You think you’ve got problems?

What is the Great Tribulation?

“There will be great tribulation unequaled from the beginning of the world until now, and never to be equaled again” (Matthew 24:21).

You are walking in a crowded downtown area. The streets are teeming with shoppers and people rushing to and from work. Suddenly you find yourself face to face with a character who seems totally out of place. He is a bit unkempt, with a look of urgency in his eyes, and he’s shouting loudly (to whom you can’t quite figure out). That is . . . until he catches your eye. You see the sign he is holding with big red letters proclaiming: “REPENT! THE END IS NEAR!” Your pace quickens as you swerve wide to the right to get around him. “What a nut,” you mutter. And on you go.

Judgment. For most, it is a topic to be avoided at all costs. We have a strong aversion to being

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told us we are wrong—much less that we must suffer consequences for it. But that is exactly why God warns of judgment—so that people can respond positively and avoid the consequences.

In ancient Israel, God sent prophets to alert the people to coming peril. Those prophets were not particularly pleasant people. While their ways may have seemed overly dramatic to some, no one could fail to hear their warnings—and yet, even after hearing them, people failed to heed those warnings. We know from history that when Israel ignored the prophets, the consequences were dire. Wars, captivity, dispersion . . . all the things the prophets predicted came to pass. That is, almost all.

Trouble is Coming

Those same prophets predicted certain events that have not happened yet. They predicted a time described as a Great Tribulation, a time that will be marked by terrible worldwide trouble or “tsuris” such as this planet has never seen. Such tsuris you wouldn’t wish on your worst enemy! Y’shua also spoke of this terrible time—the verse cited at the beginning of this chapter is an excerpt from a speech he gave describing this Great Tribulation. The last book of the New Testament, the book of Revelation, gives an even more comprehensive look at these future events. It describes three sets of seven judgments, each one more terrible than the last. Suffice it to say, this time period will be unparalleled in human history.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the more common term for this tribulation period is “The Day of the Lord.” We find that term 26 times throughout the Scriptures.

Wail, for the day of the LORD is at hand! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. Therefore all hands will be limp, every man’s heart will melt, and they will be afraid. Pangs and sorrows will take hold of them; they will be in pain as a woman in childbirth; they will be amazed at one another; their faces will be like flames (Isaiah 13:6–8).

Remember that according to the Jewish calendar, a day begins at sundown and progresses from darkness to daylight. It is helpful to think about The Day of the Lord in those terms because it is not only a time of judgment; it is also a time of restoration. And while The Day of the Lord certainly applies to a time of tribulation, it also offers the promise of future hope. There is truth to the axiom, “It’s always darkest just before dawn.” The judgment of tribulation comes in order to bring the bright light of God’s Day.

Why the trouble?

Some might wonder how a merciful God could allow anything so terrible as this tribulation to befall the earth. Why is it necessary? Can’t God set things right without all of this judgment? As we ask ourselves these questions, we can take a lesson from Neville Chamberlain and his negotiations with Adolph Hitler. Chamberlain had no clue as to the evil he was dealing with in the megalomaniac from Austria, and so he looked to work things out with as little confrontation as possible. “Peace in our time” was Chamberlain’s goal. Therefore, in trying to settle things peacefully, he accommodated Hitler and so allowed evil to grow and consume all of Europe. There comes a time when judgment is necessary, when forcibly removing evil is the only right option.

Think about it. If you have a sense of moral outrage when you hear about murder or rape, embezzlement, child abuse, terrorism and so on, imagine the outrage God must feel. Day after day, year after year, these evil actions go on. But there is coming a day when God will say, “No more!” If God is going to bring an end to the injustice and suffering in this world (and he promises to do so), it must come down to a terrible trial. That trial is called the Great Tribulation and it is described in the New Testament book of Revelation.
God has been pretty patient with his creation, but a day will come when righteous anger for all the wrongs committed will come pouring down on the earth. The Bible talks about three sets of judgments during the Tribulation, using the metaphors of seals, trumpets and bowls. The seals will include terrible wars, famine, earthquakes and something described as “the stars falling to the earth like fruit falling from a tree” (perhaps referring to killer asteroids).

