

Anything But Secret



By Doug Batchelor

God's Warning

In the early 1500s, the Aztec empire was one of the most powerful and sophisticated civilizations in the western hemisphere. However, within one year's time this mighty nation of over 2 million people was conquered and enslaved by just 600 men. How did it happen?

The Aztecs had a prophecy about Quetzalcoatl (kèt-säl´ko-ä-tal), a legendary feathered god-king who was light-skinned and bearded. It predicted that he would return to Mexico from across the sea and that he would come in the clouds from the east to save them.

Well, in 1519 Spanish galleons arrived in Mexico carrying a group of conquistadors led by Hernando Cortez. When the Aztecs saw these ships, they thought their billowing sails looked like clouds. Cortez heard about the Aztec legend from some Indians who lived on the shore and decided to try to use it to his advantage. By assuming the mantle of deity, he hoped to befuddle superstitious King Montezuma II.

While the king was waiting to receive the light-skinned visitor with honor, Cortez marched his army right into the center of the Aztec capital. By the time the people realized that Cortez was not the savior they were expecting, it was too late. The conquistadors proceeded to plunder, enslave and kill the Aztec people. An entire nation was deceived and destroyed - in part because the prophecies of their god's return were so ambiguous that almost anyone could have served as a counterfeit.

In the near future, Satan will attempt to personate Jesus and counterfeit His return to earth. But God's people need not be deceived. When the disciples asked Jesus for the sign of His coming and the end of the world, the very first thing He told them was to be on guard against impostors. He said, "Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many." (Matthew 24:4, 5).

Christ then proceeded to give His followers a wealth of information about His second coming so there would be no doubt as to how He would return. Jesus wants us not only to know that He is coming and that He's coming soon, but also to understand the manner of His coming.

The reason this is so important is that Satan will soon attempt to personate Jesus and counterfeit His return. To pave the way, Satan has introduced a strong delusion to the Christian world that has been almost universally accepted in mainline churches. I am referring to the popular teaching regarding a "secret rapture." The secret rapture theory was designed to lull God's people into a false sense of security and to prepare them for this final master

deception.

The devil knows that Jesus is coming back and that his remaining time is short (Revelation 12:12). He has been sharpening his skills of deception for 6,000 years, and his last masquerade will be his masterpiece.

In fact, God warned that Satan will do such a convincing job that, if it were possible, even the very elect would be deceived. Jesus said to His disciples, "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." (Matthew 24:23, 24).

Satan is not an ugly, grotesque, bat-winged creature wearing a red leotard. He's an angel - a beautiful, powerful angel. And the Bible makes it clear that he is able to transform himself and appear in different forms. "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:13, 14). We must not underestimate how convincing and overpowering Satan's final deception will be. I'm sure he will even quote Scripture, as he did while tempting Christ in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-6). The devil also has the ability to create the illusion of miracles. You will remember that when Moses went in before Pharaoh to plead for the children of Israel, the magicians of Egypt were able to duplicate the first few signs from God (Exodus Chapters 7, 8). Satan is in the business of deception, and we know that he is saving his greatest deception of all for the last days. We need to know how Jesus is coming, or we will be deceived.

The Bible is very clear that when Jesus comes back, His feet never touch the ground. It says the righteous will be caught up to meet Him in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17). This is why Jesus emphatically warns us, "Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, he is in the desert!' do not go out: or 'Look, He is in the inner rooms!' do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of man be." (Matthew 24:26, 27 NKJV).

Satan cannot replicate a worldwide, cataclysmic event the magnitude of the real second coming. However, if he can seduce Christians into believing the secret rapture theory, he won't need to. He can simply show up around the world in various places, perform great miracles, make television appearances, and thereby deceive the entire world.

Every general knows that the key to victory in battle is to maintain an element of surprise. Many battles have been won because of a clever diversionary tactic. While one army was distracted and looking at the diversion, the enemy came up from behind to conquer them. In the devil's final assault, he will do the same thing. The archdeceiver has always wanted to be God. Now he knows that he is doomed, but his last taunting gesture against heaven will be to personate Jesus and receive the worship of a lost world.

Satan's deceptions will be strong and convincing, but Christ has given us ample information in order to help us discern truth from error.

Not a Secret

Will there be a rapture? Yes. Will it be a secret? NO!

