

THE PROPHETIC SCRIPTURES:

What Lies Before Us?

Scripture Reading:

Message 9

INTRO: We are in a series on the prophetic Scriptures and we have asked, "What lies before us?" We have seen that before us lies an event known as the 'catching up' of believers, or the 'departure'. My wife likes to read the writings of A.W. Tozer. Some time ago, just before we turned out the lights to sleep she said to me, "Listen to what Tozer says in this book". Then she read these words from Tozer, "Don't we have the right to think that it is very strange that the majority of the Christian pulpits are completely silent concerning this glorious truth of the imminent return of Jesus Christ? It is paradoxical that there should be this great silence in Christian churches at the very time when the danger of suddenly being swept off the face of the earth is greater than it ever has been before." A few paragraphs later he writes, "Very few ministers bother to preach from the Book of Revelation any more - and that is true of large areas of evangelicalism and fundamentalism, too! We have been intimidated by the cynicism and sophistication of our day."

But I do not view preaching on the return of Christ something to be avoided. No rather, necessity is laid upon the preacher to make people aware of what is coming for the Bible speaks of it again and again. The imminent return of Christ, on the other hand, is an incentive to godly living, and we need every incentive we can get.

In our last message we looked at the beginning of the tribulation time period, a time that lies now just shortly before us. And we saw that it is described in horrific terms and as a day such as has never been before nor will ever be again. We saw that according to the Word of God it begins right after the departure of the Church (2 Thess. 2:3). Then we saw that it would last precisely 7 years and that it begins as a time of peace. We saw that two witnesses would come and thousands upon thousands of Jews would be saved and thousands, no millions of Gentiles would turn to Christ.

There is something I did not warn you about last message that I want to mention before we begin looking at the middle of the tribulation. Turn with me to 2 Thessalonians

2. You see, some say, "Well, if the rapture happens and then the tribulation comes that will give a second chance to those who failed to believe before the tribulation." And I say, "How many chances did you get? Who will complain that somebody else gets a second chance?" But the facts are that people who had a clear presentation of the Gospel before the tribulation and rejected it, will not accept the Gospel if they enter the tribulation.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, Paul deals with the rapture and the antichrist. Now listen carefully as I read some verses on the antichrist during the tribulation from verses 8-12. Here we have people described who rejected the Gospel before the tribulation, and because they did not receive the love of the truth that they might be saved, God sends them strong delusion so that they will believe THE lie of antichrist so that in the end they are condemned. Here is a very real warning to all who hear the Gospel now in our age.

And now we want to take a brief look at the middle of the tribulation. I cannot describe this time period in detail because there is a vast amount of information on the tribulation time. But we will look briefly at the middle of the tribulation.

C. The Tribulation

2. The middle

I invite you to turn to Matthew 24. As I interpret the chapter, verses 5-8 describe what it is like before the tribulation (read). Then verses 9-14 describe what the first half is like (read).

Then we come to verses 15-16 (read). Here we have the middle of the tribulation. You might say, "Well how do you know it is the middle?" Well, notice that it says, "(whoever reads let him understand)". If you had read and understood, you would not wonder how I know, for you would know what this is all about.

So, in order to understand as we are instructed in verse 15, we must go to the place Jesus is referring to in Daniel 9. (Briefly explain 9:24-

26.) In those verses we have the 69 weeks. This takes us to the time when Christ was crucified. Then we come to verse 27 which says the antichrist will then confirm a covenant with many for one week (read 9:27). Here is the peace pact made in the middle east that will briefly end hostilities.

However, we are told that in the middle of the week he will bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate. There is the abomination of desolation spoken of by Jesus, and it is in the midst of the week!

So in the middle of the tribulation, the antichrist breaks his peace pact by breaking his agreement with the Jews and their right to the temple and the temple mount. And what happens?

Well, we go to 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 (read). The man of sin, who is here also called the son of perdition is the one we know as the Antichrist. I am talking about the great and final Antichrist. Well, here he is called the man of sin. Here is a man in whom sin reigns. And he is called the son of perdition. That is the son of destruction or ruin. And in verse 4 it says he opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped. He is, in his eyes, the great I AM. He is God. There is no Budha. There is no Allah. There is no Jehovah. There is, as far as he is concerned only one, and that is he, Antichrist. Anything godly, he opposes. He is the ultimate measure of all things in his opinion.

