

Th131 God's Plan

Lesson Th131-40 The Tribulation

Have you ever wanted to know what will happen in the future? Everyone at one time or another has wished just that. In this lesson we will begin to learn about the future. God has revealed what will one day happen to His children, the people who are wicked, the very earth we live upon, and Satan and his fallen angels.

Every part of God's plan throughout history has been for one purpose. He wanted to have children that He could love and that would love Him in return. As we learned in our last lesson, it is not God's intent that we should live in these physical bodies upon the earth forever. Like every loving parent, He desires for us to be in His presence. In our last lesson we learned that one day Jesus will return in the clouds. All believers, those who have died in the past, and those who are alive upon the earth, will be changed and resurrected with immortal bodies. And in this way His promise to His children will have begun.

But God has also given us a glimpse into the future beyond the Rapture. We do not know when these events will happen, but they have been prophesied by the apostle John and by a few Old Testament prophets. These prophecies talk about a seven-year period of time called the Tribulation. It will be a terrible time when God pours out His judgment upon the wicked. Here is what the Bible says will happen.

The Great Tribulation will begin with a conqueror who throws the world into war. The war will cause planting, harvesting, and the distribution of food to be interrupted. This will lead to famine. Refugees will flee the war zone and be forced to live in unclean situations. This will result in the rampant spread of disease. Up to one-fourth of all of the people on the earth will die because of the war, the famine, and the diseases (Rev 6:8). But this will be just the beginning.

On a dark night you can often see shooting stars streak across the sky. These are chunks of rock and debris that are flying through space at many thousands of kilometers per hour. When they strike the earth's atmosphere they are heated up to thousands of degrees and burn up. The Bible says that the next event in human history will be an asteroid, "something like a huge mountain," flying across the sky, burning as it races through the earth's atmosphere at tens of thousands of kilometers per hour. This massive asteroid will strike the ocean and set off a chain of events that will be cataclysmic.

When the asteroid strikes the ocean a number of things will happen all at once. There will be a brilliant flash and great explosion. A blast of heat will go around the entire world causing grass and small plants to immediately wither and catch on fire. The heat will be so great that one-third of all of the trees upon the earth will burn up as well. The asteroid striking the ocean will cause great tidal waves to go rushing across the ocean. One-third of all the animals that live in the ocean will die and one third of all the ships will be sunk. The asteroid strikes the earth so hard with such a great speed that it causes a great explosion that sends billions of tons of rock into outer space. A massive black cloud of dust and soot will plunge one-third of the earth into darkness.

There is an old saying that whatever goes up must come down. The earth's gravity pulls all of those billions of tons of rock that were thrown up into outer space to come crashing back down into the earth's atmosphere. It will look like it is raining stars, as millions of chunks of rock burn up in the earth's atmosphere.

Part of this great dust cloud that blackens out the sun will contain elements like sulfur. As the moisture in our atmosphere forms clouds, the water will mix with the sulfur dust to create sulfuric acid. When it rains it will not rain water, it will rain acid! The acid will poison the rivers and lakes. And as the water soaks into the ground it will even poison the wells and springs. Part of the world will become uninhabitable. All of the water will become poisoned and the sun will not be shining. Crops will be dying. These nations will have to do something quickly or their entire populations will die.

One country will put together an army that has over 200 million soldiers. This army sets out to conquer other nations, so that it can relocate its entire population. One-third of all of the people on the earth will die in this war.

There will also be a war in the spirit world. This will take place three and one-half years into the seven years of the Tribulation. The apostle John saw this war in a vision—Satan and all of his fallen angels warring with Michael the archangel and his great army. We already know how this war must end, for Jesus has already defeated Satan. What then was this war about? John says that Satan and all of his fallen angels were thrown down to the earth. They lost their places among the stars and were forced down upon this one planet. Satan is very angry. He knows that his time is very short. After perhaps billions of years, Satan is facing a final judgment.

Satan will now lead the world into the final three years of unprecedented Tribulation. Great political events will transpire. A world leader under Satan's control will arise in Europe and he will rule over what is left of the earth. Treaties will be made and then broken. Finally at the end of the seven years of Tribulation, Jesus and the armies of Heaven return to the earth. These are the words that John wrote to describe Christ's return:

"I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. 'He will rule them with an iron scepter.' ... On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS" (Rev 19:11-16).

And thus Jesus Christ, along with all of the saints, return to the earth. The rulers and leaders of the earth will try to fight against Christ, but they will all be slain. Satan and his fallen angels will be defeated as well. We will learn more about this in the next lesson.

The Great Tribulation is a terrible time that will come upon the earth. But we do not need to fear. The Tribulation is God's wrath poured out upon the wicked and unbelieving. It is not intended for his children.

In this lesson we have seen the next great event in God's plan for His children and the earth. It is both terrifying and exciting. What should we do with this knowledge? We do not know if this will happen in our lifetime. It could. But then it could be many years off in the future. God's Word does not reveal when this will take place. We do know that the children of God will be delivered and that the wicked will be judged. Perhaps this is the truth that we should keep ever present in our hearts. There are people all around us who do not know God. Unless they are reached with the Gospel they will surely come under an eternal judgment.

This lesson is **important** because it speaks about a seven-year period of time called the Great Tribulation. It will be a terrible time when God pours out His judgment upon the wicked. Because we know what is ahead, we must try to win as many people to the Lord as possible.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that during the Tribulation both those who have rejected Christ on earth and Satan and his forces in the spirit world will be defeated by God's power. Since we do not know when Jesus will come back or when the Tribulation will occur, we must be ready to meet Him at any moment.

Let's **review** what you learned in this lesson.

1. How many years does the Great Tribulation last? [Pause]
 - A. If you said, "The Great Tribulation will last seven years," you are correct.
2. What catastrophic event will happen in the Tribulation that will cause cataclysmic destruction upon the earth? [Pause]
 - A. If you said that a giant asteroid will hit the earth, then you are right.
3. What happens to Satan and his fallen angels halfway through the tribulation? [Pause]
 - A. If you said there is a war in heaven and that they are all cast down to the earth, then you answered correctly.
4. What happens at the end of the Tribulation? [Pause]
 - A. If you said that Jesus and all of the saints return to the earth, you are correct.

Your **assignment** is to review this lesson three times until you have mastered the information about the Great Tribulation. Find a few fellow believers and discuss with them what you have learned. Encourage one another to do more to win the lost.