

**Summer 2011 Newsletter**  
**Detroit Bible Students Ecclesia**  
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*"We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, ... because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned. And the nations were angry..." Revelation 11:17,18*



## *Troubled Times*

*"And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh." Luke 21:28*

Except for the era of World War II, has there ever been a year that began with so much trouble? In just a few short months, we have seen riots and government upheavals in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Iran and Yemen. Israel is still the focus of Arab attacks as large Palestinian demonstrations marked the anniversary of the Six Day War. World pressure is on Israel to give up the territories they gained after being attacked by their Arab neighbors in 1967 but Gaza has demonstrated the result of returning land to the Arabs.

Meanwhile, the largest earthquake ever recorded struck just off the coast of Japan, creating a devastating tsunami which multiplied the death and destruction caused by the earthquake itself. Nuclear power facilities which were sent into meltdown by these events, have released enormous levels of radiation, and the already beleaguered Japanese people are once again facing Hiroshima-like nuclear pollution.

At home, Floods have inundated the Midwest, and an unprecedented number of spring tornadoes swept the southern United States killing hundreds and leaving enormous swaths of destruction in their wake. Thousands have lost their homes and

livelihoods as a result, and hurricane season has not yet begun. Thinking back to the devastation of Katrina, one can only wonder what that will bring.

We are indeed living in a great time of trouble. Since the dawn of the twentieth century we have been living in history's most violent era, characterized by unprecedented trouble including two World Wars, Korea, Viet Nam, and wars in the Middle East; nuclear proliferation, revolution, terrorism, genocide; as well as "natural" disasters, earthquakes, volcanoes, tsunamis. The twenty-first century has followed in the same course as its predecessor. The events of the current century are already a catalog of horrors, to which this year has been a strong contributor.

### **Is this the "seven years tribulation?"**

The Bible predicts that a great time of trouble would come upon the world in the last days. The question may be asked, "Is this the seven years tribulation" which some have been taught to expect? To answer this question, it is necessary to consider the historical origin of the concept and the scriptural prophecy from which it is derived.

The "seven years tribulation" concept rests solely on an arbitrary splitting of a seventy-week prophecy found in Daniel 9:24-27. Seventy weeks equals 490 days, and all agree, upon the basis of Ezekiel 4:6—a day for a year—that this seventy weeks equals not 490 literal days, but 490 years. There is also unanimity that the 69 weeks of Daniel 9:25 marks a period from a decree issued in Nehemiah's day to the first advent of Christ. Verse 26 states that "after" (Hebrew—*achar*) the 69 weeks "shall Messiah (Christ) be cut off," and verse 27 shows that "in the midst of the [70th] week he [Christ] shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease." Christ's death abolished the necessity for the further offering of typical sacrifices by Israel's priesthood. (Hebrews 9:11; 10:12) The division of the 69th and 70th week is **purely arbitrary**. There is no justification for separating out the last week from the prophecy. The 70th week immediately follows the 69 weeks and verse 27 clearly shows it is in the midst of the 70th week that Christ died.

The Futurist Movement, to which the concept of the "seven years tribulation" belongs, began during the Counter-Reformation and was conceived by Francisco Ribera, a Jesuit priest, who, in 1590, wrote a 500 page commentary aimed at refuting the Protestant identification of the Antichrist as the Church of Rome, and introducing a literal interpretation of Revelation to replace the traditional symbolic understanding.

Early reformers from Peter Waldo in the 1170's to Wycliffe in the late 1300's, were the first to identify the Roman Church as the Antichrist as they saw worldly conditions seeping in and pervading it.. The historian Will Durant describes this transformation of the church in his book The Age of Faith, page 51: "*As rich and aristocratic families abandoned paganism for Christianity, the Roman Church participated more and more in the wealth that came to the Western capital and ... the bishop of Rome lived like a prince in the Lateran Palace, and moved through the city with the pomp of an emperor.... While the Christian populace joined the surviving pagans at the theater, the races and the games, a minority of Christians strove to live a life in harmony with the Gospels.*"

Initially, Waldo, Wycliffe, Luther and others, thought that they could reform the church by bringing the errors and abuses to light. When this failed, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Carlstadt, etc., gave up trying to heal her and separated from the Roman Catholic Church. Protestantism was born. These Reformers had some differences between themselves, but one thing **they all agreed** on was that Papacy (the Catholic **church-state system—not Catholic people**) was the "Man of Sin"—the Antichrist. They were firmly united on this. For example, Luther, the father of the Reformation, said, "We are convinced that the Papacy is the seat of the true and real Antichrist." (What Luther Says, ed. Ewald M. Plass, Vol.1,34)

As the Protestant Movement grew, the Papacy became alarmed at their loss of control over the people. It was

necessary to defuse the claims of the Reformers and Francisco Ribera rose to the task. Briefly, his assertion was that Christ will return briefly in fulfillment of 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17, and rapture the Church. Then Armageddon and the seven years of tribulation will begin, during which a despotic leader known as the "Man of Sin" rises to power and persecutes all who won't worship him. Lastly, Christ returns again with his saints and destroys Antichrist. Therefore making all references to the Man of Sin and Antichrist future events.

When the disciples asked Jesus what signs they should watch for to know that they were at the end of the age, Jesus told them (Matthew 24:4,5) that **first** a great apostate system would arise claiming to be Christ and will deceive many. He further labeled this system (v.15) "the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet" (Daniel 11:31). While most Bible expositors apply the Daniel reference to the erection of the statue of Zeus in Jerusalem's temple by Antiochus Epiphanes, the fact that Jesus tells his disciples to look for its fulfillment future to their day, shows that there was yet something coming which would be the fulfillment of this prophecy; something that would usurp the place of Christ **before** his second advent.

