – will be raptured up to heaven to be with the Lord. When that happens, there will be great turmoil in the world – disasters, plagues, wars, etc. The various things that will occur are referred to as the tribulation. Because of the rapture and other events, many will finally turn to the Lord – especially Jews (this is the 144,000 of Revelation 7:4-8) and an innumerable number of Gentiles (Revelation 7:9), as they will finally realize that Jesus is their messiah. Of course, the world will still be ungodly and wicked. This period of tribulation will last for 7 years (based upon a prophecy in Daniel 9:24-27) until the Lord returns to defeat and bind Satan (the battle of Armageddon) and His thousand year reign will begin. At some point during this time, a one world government will be established. A leader will be chosen who will gain great influence.
- b. The great tribulation – about 3 ½ years after this upheaval begins (based upon Revelation speaking of 3 ½ years – Revelation 11:2-3, 12:14, 13:5) the leader will eventually declare himself as deity – this is the antichrist. He will outlaw true religion and the greatest persecution ever known will begin – with many Christians and messianic Jews dying as martyrs. This is known as the great tribulation.
- c. Some quotes –
 - i. The Tribulation is a future time period when the Lord will accomplish at least two aspects of His plan: 1) He will complete His discipline of the nation Israel (Daniel 9:24), and 2) He will judge the unbelieving, godless inhabitants of the earth (Revelation 6–18). The length of the Tribulation is seven years. This is determined by an understanding of the seventy weeks of Daniel (Daniel 9:24–27; also see the article on the Tribulation). The Great Tribulation is the last half of the Tribulation period, three and one-half years in length.¹
 - ii. C.I. Scofield commenting on Revelation 7:14 in his Scofield Bible notes (NOTE: The Scofield Study Bible -1917- was one of the major sources that popularized the theory of Premillennialism) describes, “The great tribulation is the period of unexampled trouble predicted in the passages cited under that head from Psa. 2:5 to Rev. 7:14 and described in Rev. 11–18.” He further notes this will include 4 elements: 1) The cruel reign of “the beast out of the sea.... 2) The active interposition of Satan “having great wrath” (persecutions, powers, etc. – TT), 3) The unprecedented activity of demons, and 4) the terrible bowls of judgment of Revelation 16.²
- d. There are basically 3 passages of scripture used to advance this theory.

¹ Got Questions Ministries. (2002–2013). [Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered](#). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

² Scofield, C. I. (Ed.). (1917). [The Scofield Reference Bible: The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments](#) (p. 1337). New York; London; Toronto; Melbourne; Bombay: Oxford University Press.

- i. Daniel 9:24-27 and the 70 weeks – there is language concerning the 70th week which they use to imply this is the tribulation. We will examine this text in awhile.
- ii. Matthew 24:21 – advocates of premillennialism believe that most or all of Matthew 24 and 25 have reference to end time events. While many admit Jesus was specifically addressing the destruction of Jerusalem (along with Luke 21:20-24), they believe this text has a dual implication that is more descriptive of the end times than even Jerusalem. Matthew 24:21 states specifically, *For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.* The unprecedented “tribulation” they say implies it has not happened yet, and will be greater than that of Jerusalem. We will examine this text in just a moment!
- iii. Revelation 6-18, esp. 7:14 - one of the arguments for both the rapture is the absence of the mention of the church in the majority of Revelation which deals with the judgment of God – 7 seals, trumpets and bowls of wrath, etc. The theory is advanced that because of this, the tribulation is on the earth facing God’s judgment – which they say is literal events taking place as described in the book (note: premillennialism takes what events they understand as literal – e.g. earthquakes, famine, wars, etc., but the parts that do not fit their narrative – dragons, beasts, etc. they see as figurative. It is a great mixture.
- iv. Revelation 2:22 -