Rapture means "to be carried away with power," and it is true that when Jesus comes the living righteous will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17). But many have come to believe that this rapture will take place quietly - that faithful Christians all around the world will suddenly disappear and that life here on earth will continue for a seven-year period of tribulation. During this time, they say, many will be converted and have a "second chance" at salvation before Christ's final coming. Although the secret rapture scenario may appear comforting at first glance, there is absolutely no scriptural support for it. The Bible plainly teaches that when Jesus comes again, every one of our senses will be bombarded with evidence!

His Coming Will Be Literal

"And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven". (Acts 1:9-11)

Heaven-sent messengers told the disciples that Jesus would return to this earth in the same manner He left. Christ left in the clouds, and He will come back in the clouds. He was visible when He left, and He will be visible when He comes again. He had a real body when He left, and He will return in the same way.

His Coming Will Be Visible

"Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him". (Revelation 1:7)

"For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." (Matthew 24:27).

"And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds

of heaven with power and great glory." (Matthew 24:30).

When Christ comes, it will not be merely a local sighting or an isolated event. It will be visible across the entire world.

His Coming Will Be Audible

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17).

"The LORD shall roar from on high, and utter his voice from his holy habitation; he shall mightily roar upon his habitation; he shall give a shout." (Jeremiah 25:30).

"Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him." (Psalm 50:3).

As you can see from the preceding Scriptures, Christ's second coming will be loud! There will be shouts and trumpets and all kinds of noise. No one will accidentally miss it or be able to read about it in the newspaper the next day.

His Coming Will Be Emotional

"Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." (Luke 21:26, 27).

"And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation." (Isaiah 25:9).

When Christ returns, it will be an emotional day for the wicked and righteous alike. The lost will experience indescribable fear and anguish, while the saved will experience the perfect joy

of eternal salvation.

His Coming Will Open the Graves

"And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:40).

"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming." (1 Corinthians 15:22, 23).

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17).

This is the Bible's description of the rapture. The dead in Christ will rise by His power and will meet Him in the air. Afterward the faithful who are still alive will also be caught up. It will not be a secret!

His Coming Will Destroy the Earth

"The earth is utterly broken down, the earth is clean dissolved, the earth is moved exceedingly. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage; and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it; and it shall fall, and not rise again." (Isaiah 24:19, 20).

"And the heaven [sky] departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places." (Revelation 6:14).

"And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great. And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found." (Revelation 16:18-20).

This world will be uninhabitable by people after Christ comes. His coming will shake the very foundations of the earth.

His Coming Will Mean Final Judgment

"For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works." (Matthew 16:27).

"And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." (Revelation 22:12).

It is at Christ's return that we will receive our final reward. Each person's decision will have already been made; there will be no second chance to convert. The time to make a decision to follow Christ is now!

Basis for Confusion

With so much evidence in the Bible as to the manner of Christ's coming, how did people get the idea that the rapture will be a secret event?

As with most deceptions, the secret rapture theory is based on a few texts that have been taken out of the context. Two main concepts in Scripture have been used to substantiate a "secret" rapture.

The primary one is that Jesus will come as "a thief in the night." The secret rapture theory assumes this means that Christ will come secretly to steal away the righteous and carry them quietly to heaven.

Christ's coming is described as "a thief" several times throughout the New Testament. Let's look at one of these passages and see if it describes a secret rapture. "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." (2 Peter 3:10). That doesn't sound like a secret event, does it?

In describing His return as a thief, Christ did not intend to show that it would be quiet, but that it would be sudden and unexpected - that the wicked would be taken by surprise. He said, "If the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through. Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not". (Luke 12:39, 40). Likewise, Paul told the Christians in Thessalonica, "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief" (1 Thessalonians 5:4). God does not want His followers to be surprised. He wants us to be watchful and ready.

To further illustrate this truth, Jesus said, "No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. And then he will plunder his house" (Mark 3:27, NKJV).

Can you picture a homeowner being oblivious to a robbery if the thief just broke into the man's house, tied him up and threw him in a closet, and then ransacked the place while searching for valuables? Of course not!

In the same way, the day and hour of the second coming is a secret, but when the glorious event transpires, all will know!

The second concept used to support a "secret" coming is found in Luke 17:34-36: "I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left." Secret rapture proponents say this passage proves that the saints will suddenly disappear from the earth when Jesus returns. But let's take an honest look at the evidence and see what these verses actually teach.

In Luke 17:34-36, Jesus employs some of His favorite symbols to illustrate a simple point. At the end of time, there will be just two groups of people living upon the earth - the lost and the saved.

"Two Men in One Bed."

