

THE TRIBULATION?

The premillennial view that Jesus Christ will soon return to take the faithful from the earth for a seven year period of rapturous joy was discussed in our last article. Clearly, this view is not only without basis in the Scriptures, it also contradicts their plain teaching. For that matter, the term *rapture* is not even found in the Scriptures.

A companion to the unscriptural *rapture* theory is that of seven years of *tribulation* to be suffered by the wicked who are left behind when the faithful are taken from the earth to be “raptured.”

The term *tribulation* is found in the Scriptures. Jesus warned his disciples, “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” (Matthew 24:21). But what was Jesus actually talking about?

The context of Jesus’ statement had nothing to do with the *rapture-tribulation* scenario imagined by premillennialists. Rather, the context of his statement is framed in the first two verses of Matthew 24. Verse 1 indicates that Jesus’ disciples were exulting in the buildings of the temple. In response, according to verse 2, Jesus said, “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.” Clearly, Jesus spoke to those men of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem.

The disciples were amazed by this statement and asked Jesus, “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (:3). Jesus gave them a number of signs including “wars and rumors of wars” though such would not herald the end (of the temple) but only the “beginning of sorrows” (:6, 8). These sorrows would culminate in the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple as prophesied by Daniel (:15) and would call for an abandoning of the city by the prudent (:16f; Luke 21:20-24). This is the event that would cause the tribulation Jesus warned about per Matthew 24:21.

Yes, there would be a coming of Jesus in this time (:30). Not his second coming, but his coming in the power of the gospel. How can we be sure? Because all these things, all the signs Jesus cited, would occur within the time of the generation—the actual lifetime—of the men to whom he then spoke (:34). As certain as Jesus’ own word, it would be (:35). As certain as historic verification, this horrific event came to pass at the hands of the Romans in A.D. 70.

—Jerry F. Bassett