II. Doctrinal concerns with the tribulation

- a. Daniel 9:24-27 – and the 70 weeks - the premise of their 7 year tribulation theory.
 - i. It is from this text that premillennialism believes the tribulation will last 7 years. The text speaks of 70 weeks – a period of 7 weeks, 62 weeks and 1 final week. The final week is associated with the coming of the Messiah. Each week is believed to represent 7 years, and thus the period of 70 weeks would be equivalent to 490 years – which, is about the amount of time between the rebuilding of the temple and Jerusalem and the coming of Jesus to this earth. After the 69th week, the Messiah is cut off and the city and sanctuary will be destroyed. In the middle of this week an end will be brought to sacrifices and offerings. There will then be a consummation. Premillennialism teaches that between this 69th and 70th weeks is a period time, now approaching 2000 years. The 70th week is this supposed tribulation – beginning with the coming of the Lord.
 - ii. Consider the context of Daniel 9:
 - 1. Babylon has fallen to the Medo-Persians (Daniel 9:1).
 - 2. Vs. 2 - Daniel considers a prophecy of Jeremiah (25:11-12)
 - 3. Vs. 3-19 - He prays a prayer of confession and repentance for Israel, and Jerusalem in particular. He knows it is time and prays for the city’s forgiveness and restoration.
 - 4. Vs. 20 -21 – while praying, Gabriel appears to him.
 - 5. Vs. 23-27 - He then speaks of 70 weeks being determined. In this prophecy we see the following details:
 - a. ***It is “for your people and your holy city”*** – it has reference to Jerusalem
 - b. ***To finish the transgression*** – likely a prophecy pointing toward the Jews finishing their rejection of Jesus and therefore God’s kingdom -
 - c. ***Make an end to sins*** – applies to Jesus dying on the cross. NOT that sins will not continue to be committed, but the wages of sin will be addressed – Romans 6:23, Hebrews 2:14-15 – Jesus destroyed the devil and his works
 - d. ***Make reconciliation for iniquity*** – again, Jesus did this (Colossians 1:19-22)
 - e. ***Bring in everlasting righteousness*** – again, spiritually, Jesus did this establishing a kingdom based on righteousness (spiritual) – 2 Corinthians 5:21, Romans 3:21-26

- f. ***To seal up vision and prophecy*** – this is the time of fulfillment of prophecies concerning God’s redemptive plan – prophecies about the Messiah and His kingdom in particular. IOW, what happened in the first century is what this was prophesying about. See Luke 24:44, e.g. Luke 4:17-21 – Jesus at Nazareth.
NOTE: We might also consider in this that in the time of Jesus and the establishment of the kingdom/church prophecies would be brought to their conclusion (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:8-12)
- g. ***To anoint the Holy One*** – the best understanding of this (to me) in light of the rest of this context – it is a reference to Jesus being anointed. A study of anointing under the LOM will reveal that kings, prophets and priests were anointed. Jesus is all 3.
Premillennialists want to say this is about the temple. Like so much of premillennialism, that is speculation. Consider this, suppose reference is being made to the “most Holy” place of the temple! Hebrews 9 elaborates how Jesus is High Priest who has not entered the physical tabernacle (which was a symbol of things to come – (9:7-9), but into heaven itself – a greater a more perfect tabernacle – spiritual (9:11-12). He entered into heaven itself with a better, heavenly sacrifice of Himself. Note also that Hebrews 9:18-22 speaks of Moses dedicating the tabernacle with blood – this was sanctifying (anointing) the tabernacle (cf. Exodus 40:9-10 – the tabernacle was anointed along with its furnishings). This is SPIRITUAL FULFILLMENT associated with the spiritual kingdom NOT OF THIS WORLD (John 18:36)
- h. ***From the going forth of the command to rebuild Jerusalem*** – this leads to the discussion of when the beginning of this “70 weeks will occur. At least 3 scenarios are presented:
- i. The decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1-4) to rebuild the temple. This would have been contemporary with Daniel’s vision on this occasion – around 539-538 BC. The problem with this is dating. If the 70 weeks represent years (which is very likely), this would put its completion well before Jesus even came to earth (~50 BC).
NOTE: However, considering numbering in apocalyptic literature, it is possible that this 70 weeks is reference to a completed period of time, emphasized 3 fold (1) 1 week is 7 days, 2) 7 is associated with completeness, 3) 10 is associated with completeness as well – thus 10x7 would be completeness emphasized, and 7X70 would take that even further.
 - ii. The decree of Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:13-14) to restore the Law and its worship (~457 BC). This would put the dating CLOSE to the time of the ministry of Jesus, but a little early (~26 AD)
 - iii. The second decree of Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 2:1-8) – Nehemiah is permitted to rebuild the city with authority from the king (~445-444 BC). This would end a 3-4 years AFTER the ascension of Jesus.
 - iv. The 2nd and 3rd scenarios are plausible from a dating standpoint and can be reconciled as consistent with the time of life of Jesus (but exact events associated with these dates require speculation about what they involve. The third being possibly a reference to

when Cornelius obeyed – thus the gospel was introduced to the whole world, not just Jews).