A bed generally connotes sleep, and Jesus used sleep as a symbol of death. He said to the disciples, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep." "Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead." (John 11:11, 14). In the resurrection at the last day, there will be two kinds of people sleeping in the grave - the lost and the saved.

"Two Women Grinding Together."

In Bible prophecy, a woman is a symbol of a church (Jeremiah 6:2). Grinding grain represents working with the Word of God. When Christ comes in glory, there will be two kinds of churches - the false and the true. Both will be outwardly doing the same thing, but only one will be redeemed. "Two Men in The Field".

The field represents the world (Matthew 13:38). When Jesus comes again, there will be two kinds of missionaries laboring out in the field - the false and the true. This is why He said, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." (Matthew 7:22, 23).

Not Left Behind

Another common misconception contained in the secret rapture theory is that people will continue to live here on earth for several years after Christ's return. However, the Bible clearly teaches that when Jesus comes next, there will be no one left alive on this planet.

For example, in his prophecy about the end of the age, Jeremiah wrote: "I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens, and they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly. I beheld, and lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled. I beheld, and lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the Lord, and by his fierce anger" (Jeremiah 4:23-26, emphasis added).

In another place he declared, "And the slain of the Lord shall be at that day from one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth: they shall not be lamented, neither gathered, nor buried; they shall be dung upon the ground" (Jeremiah 25:33).

The prophet Isaiah describes the same dismal conditions in his prophecy of the state of the earth following the second coming. "Behold, the Lord maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof." "The land shall be utterly emptied, and utterly spoiled:for the Lord hath spoken this word" (Isaiah 24:1, 3 emphasis added).

Last but not least, consider the following passage of Scripture: "And as it was in the days of Noe [Greek for 'Noah'], so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed" (Luke 17:26-30 emphasis added).

Notice that the wicked were destroyed on the same day that the Flood came to Noah and on the same day that the fire came to Sodom. Jesus emphasizes at both the beginning and the end of this passage that these earlier judgments, which destroyed all of the wicked, were examples of what would happen at His second coming. The Bible is crystal clear that life on earth does not continue for either man or beast after Jesus comes.

Through the Tribulation With Christ

The idea that the righteous will all be raptured out of the world just before the time of trouble and that only the wicked will be left behind to endure seven years of tribulation can be very appealing. Perhaps that is why this doctrine has gained such widespread acceptance. But the Bible clearly teaches otherwise.

The phrase "seven years of tribulation" does not appear anywhere in Scripture. However, Jesus did say that a terrible time of trouble would come upon the world just before His return and that it would be more intense than any other in the history of this world. In His great prophetic discourse on the Mount of Olives, Jesus made the following statement: "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" (Matthew 24:21, 22).

If the elect were not in the world during the great tribulation, they would not need the days to be shortened!

All throughout Scripture we see examples of the Lord saving His people through tribulation, not from it.

- Noah was not saved from the Flood, but through it.
- Daniel was not saved from the lions' den, but through it.
- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not were not saved from the fiery furnace, but through it. In fact, Jesus went through it with them, and He will go through the great tribulation with us, as well!
- The children of Israel were not saved from Egypt before the plagues fell, but afterward. God demonstrated His love and power by preserving them in Egypt through the 10 plagues. In the same way, the righteous will be in the world when the seven last plagues fall (Revelation chapter 16), but God will preserve them.

God never promises that our lives will always be easy. Christ prayed to His Father for His disciples, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil [one]." (John 17:15) Likewise, in 2 Timothy 3:12 Paul declares, "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Paul also told a group of disciples that "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22).

In His parable of the two home builders, Jesus taught that the storm comes to the wise man who builds on the rock just as surely as it comes to the fool who builds upon the sand (Matthew 7:24-27). The storm comes to all.

The good news is that God's children will survive the coming tribulation. They will endure by practising some of the same survival skills used by the Great Basin bristlecone pine. Believed to be one of the oldest living trees on the planet, it can live more than 4,000 years. Found on lonely mountaintops, some of these ancient evergreens have weathered thousands of years of intense freezing wind, pounding rain, scorching sun, and violent electrical storms.

How do they manage to survive such harsh, adverse conditions? They send their roots deep, wrap them tenaciously around a solid rock, and hang on.

In the same way, the saints will have to sink their roots of faith deep into the Word of God and cling tenaciously to the mighty Rock of Ages. Remember that even though God does not always provide an escape from tribulation, He does promise to give us the power and strength to get through it. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13).