Now let me tell you what I think happens. He makes the peace pact with the world and to put this pact in place he has to satisfy the Jew. So he gets the temple mount from the Arab and lets the Jews build their temple. I have no doubt that is part of the peace pact. The temple is built and the two witnesses spoken of in Revelation 11 witness to the world from this temple. And from this place they do great wonders (read Rev. 11:3-6). So successful are these witnesses that thousands upon thousands of Jewish people give

their hearts and lives to the Lord Jesus. Out of those thousands, 12,000 of the twelve tribes of Israel are chosen as special agents for God and are sealed by God in their foreheads (Rev. 7:2-8). They in turn go into every country and witness to every people group on earth, and multiplied millions upon millions turn to Christ (Rev. 7:9-17).

And when Antichrist sees this, his jealousy through his godlessness turns him into a living demon. Here the God of the Jews is getting recognition and worship from millions from whom he wants worship and adoration. And after 3 ½ years, when the number of converts has grown to an innumerable company, he is so infuriated that he breaks his peace agreement with Israel, and he enters their holy temple, opens the veil into the holy of holies, and sets himself up as God Almighty. This is the most sacrilegious sin possible to the Jews! Nothing could be worse, not even when Antichus Epiphanes offered a pig on their altar. This is the epitome of sin! So let us now finish reading 2 Thessalonians 2:4.

Now let me take you to the book of Revelation and to the middle of the tribulation (read 13:5-6). From here Antichrist is given 42 months which is exactly 3 ½ years. Now something else happens at this precise time in heaven. Let us read 12:7-9. Satan and his angels are cast out of heaven. For the first time since creation, Satan is cast out and barred from ever entering heaven again! And I believe that when he is cast down to earth he inhabits the antichrist. Now let us read Revelation 13:1-3. It seems that Antichrist is mortally wounded and his deadly wound is healed. I think that here the Devil himself enters the Antichrist, and so in both events we are at exactly the mid point of the tribulation.

Notice now in verse 4 it says, "So they worshipped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshipped the beast..." Worshipping the dragon is worshipping Satan for we find in Revelation 12 that the dragon is Satan. And here they worship both the dragon and the Antichrist,

I think both in one man. Antichrist is now, not demon possessed but Satan possessed. This has never happened before and will never happen again.

Now note in verse 7, what he is allowed to do (read). So I want to show you one thing Antichrist is now finally able to do, now that he is indwelt by Satan. Up until now he has not been able to deal with the two witnesses that have been so successful. But now he has all the power of Satan dwelling within, and now he goes after the two witnesses. Let us read what happens (11:7-10). The death of these two witnesses is the cause of rejoicing around the world, but then several incredible things happen (read 11-13).

Now that the devil is residing in the Antichrist, right here in the middle of the tribulation, he inspires the Antichrist to enter the temple and to set himself up as God. There is Satan in the temple in the place of God, the place he desired since before he fell from his high angelic position as Lucifer. Finally he has achieved his goal!

Now I want you to see something else (read 13:11-18). We have here a second beast. This is the false prophet, or the head of the religious world. And he causes all to worship the Antichrist. He is a very powerful being so that he does miracles and by them deceives the world. And this false prophet brings about the worship of the Antichrist and Satan. And how does he do it? Well, those who do not willingly submit, he has a method for them as well (read 16-17).

Now I want you to notice something about the number 666. It seems to me that these three numbers in a row will not be the official antichrist mark. This verse indicates that to come to this number one must calculate the number of the beast, and that calculation will be 666.

Now there are those who hold that the first 3 ½ years are relatively peaceful. I do not think that will be so since the Antichrist opposes all

that is godly and God Himself. However, it is very clear that once Satan has entered the Antichrist the blood of the martyrs will flow freely. I want to read together with you seven passages that describe the time right after the middle of the tribulation (6:9-11; 7:9-17; 11:7-13; 12:6-12; 13:5-7; 14:1-5; 15:1-4).