The trumpet judgments will include an apocalyptic storm that is described as “hail and fire mingled with blood, burning up a third of the earth’s trees and all green grass.” Perhaps a nuclear holocaust? There is also “something like a great mountain burning with fire thrown into the sea” that will destroy a third of the living creatures in the ocean. Another heavenly body described as a star will plunge to earth contaminating a third of the world’s water supply. A darkening of the sun and the air is also predicted.

The judgments known as the seven bowls will include some kind of skin disease for most of the world’s population. There will be more water pollution, this time killing all marine life. Some of the plagues will be reminiscent of the plagues God poured out on Egypt: a tangible darkness, water turned to blood. No wonder this time in history is called the Great Tribulation!

D o t h e m a t h

We don’t know exactly when this Great Tribulation is going to begin, but we do know how long it will last: seven years.

Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times. And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined. Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate (Daniel 9:25–27).
This passage from the book of Daniel provides crucial information about the length and events of the Great Tribulation. But it takes some effort to understand Daniel’s terminology. First, the number seven is significant in Jewish reckoning. Seven is the number of perfection, and perfection carries with it the connotation of completion. The number seven is used to measure periods of time. The seventh day is the Shabbat, the day of rest. The seventh year was the sabbatical year in Israel, a year when the whole Land was to have a rest, when there would be no planting and harvesting of crops. When Daniel talks about “weeks” (literally units of seven) in this passage, he is not speaking of literal weeks but of periods of time, each a period of seven years.

In this amazing prophecy, Daniel gives us important details about two major events in history, one of which is now past while the other remains in the future. Daniel’s clock starts ticking, “from the going forth of the command, to restore and rebuild Jerusalem.” That decree was issued by the Persian King Artaxerxes in approximately 444 B.C. From that point in history, Daniel tells us to count off “seven sevens and 62 sevens.” A bit of quick calculation tells us that adds up to 69 periods of sevens, or 483 years. If we count 483 years from 444 B.C. we see that the fulfillment of Daniel’s first amazing prediction was scheduled for the first century. “The anointed One will be cut off . . . The people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.”

The term “anointed one” is a translation of the Hebrew word “mashiach” or Messiah. When Daniel tells us that the anointed one will be “cut off” he is predicting nothing less than the death of Messiah . . . in the third decade of the first century! This is exactly the time frame when Y’shua died on a Roman cross. It is perplexing to consider why so many have overlooked a prophecy with such astounding implications. One explanation offered is that the rabbis have told us not to calculate the time of Messiah’s coming (Sanhedrin 97b).

Daniel also predicts, on the heels of that astounding statement, that both Jerusalem and
its sanctuary would be destroyed. This terrible tragedy did take place in A.D. 70—not long after Jesus was cut off!

The prophecy of Daniel, chapter nine, has not been completely fulfilled. There is more—one “seven” of the seventy still remains to be played out. But there seems to be a break in Daniel’s countdown; he indicates a time lapse between the sixty-ninth seven and the final seven. “The end will come like a flood, war will continue until the end and desolations have been decreed.” The past 2000 years have been a parenthesis in Daniel’s prophecy and we await that final seven: “He will confirm a covenant with many for one seven, but in the middle of that seven, he will put an end to sacrifice and offering and one who causes desolation will place abominations on a wing of the temple until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.”

Someone is going to make a covenant or treaty with “the many” for one seven, i.e. seven years. It is important to know the identities of those who are party to this treaty. The context and subject matter of this prophecy clearly indicate that “the many” are the people of Israel. The one who makes the treaty with Israel is “the ruler,” the very one whose people destroyed the city and sanctuary. Titus and the Romans were responsible for the first destruction; they were mortal enemies of the Jewish people. So will it be with this future ruler. His “treaty” will be one of treachery. “. . . He will put an end to sacrifice and offering and one who causes desolation will place abominations on a wing of the temple . . .”