Times of Trouble

As we discuss the great tribulation to take place just before Jesus returns, keep in mind that there have been several other "times of trouble" for God's people in the past.

For example, the children of Israel endured 400 years of tribulation just before the Exodus (Acts 7:6). The early Christians also passed through a time of trouble immediately after the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1). From A.D. 303-313, during the era represented by the Smyrna church (Revelation 2:10), God's people suffered a 10-year period of tribulation. But perhaps the most notable time of trouble was the 1,260 years of intense persecution waged against true Christians during the Dark Ages. "And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days."

"And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child" (Revelation 12:6, 13). As dark as each of these times was for God's people, none will compare with the final, great tribulation that is yet to take place. The great tribulation corresponds with the time during which the seven last plagues of Revelation chapter 16 will fall. "And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God" (Revelation 15:1).

God's wrath will be directed against the ones who disobey His law, distort His truth, and oppress His people. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (Romans 1:18).

The great tribulation also coincides with the Battle of Armageddon. Both take place immediately before Christ's second coming. "And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon. And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done" (Revelation 16:16, 17).

It is my belief that the great time of trouble will last only a month or two. Here are a few Scriptures that indicate it will be a short period of time.

Revelation 18:8 tells us, "Therefore shall her plagues come in one day." A "day" in Bible prophecy represents one literal year (Ezekiel 4:6; Numbers 14:34; Luke 13:32). So when Revelation says that "her plagues come in one day," it means within, or less than, one year's

time.

Furthermore, the very nature of the seven last plagues - the rivers and seas turning to blood and the planet being scorched with great heat - would render it impossible for the human race to survive more than a month or two. This is why Jesus said, "And unless those days were shored, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened" (Matthew 24:22 NKJV).

Just Before the Plagues

Since the experience of the children of Israel just before the plagues fell on Egypt is a type, or symbol, of what will happen to God's people before the seven last plagues described in Revelation chapter 16, let's examine that story more closely.

After 400 years of slavery, the Israelites had become influenced by the religion of Egypt and had lost sight of God's law. So before Moses and Aaron met with the Pharaoh, they first met with the leaders of Israel to encourage a revival of commitment to God's law - including the Sabbath of creation (Exodus 4:29-31). The people responded wholeheartedly, which is why the Pharaoh got angry and said to Moses and Aaron, "You make them rest from their labor!" (Exodus 5:5, NKJV). Remember that the children of Israel knew the Sabbath was part of God's law before they ever came to Mount Sinai (Exodus 16:22-28).

Likewise, before the onset of the great tribulation, special attention will once again be called to the subject of worship and the Sabbath commandment. In Revelation 14:7, an angel calls God's people to "worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." The angel is clearly quoting from the Sabbath commandment, which says, "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day" (Exodus 20:11).

A widespread rediscovery of the law of God, including the Sabbath truth, will be the alarm that wakes the dragon to fury. The devil hates the Sabbath because he knows that all love relationships are built upon time. If he can destroy the day that was set apart for God's people to spend quality time with their Creator, he can destroy the relationship. We see this happen over and over again between husbands and wives or between fathers and sons. If two people stop spending quality time together, soon the relationship will fall apart.

When the children of Israel responded to God's call to keep the seventh-day Sabbath holy, the Pharaoh became furious. He knew that as long as the people focused only on work, work, work, they would have no time to think about freedom. The devil is using the very same strategy today. His goal is to keep people so busy with work and so preoccupied with the cares of this life that they have no time to worship their Creator. He knows that if he can cause people to neglect the Sabbath rest, they will never have time to think seriously of salvation.

Looking down through history to the end of time, the Lord knew that His faithful people would keep the Sabbath of the fourth commandment. That is why, in connection with the tribulation, Jesus advises His followers to "pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day" (Matthew 24:20).

Another way in which this small time of trouble will resemble the period of time just before the plagues fell on Egypt is that God's people will be called upon to endure a period of bitter hardship. In Moses' day, the angry Pharaoh tried to turn the hearts of his Israelite slaves against their God by forcing them to produce the usual quota of bricks without providing the necessary straw.

In the same way, before the tribulation the government will use political and economic sanctions to pressure God's end-time people into receiving the mark of the beast. During this time the saints will be called upon to share their faith in the face of stiff social, political and religious opposition. "And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name" (Revelation 13:17).

When this fails to deter the people of God from obedience, there will be a final death decree. The Bible says, "And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed" (Revelation 13:15). At this time, the great tribulation begins and the seven last plagues start to fall.

