

Di223 We Believe

Lesson Di223-26 The Great Tribulation

Many people seek out astrologers and fortune-tellers whom they think can predict the future. They want to know what tomorrow may hold. Such curiosity opens the door for Satan to gain a foothold in their lives. For the believer, there is nothing to fear in future events. The Bible does not provide a time schedule for the end-time events. However, God's Word does speak of the end of this age. The books of the prophets Ezekiel and Daniel, as well as Paul's Epistles and John's Revelation foretell future events. In this lesson we will focus on scriptural prophecy concerning the Great Tribulation.

In our last two lessons you learned that the first end-time event is the rapture of the Church. To review, one day this present age will be interrupted by the sudden return of Christ and the Rapture. All who have given their hearts to Christ will be caught up in the air to be with Jesus. Many people who thought they were Christians, but had not accepted Christ as Savior, will be left on earth. Being left behind will mean terrible suffering. God's judgment will fall on a rebellious and sinful world. Only God knows when the Great Tribulation will take place.

What is the Great Tribulation? The word 'tribulation' means "a time of great misery or distress—a time of extreme suffering." The Great Tribulation is a period of seven years which begins right after the rapture of the Church. It will be a time of great suffering, such as the world has never seen. A powerful, but evil, man called 'the Antichrist' will become a world leader. He will make a covenant with unbelieving Jews, who have returned to the Holy Land. During the first three and a half years, the Antichrist will keep his agreement with the Jews. After that time is over, he will break the covenant and many horrible things will take place.

The Tribulation directly concerns Israel and is God's judgment for their rejection of the Messiah. The Tribulation also affects the whole world because of its lack of godliness and sad treatment of the Jews. The first half of these final seven years will probably be a time of prosperity and acceptance of the Antichrist. Jews may see him as the great deliverer from economic chaos. The second half of the period will bring the horrible plagues described in the Book of Revelation. These include conquest, wars, famine, death, and destruction.

What will the Antichrist be like, and what will he do? The Bible warns against false Christs or men who claim to be the Messiah or Deliverer. This false Christ is called the Antichrist. He will be Satan's special agent from hell. Daniel tells us the Antichrist will make a covenant or agreement with the Jews. He then will break that agreement after three and a half years and will stop temple sacrifices and offerings. He will set up an "abomination that causes desolation" in the temple and the time of trouble will begin (Dan 9:27). The prophet Jeremiah tells us, "How awful that day will be! No other will be like it. It will be a time of trouble for Jacob [the Jews], but he will be saved out of it" (Jer 30:7). The Antichrist will turn on the Jews.

God's patience with evil men who choose to follow Satan finally ends. The wrath of a righteous God spills out on the earth in plagues of judgment: hail and fire mingled with blood, fire, a third of the sea turned to blood, the drinking water made bitter, a third of the lights of the

heavens darkened, locusts that torment with severe pain, and death to many people. Further plagues will be poured out from God's wrath: ulcers and sores on people, rivers turned to blood, the earth scorched by the heat of the sun, darkness, and the Euphrates River dried up (Rev 8-9). This unbelievable destruction will end only with the revelation of Jesus Christ at the Battle of Armageddon.

What is happening in heaven during the Great Tribulation on earth? While God's wrath is being poured out on the earth, the saints caught away in the Rapture are busy with events in heaven.

First is our call to the Judgment Seat of Christ, where our works will be judged. Christ is the judge. The apostle Paul writes, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2Cor 5:10). Everything we have ever said or done secretly will be uncovered. God will examine and openly reveal our character, our good deeds, our attitudes, our motives, and our lack of love. God will reward all who work for him. He sees the sacrifice of our service. Our judgment will include how we have judged others. Faithfulness will be given the highest priority. "The Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do" (Eph 6:8).

Second, we begin to celebrate at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. After we have been judged, we are ready to be presented as the perfect bride of Christ. John describes the scene in heaven: "Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: 'Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.' (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.)" (Rev 19:6-8). The marriage of Christ and the Church is finally complete. "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (Eph 5:26-27). This is the picture of the Church as the Bride of Christ. The Marriage Supper of the Lamb is a wonderful time.

This lesson is **important** because it explains about the Great Tribulation, the Antichrist, the Judgment Seat of Christ, and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. What a contrast between what is going on down on earth and what is happening in heaven!

The **main truth** of this lesson is that on earth there will be a time of tribulation and great suffering. At the same time, in heaven the works of the saints will be judged. This will be followed by the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. The Church will be united with Christ, our heavenly bridegroom.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. What is the Great Tribulation that will take place on earth? [Pause.]
 - A. If you said, "The Great Tribulation is a time of great suffering in which Antichrist will be the world ruler for seven years," you are right.

2. When Christians are judged for their deeds and service to God, what characteristic will be the most important? [Pause.]

A. If you answered that faithfulness in service to God will be the most important characteristic, you are right.

3. What great celebration will take place in heaven following the Judgment Seat of Christ? [Pause.]

A. If you said, “The Marriage Supper of the Lamb, which is the celebration of Christ with his saints,” you are correct.

Your **assignment** is to memorize our twelfth *Statement of Faith*: “We believe the blessed hope of the Church is Christ’s return from heaven to ‘catch up’ the Christians who have died, together with those who are alive, to be with him forever.” Also learn the **Memory Verse**: “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am” (John 14:3). Share with at least two other persons about the Great Tribulation, the Judgment Seat of Christ, and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Share with your family about the contrast between events on earth and events in heaven during that time period. Offer to pray with any of them who are not sure where they would be if Jesus came back today.

Review all twelve *Statements of Faith* until you can say them from memory:

Statement #1: We believe the Scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments, are verbally inspired of God. They are the revelation of God to man, the unchanging rule of faith and conduct.

Statement #2: We believe the one true God has revealed himself as the eternal Creator of heaven and earth and the Savior of mankind. He has further revealed himself as one being in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Statement #3: We believe the Lord Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, as revealed in the Scriptures by his virgin birth, his sinless life, his miracles, his death on the Cross, his bodily resurrection from the dead, and his position at the right hand of God.

Statement #4: We believe that human beings were created in the image of God for a loving relationship with him. They chose to disobey God, however, and thus experienced physical death and separation from God.

Statement #5: We believe mankind’s only hope of salvation is through the shed blood of Jesus, the Son of God. The gift of eternal life is received when we repent of our sins and confess our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Statement #6: We believe water baptism by immersion is commanded of all who repent and believe on Christ as Savior. Water baptism is a witness to the world that we have died to sin and been raised to new life in Christ.

Statement #7: We believe the Lord’s Supper is a remembrance of Christ’s suffering and death, and a prophecy of his Second Coming. Christ commanded all believers to take Communion until he comes.

Statement #8: We believe the baptism in the Holy Spirit, according to Acts 2:4, is given to empower a believer to witness and to live an overcoming Christian life.

Statement #9: We believe sanctification is working with the Holy Spirit to separate ourselves from sin and to dedicate ourselves to God.

Statement #10: We believe the Church is the body of Christ with a divinely called ministry. Its purpose is to evangelize the world, worship God, encourage believers to grow in the likeness of Christ, and show God's love and compassion to the world.

Statement #11: We believe healing is provided for in the atonement of Christ and is the privilege of all who ask and believe.

Statement #12: We believe the blessed hope of the Church is Christ's return from heaven to 'catch up' the Christians who have died, together with those who are alive, to be with him forever.