Three and one half years after making a treaty with Israel (that is, halfway through the seven year period), this ruler breaks his word. Obviously the Temple has been rebuilt because Daniel tells us this ruler puts an end to sacrifice and sets up some kind of abomination (a loathsome horror that would be anathema to Jewish worship) right inside the Temple in Jerusalem. Ultimately this ruler is destroyed in a final conflagration of enormous proportion.

Who exactly is this “ruler” who makes a treaty with Israel? Why will the Temple be rebuilt in Jerusalem, and what will this final conflagration alluded to be like? A more detailed description will be presented in later chapters. Meanwhile there should be no doubt that there is a time of fierce judgment and wrath that lies ahead. This is The Day of the Lord, the Great Tribulation.

**Where is Hope?**

Another term that describes the Great Tribulation is, “the time of Jacob’s trouble.” “Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob’s trouble, but he shall be saved out of it” (Jeremiah 30:7).

Jeremiah says there will be a time of incredible distress for Jacob (referring to his descendants, since Jacob is long gone). Notice he goes on to say, “but he will be saved out of it.” Later comes a promise: “‘For I am with you,’ says the LORD, ‘to save you; though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you, yet I will not make a complete end of you. But I will correct you in justice, and will not let you go altogether unpunished’” (Jeremiah 30:11).

Here is part of the hope: that through all the suffering, Israel will be refined. God will correct and chastise his people, and the result will be restoration and the relationship that God has always desired to have with Israel. There is a hope for healing and wholeness behind God’s judgment; in fact that is his ultimate purpose in judging. Another purpose served by this great distress is that God is going to punish the nations; he will punish their wickedness and pour out his wrath upon evil. But once again, through the Tribulation he will also turn the nations to himself. “The LORD will be awesome to them, for He will reduce to nothing all the gods of the earth; people shall worship Him, each one from his place, indeed all the shores of the nations” (Zephaniah 2:11).

The time of terrible trouble that this world faces is God’s just judgment on all the evil the human race has done. Sadly, much of it is also the logical consequence of the tremendous accumulation of our own wrong choices. The Bible points out that the result of people’s rebellion against God is a spiritual deafness to his voice and a propensity to hear what we want to hear, whether or not it is true. “The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule Continued on page 6
by their own power; and My people love to have it so” (Jeremiah 5:31).

But what will happen in the end? That is what the tribulation time is about. God is saying, “Here you go. You want what you’ve wanted, without God telling you what is right and wrong? Well, here it is. This is what life is like without God to restrain the evil. I’m not holding it back any more. I offer you the sum total of what you’ve been asking for.” So essentially, this tribulation to come is both a judgment on global evil and a consequence of our choices.

Yet there is an up side to all of this. C. S. Lewis says, “Suffering is God’s megaphone to wake a sleeping world.” Sometimes it takes the hardship, the consequences of our actions to wake us up and force us to face reality. I had a graphic demonstration of this when I was living in New York City in 1995. New York is the crossroads of civilization, the hub of world trade, the communications capital of the world. The city is a monument to human achievement, to all that we can accomplish. Yet, when we experienced a record-breaking snowstorm, the entire city shut down. No one could move in or out of this world-class city. Pipes froze, people were stranded and some died. How incredible that the lightest, fluffiest stuff that could fall from the sky totally foiled the plans of some of the most resourceful people in the world. None of our creations or contraptions could control the tons of this light, fluffy stuff that had brought New York City to a grinding halt.

Now if a snowstorm was enough to stop people in their tracks, just imagine what the Great Tribulation will do. There will be nothing lightweight or fluffy about it! God will bring down upon the world a sense of cosmic reality whereby people will be jarred into the realization that we are not masters of the universe. Only God is. And that is the key to finding the only path to hope.

As long as human beings cling to the illusion that we are the lords of our own destiny, we will be in darkness. Our illusions may bring pleasure and they may bring temporary satisfaction, but only the truth can bring us real and lasting meaning. The truth is, God is in control. The truth is, he cares about you and would like you to accept the relationship he offers those who trust him.