### The "Man of Sin"

In 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, the Apostle Paul calls this same "abomination" the "man of sin" and "mystery of iniquity" and warned the Church that it was **already** at work. How like Jesus' words in Matthew 24:5 is Paul's description in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 "...who exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God showing himself that he is God." That it was already at work in the Apostle's day, was confirmed in Revelation 2:2 in the message to the first church, Ephesus. "...you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not and have found them liars." After the death of the Apostles, the way was open for "wolves ... to come in ... not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves." (Acts 20:29. 30)

In scripture, the true, faithful church of God, is represented as a virgin waiting for her Bridegroom, Christ. The apostate system is pictured in Revelation 17 as a harlot because she did not wait for Christ, but allied herself with the civil governments of the world. She is also pictured as being drunken with the blood of the saints and martyrs of Jesus. (Rev. 17:6) One needs only pick up a history book to learn about the great church-state system that has ruled the world and been responsible for the various persecutions, inquisitions, and religious wars waged throughout the last 2,000 years of man's history.

That Papacy was the Antichrist/"Man of Sin" was fundamental Reformation doctrine, and has been the historic position of Protestantism from the Reformation until just after

World War II. Inroads into this belief began to be made when John Darby, founder of the Plymouth Brethren, embraced the ideas of Ribera in the mid 1800's. He influenced a minority of Protestant Fundamentalists to adopt his Futurist "seven-year tribulation" concept. and during the balance of the 1800s and into the 1900's, this militant minority advocated a future, literal interpretation of Revelation. The view became popular among Protestants after 1948 with the help of such men as Dwight L Moody and Cyrus Scofield, who promoted it in his reference Bible.

### Why so much trouble?

There are many prophecies in scripture that were given to prepare the faithful to endure the trouble coming before the setting up of Christ's kingdom. Jesus said, "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, **there should no flesh be saved:** but for the elect's sake **those days shall be shortened.**" (Matt. 24:21,22) "And at that time shall Michael stand up...and there shall be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time..." (Daniel 12:1)

Since God pronounced the curse upon man in the Garden of Eden, the world's history has been one of continual strife. Is the present time really so much different? Yes. All the sufferings of the past, while they were terrible for the ones who lived through them, only affected the people who were in the path of the warring hordes. In the second world war, for the first time, civilian casualties equaled deaths on the battlefield. Today, with nuclear weapons it is possible to destroy all flesh. For this reason, we believe we are living in the last days and that the establishment of Christ's kingdom in the earth is near.

### The Object of Christ's Return

Although great trouble characterizes the end of the age, nothing as fantastic as the prognostications of the Literalists will occur. Revelation is a book of symbols and should be interpreted in the light of the rest of the Bible testimony. Instead of an event to be dreaded, the Lord's return is a time of blessing and rewarding of all those who conform to his righteous rule. The Apostle Peter said that "times of refreshing" would come from the presence of the Lord, (Acts 3:19-21) and the "ransomed of the Lord will return" with joy and gladness. (Isaiah 35:10) and Jesus **gave** the ransom for **all** (1 Timothy 2:6). All who now die because of Adam will be given an opportunity for life because of Jesus. (Romans 5:12,18, 19; 1 Corinthians 15:22)

Our lead scripture gives us an insight into the work that Jesus will do during his second advent. "Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ and he shall reign for ever and ever!' ... The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, And the time of

the dead that they should be judged, And that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, And those who fear Your name, small and great, And should destroy those who destroy the earth." (Revelation 11:15-18)

When Jesus first returns there is great trouble in the earth. "The nations are angry." Like a physician who must wound to heal, the Lord must cut away the evils in the world so that the blessings of his kingdom may flow out. This results in great trouble as the "god of this world," Satan, resists the breaking up of his household. (2 Corinthians 4:4; Mark 3:27) "For He must reign until He has put all enemies under his feet, The last enemy that will be destroyed is death." (1 Corinthians 15:25,26)

Jesus returns not only to gather his Church but also to fulfill the gospel. The apostle Paul tells us what the Gospel is in Galatians 3:8; "And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the nations by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, 'In you all the nations shall be blessed.'" During this present Gospel Age, believers in Christ have been blessed, but Paul goes on to show that the meaning of the promise is more inclusive. "Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed, who is Christ.;" "And if you are Christ's then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (vss. 16,29) Since Christians are part of the seed doing the blessing, their receiving blessing is only a part of the promise of the Gospel. Therefore, Christ returns not only to reward his Church, but also to accomplish the blessing of the rest of the world of mankind. God promised it to Abraham and bound it with an oath. (Hebrews 6:13,14)

For those who may be fearfully looking at the catastrophic events of our day, the promises of God offer hope and assurance. For those who have been taught that Jesus returns merely to "rapture" his church and leave the rest of the world to destruction, Jesus said, "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." (John 3:17) "And he is the propitiation for our sins: and **not for ours only**, but also for the sins of the whole world." (1 John 2:2) God "will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:4) Notice the order!

In Christ's glorious kingdom, we learn that all tears, sorrow, pain and death will pass away and there will be no more curse. All evil will be wiped out and even death and hell will be cast into the lake of fire...the second death, destruction, and the nations will be healed, (Revelation 21:4; 20:14; 22:2)

*"And the spirit and the bride say, Come.  
... And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will,  
let him take the water of life freely."  
Revelation 22:17*