The time of trouble begins with the wrath of the devil against God's obedient children (Revelation 12:17) and ends with the wrath of God against the ones who obey the beast (Revelation 14:9, 10).

No Second Chance

The main reason this last period of time will be so intense is because it will come after probation closes for the lost. God gave the very first prophecy about it to His servant Daniel, who wrote, "At that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book" (Daniel 12:1). Notice that when the great tribulation begins, the cases of all people will have been forever decided.

The door of salvation and grace will close for the world - just as the door on the ark closed seven days before the Flood began. At that time Jesus will declare, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his work shall be" (Revelation 22:11, 12).

For the first time in the world's history, God's Spirit will be completely withdrawn from the

lost. The unsaved will be given wholly over to demonic control. The saved will be forever sealed and the lost forever lost. No more changing teams!

God on Trial

If no one is converted by the plagues, then why does the Lord allow them?

For thousands of years God's Spirit has worked in the hearts of men. But He has warned that this would not always be so (Genesis 6:3). Satan must have an opportunity to demonstrate what a world that is completely under his power would be like. And so God will finally allow the winds of strife to blow unhindered - but not before His servants are sealed (Revelation 7:1-3).

The great tribulation will prove to the universe that nothing - not even the worst conditions in the history of the world - would change the characters of those still alive upon the earth. God's people will trust Him no matter what, and His enemies will rebel against Him no matter what.

Sometimes adversity brings a lost soul to repentance, but as the seven last plagues are being poured out, the wicked will reveal that there are no longer any redeemable threads in their fabric. The following three verses prove this point:

"The fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues; and they repented not to give him glory" (Revelation 16:8, 9).

"They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds" (Revelation 16:11 NKJV).

"Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great" (Revelation 16:21).

No Need to Fear

Perhaps your picture of the great tribulation has always resembled this terrifying recipe:

"Pour the entire contents of Armageddon into a pressure cooker, then slowly mix in the seven last plagues with one full bottle of Jacob's trouble and one whole crushed Babylon. Next, evenly stir in two full boxes of wrath - one from God and one from Satan. Cover securely and cook on high."

We all seem to conjure up frightening images when we think of the coming tribulation. Do yourself a favor; try this instead. Picture Jesus in a fragile little boat on a dark sea, with the waves mounting and wind roaring. Mark 4:38-40 records the scene: "He was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish? And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm." Then Christ said to them, "Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?" Jesus rested with the peace of a baby because He lived by faith in His heavenly Father. One message He delivered repeatedly throughout His ministry was "Fear not."

In John 16:33, Jesus said, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

God does not want us to live by fear, but rather by faith. "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love" (1 John 4:18).

During the world's darkest hour and greatest trial, God will supply the greatest peace and faith. We need only to remember that Jesus is in the boat with us. Though the furnace be heated seven times over, we can pass safely through it if Jesus is at our side.

The ninety-first Psalm contains special promises for those living during the last great tribulation. It says, "You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, Nor of the arrow that flies by day, Nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, Nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday. A thousand may fall at your side, And ten thousand at your right hand; But it shall not come near you. Only with your eyes shall you look, And see the reward of the wicked" (Psalm 91:5-8, NKJV). The Psalmist makes it clear we will be in the midst of the world during the plagues, yet remain untouched, if God is our refuge. "No evil shall befall you, Nor shall any plague come near your dwelling" (Psalm 91:10, NKJV).

Rescue From the Skies

On Friday, June 2, 1995, Captain Scott O'Grady was flying his F-16 over Bosnia when the jet was cut in two by Serbian anti-aircraft fire. He quickly ejected and parachuted to the ground. Suddenly he found himself in a different, hostile world with the entire Serbian army combing every inch of ground in search of him.

For six days he prayed, often hiding with his face in the dirt to avoid being seen by enemy soldiers passing within a few feet. For six long days he survived - cold, wet, tired, hungry, eating bugs and drinking dirty water, calling every night on his little radio for help from above, running from enemies, and hiding under bushes.

Then came a daring rescue from the skies. Forty airships, hundreds of soldiers, satellites, and

the combined technology of all NATO were all engaged to rescue one hunted soldier.

Will God do less for His people? When Captain Scott O'Grady returned to the United States, he was hailed as a hero. Why? Because he had come out of great tribulation. We too may have to endure a brief time of trouble, but it will fade into insignificance when compared with the glorious moment when Jesus comes crashing through the skies with His angelic armies to rescue His children.

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

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