Now there is one more very important event that takes place in the middle of the tribulation (read 12:1-3). In Revelation 12 we have a chapter that has to do with the nation of Israel in symbolical language. We know this is symbolical language because in verse 3 it speaks of the red dragon, and in verse 9 interprets the meaning of the dragon (read 3 and 9).

So I have no doubt that the woman in 12:1 is Israel, and the child of verse 2 is Christ. So we have in symbolical form what it was like 2000 years ago when Christ was to be born. Then in verse 3 we have another sign, and we have already learned that this speaks of Satan or the Devil. Now look at verse 4. Many believe the words, "...and his tail drew a third of the stars of heaven..." refers to the time of the fall of Lucifer and that 1/3 of the angels of heaven followed him in his rebellion.

So we have the Messiah about to be born, and the Devil with one third of the angels prepared to kill the Christ as soon as He is born. Then in verse 5, we have the birth of the Child (read). Now we know from Psalm 2 that this Child refers to the Messiah because it is the Messiah who is to rule all nations. And verse 5 says this Child was caught up to heaven. There, no doubt, is the ascension of Christ to heaven.

So we have had several time periods referred to in this passage. There is the birth of the nation Israel, the woman and the twelve stars or twelve tribes of Israel. Then we have the time when the Messiah is to be born to Israel. Then we have the fall of Lucifer and the beginning of Satan and the fall of 1/3 of the angels. Then we have the devil standing ready to kill the Christ the

moment He is born. That is when Herod had all the babies 2 years old and under killed, but Jesus was not among them.

Then in verse 6 we have one more very significant event. The woman flees into the wilderness. From this verse we learn that we are in the middle of the tribulation for the time period is for 1260 days (read). We learned earlier that the woman is Israel. No doubt that at this point we are at the mid point of the tribulation.

It is precisely here that the war breaks out in heaven and Satan is cast out and he enters the Antichrist (12:7-12), as we read earlier. Now I want you to notice what happens after this. You see, Antichrist is empowered by the devil to kill Christians. But God does something wonderful for Israel (read 13-17). Here we have the three and $\frac{1}{2}$ years referred to as a time and times and half a time. From Daniel 9 we learn that this is $3\frac{1}{2}$ years or 1260 days as verse 6 noted or 42 months as 13:5 says. All are the same time period. Now see how precisely this agrees with the words of Jesus in Matthew 24 (read 15-22).

God will spare this remnant of Jews, most Bible scholars believe, in Petra, in the wilderness for the last $3\frac{1}{2}$ years. They will be among those who live to see the end of the tribulation and the beginning of the millennium. This is a great miracle of God.

CONCL: So we have seen briefly what takes place in the middle of the tribulation. We have seen that the abomination of desolation takes place here. Possibly the tremendous success of the two witnesses and then the 144,000 Jews infuriates the Antichrist. He then breaks his agreement and sets himself up as God in the temple of the Jews.

At the same time Satan and God's angels fight and Satan and his angels are cast out of heaven. Satan then enters the antichrist and causes him to have the two witnesses killed. Their dead bodies are left in the streets for $3\frac{1}{2}$ days and then they are raised to life and ascend to heaven.

At this time the False Prophet causes all both small and great to receive the mark of the beast and he causes all to worship the Antichrist. Since believers do not worship him, they are then killed by the millions.

The last major event we considered was God's preservation of a remnant of Jews. We saw how Satan has through the ages tried to destroy the Jews and how during the tribulation once more he does so. But God helps the Jews and hides them for the last 3 ½ years.

Well, let me just say in conclusion, that right in the middle of the tribulation, this world begins to experience the darkest days this world will ever know. We want to see in our next message how this time comes to a close.

Are you a Christian? If not, let me remind you of the words we read at the beginning of the message that those who heard the Word of God and did not receive the love of the truth before, are sent strong delusion by God during the tribulation so that they might be condemned for their unbelief. Today is the day to get right with God.

So let me close with these words from A.W. Tozer, "Don't we have the right to think that it is very strange that the majority of the Christian pulpits are completely silent concerning this glorious truth of the imminent return of Jesus Christ? It is paradoxical that there should be this great silence in Christian churches at the very time when the danger of suddenly being swept off the face of the earth is greater than it ever has been before."