The Day of the Lord begins with a terrible descent into the darkest time in human history, but its ultimate goal is a bright future. There is an old Russian proverb, “The morning is wiser than the night.” There is a Bible verse that says it even better, “…joy comes in the morning” (Psalm 30:5b). Things look different and yes, better, in the light of day.

You don’t have to wait until morning to know the reality of God’s loving sovereignty. When we acknowledge God as creator and king, when we give him the proper place in our lives, when we receive the life he wants to give us in his son Y’shua, we pass from judgment into the brightness of his holy presence. You can experience his truth, love and forgiveness today, just ask him.

—David Brickner
What quality is most essential to a meaningful life? Researchers were surprised when approximately 60% of respondents to a survey asking that question said their number one choice was the quality of HOPE. It is within this context that I read *Future Hope*, a challenging new book by David Brickner.

Brickner divides his book (subtitled “A Jewish Christian Look at the End of the World”) into eleven brief chapters and eight appendices, each dealing with an aspect of the theme. He invites readers to examine the chapters in whatever order they choose. The table of contents makes it easy to find which chapters address what questions, including “What is Armageddon?” “Who is the Antichrist?” and “What is the role of Israel in the end times?”

Brickner writes from his perspective as a fifth generation Jewish believer in Jesus. He examines Jewish prophecies concerning end times and tells how it is possible to have confidence and hope as these climactic and catastrophic world events unfold.

Many books on the topic of end times prophecy are so complex that their readership is limited to theologians and scholars. Brickner wrote *Future Hope* in an easy-to-understand style for a general audience. He wrote to the average person who needs to know that, despite the turmoil and tragedies we may face, God has promised profound meaning and hope.

Brickner writes concisely and clearly, which makes the book a fairly quick and easy read. However, it may not satisfy a reader who is already deeply involved in a biblical study of end times—it is not meant to be an in-depth treatment of all the issues it raises. It does address the anxieties that all people have about the future and offers a dynamic solution. Page after page suggests to the reader that it is possible to live in intimate relationship with the God who is in control of the future, and who has embedded future events with meaning and purpose and therefore with hope.

Brickner doesn’t skirt controversial questions about the future found in the prophecies of Daniel, Zechariah, Matthew and Revelation, though he includes a disclaimer regarding the positions he takes as being his own and not attributable to the organization he leads, Jews for Jesus.

Is there anyone who does not feel anxiety about the future? It is difficult to have hope when we live in such a nihilistic, cynical society. Brickner suggests that many of our problems are traceable to the fact that most people have disregarded God and have chosen to believe in humanity's total control over our own life and destiny. Centuries of bad choices have brought us to the edge of despair and destruction. *Future Hope* counters the despair which this humanistic faith has caused at its very source. Chapter after chapter highlights the same theme: there is hope because God is in control and no matter what happens, history is moving toward a divinely appointed climax. God will use each event the prophets foretold to bring about purpose and meaning. For that reason all of history is filled with hope.

If you have questions about the future, I encourage you to read *Future Hope* and to consider seriously the implications that Brickner raises.

John Van Dyke 
reviewer
MULDERIUS—WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF THAT SIGN!

REPENT! THE END IS NEAR!

JERUSALEM, 69 A.D.

HMMM... SOUNDS OMINOUS TO ME. COULD BE HE’S WORRIED ABOUT THE THREAT OF EXTRATERRESTRIAL INVASION.

NO—HE’S PROBABLY SUFFERING FROM SOME KIND OF EXTREME PSYCHOTIC DELUSION.

I DON’T KNOW, SCULLIA. HE LOOKS PRETTY RATIONAL TO ME. MAYBE HE’S ON TO SOMETHING.

OH, MULDERIUS! MANY HAVE FALSELY WARNED OF IMPENDING DOOM. I STILL THINK HE’S CRAZY.

I WOULDN’T RUSH TO THAT CONCLUSION, SCULLIA. LOOK AT THE OTHER SIDE OF HIS SIGN.

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN? COULD THE END BE NEAR? IS IT THE TRUTH?

PREPARE FOR THE 770 PROBLEM!

THE TRUTH... HMMM.

Paige Saunders ’99