The first date is also possible if we see the 70 weeks as figurative which is the nature of many of the visions in Daniel, and in all honesty this is the best consideration because we are not obligated to lock in specific events. It is simply a completed time period.

- i. **Until Messiah and Prince there will be 7 weeks and 62 weeks** (69 weeks) – after this period of 69 weeks (483 years) we come the life of Jesus.
- j. **The city shall be rebuilt** – this could have reference to the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem under the direction of Nehemiah and his restoration of worship, both his first and second visits, and perhaps some time associated with Jerusalem again being established.
- k. **After 62 weeks (total of 69 weeks) Messiah will be cut off, but not for Himself** – during this time, Christ will be rejected and crucified. *Not for Himself* could indicate it was US that He died (Romans 5:8).
- l. **And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and sanctuary** – because of the rejection of Jesus, the Messiah, the beginning of the end for Jerusalem and the Jews takes place. It will take about 40 years, but it will occur, nonetheless. Consider that when Jesus died, there was an earthquake, the bodies of dead saints arose AND “*the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.*” (Matthew 27:51-54). In the tearing of that veil, I see the declaration of God, “That is it! Israel has rejected me once and for all”. But even in that declaration, He gave them time to repent and time for the righteous of Israel to turn to Him. He gave them 40 years. I see hints of this in the book of Hebrews.
- m. **Vs. 27 could be describing God using Rome as His instrument of destruction against Jerusalem:**
 - i. **He makes a covenant with many** – Rome was a nation that made covenants with many nations and peoples. As long as they remained loyal to Rome they had relative freedom. This INCLUDED Judea and Jerusalem. In the gospels and Acts we continually read about the presence of Rome there. The Jews didn’t like it, but it was so!
 - ii. **In the “middle of the week”** – He brings an end to sacrifices and offerings: This could be reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The city was decimated, the temple was destroyed, and more than a million Jews perished. They were finally cut off and sacrifices ceased (and have not resumed since).
 - iii. **On the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate** – this would be Rome as they destroyed Jerusalem under the direction of Titus the general.
 1. NOTE: In Matthew 24:15-16 Jesus speaks of the “*abomination of desolation spoke of by Daniel the prophet standing in the holy place...*” This is in a context that is CLEARLY speaking about the destruction of Jerusalem (we will examine this text next week along with some others - TT).
 2. Mark 13:14 uses similar language.

3. But consider Luke 21:20-21 - *“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains...”*
 - iv. ***Even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate*** – Harkrider in his commentary on Revelation notes that this points to the eventual fall of Rome who is judged by God because of everything they did to Christians. The last phrase can be translated, “on the desolator”.
 - v. Tying this text to Matthew 24 and other passages, Daniel 9 HAS TO have reference to Jerusalem being destroyed!
- iii. Some observations about this text:
1. This is an extremely difficult text to interpret. I have attempted to present my plausible interpretation that shows it is related to the time of Christ and ultimately the destruction of Jerusalem. I could be wrong about some of my conclusion.
 2. Consider also the figurative nature of the book of Daniel and its visions. They dealt with the establishment of the kingdom of God. Recall that the first vision of Nebuchadnezzar was about 4 kingdoms – the 4th being Rome and God would establish His kingdom that would stand forever during that time (Daniel 2:44). The other visions Daniel records deal with this timeframe, INCLUDING the 70 weeks vision.
 3. **NOTICE that there is NOTHING in this text about a parenthesis or gap between the 69th and 70th weeks** dealing with “the church age” as premillennialism portrays it (read again vs. 26-27). WHERE is the gap?????????
Consider that premillennialists want to make this passage literal, EXCEPT for weeks representing years AND a gap that is NOT in the text!
 4. Nor does it fit a timeline dealing with the end of the world. It is about Jerusalem being judged.
 5. Gabriel is giving Daniel comfort about the return (the first 7 weeks of the prophecy), but sadly there is also a notice of Jerusalem’s future destruction

In this lesson we see that this text is NOT about some future great tribulation. Like everything about premillennialism, this text shows how they look for the spectacular and enigmatic texts to formulate their theory. But consider that Daniel 9 says very little about tribulation OR a 7 year time frame at the end of our generation. It was about Jerusalem and their rejection of Jesus. We continue to examine this next week when we address Matthew 24 and the nature of Revelation. We will see where we go from there. Meanwhile, do not dismiss the fact that our Lord is going to return and when He does we will stand before Him in judgment. Are you ready for that day?