

COME OUT OF HER, MY PEOPLE

Great Tribulation

We are, at this very moment, living through the time of the “great tribulation” (Matt. 24:21) discussed in the Olivet passages (“...as he sat upon the mount of Olives....”), Matt. 24, Mk. 13 and Luke 21. This means that Satan, the “abomination of desolation spoken by Daniel the prophet,” is indeed standing in the “holy place” (Matt. 24:15), and “Jerusalem” has been “compassed with armies” (Luke 21:20). That Satan would one day “stand in the holy place” was foretold also in 2 Thess. 2:4: “Who [Satan] opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God” (comp. Isa. 14:12-15). The reference to his sitting “in the temple” is clearly a commentary on the “abomination of desolation” standing in the “holy place,” or, as we read in Mark 13:14, “where it ought not.”

Old Testament church – a lesson for the New Testament church

Old Testament passages parallel to the above direct us to carefully study the biblical history of Israel and Judah, the Old Testament people of God, the “church” (Acts 7:38), in order to understand how God is to deal with the church of the New Testament era - for such passages serve to forewarn the true believers living in these the “latter days” of this most horrific of events (1 Cor. 10:6, 11) - the Great Tribulation:

...O God, the **heathen** are come into thine inheritance; thy **holy temple** have they defiled; they have laid **Jerusalem** on heaps. (Ps. 79:1)

But they set their **abominations** in the **house**, which is called by my name, to defile it. (Jer. 32:34)

...Son of man, seest thou what they do? even the **great abominations** that the **house of Israel** committeth here, that I should go far off from **my sanctuary**? (Ezek. 8:6; cf. vv. 5-18)

In Daniel 8 and 11, we read of a direct prophecy uttered against the New Testament church:

Yea, he [Satan] magnified himself even to the prince of the host, and by him the daily sacrifice was taken away, and the **place of his sanctuary** was cast down. (8:11)

And arms shall stand on his part, and they shall **pollute the sanctuary of strength**, and shall take away the daily sacrifice, and they shall **place the abomination** that maketh desolate. (11:31)

Christ in Matt. 24 reaffirms that the above prophecy is to take place sometime in the future, in New Testament era:

...and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the **temple**. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, **There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.** (vv. 1b, 2)

When ye therefore shall see the **abomination of desolation**, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, **stand in the holy place**.... (v. 15)

A look into Daniel 12, especially vv. 9 and 11, teaches us that the reign of Satan in the “temple of God” is that which is to occur in the last of the latter days of the New Testament era, and more specifically, during the time of the Great Tribulation:

...And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed **till the time of the end**...And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the **abomination** that maketh **desolate** set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days.

Believers must flee the Holy Place now defiled

What is God's direct instruction for the believer when such unimaginably horrific spiritual events are taking place? “And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies...Then let them which are in Judaea **flee** to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it **depart out**; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto” (Luke 21:20, 21). As thus far seen in the varied passages, the terms “holy place,” “house of God,” “sanctuary,” “Israel,” “Jerusalem,” and “Judaea” always refer to the people of God congregate:

...and lest wrath come upon all the **people**: but let your **brethren**, the **whole house of Israel**.... (Lev. 10:6c)

...the LORD said...I have hallowed this **house**, which thou hast built, to **put my name there for ever**...But if ye shall at all turn from following me...Then will I cut off **Israel** out of the **land** which I have given them; and this **house**...will I cast out of my sight.... (1 Kin. 9:3, 6a, 7b)
And he built altars in the **house of the LORD**, of which the LORD said, In **Jerusalem** will I **put my name**. (2 Kin. 21:4)

Thus the command of Luke 21:21 (comp. Matt. 24:16-18; Mk. 13:14-16) certainly is alarming for the true believers; for God is here teaching that not only will Satan be allowed entrance *into* and rule *over* the corporate, visible assembly, but that upon such an occurrence, the believers are to “**flee**” from this body that is void of the “light of the candle.”

Light of the candle removed

This ominous expression as found in Jeremiah 25 was given as a death sentence in a time when the very corporate church of the Old Testament era was being told of their certain destruction by the Babylonians, and the 70-year captivity (officially beginning with the death of Josiah in 609 BC) to follow. Note Jeremiah 25:8, 10, 11:

...thus saith the LORD of hosts; **Because ye have not heard my words... I will take from them** the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the **light of the candle**...and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

A very similar warning is found in Revelation 2:5, against the church at Ephesus:

Remember therefore from **whence thou art fallen**, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will **remove thy candlestick** out of his place, except thou repent.

According to Matt. 5:15, the “candlestick” (*luchnia*, from *luchnos*, which is rendered “candle” or “light”) is that

upon which is placed the lit “candle,” that it may give “light unto all that are in the house.” Further, Rev. 1:20's plain statement, “the seven **candlesticks** which thou sawest are the seven **churches**,” demonstrates the truth that a “candlestick” is a figure for an assembly, a church, recognized of God. Finally, we learn that the chief function, the characteristic expected of a God-ordained assembly is that of Gospel witness: “And I will give power unto my **two witnesses**, and they shall **prophesy** a thousand two hundred and threescore days...These are the two olive trees, and the **two candlesticks** standing before the God of the earth” (Rev. 11:3, 4). Therefore, the removal of the “light of the candle,” or the “candlestick,” is a direct reference to a church whose witness is no longer. *It is a dead organism.*

In both Jer. 25 and Rev. 2, the eventual fulfillment as well as the initial cause of the warning was due to spiritual apostasy (“Because ye have not heard my words,” “Remember...from whence thou art fallen”), nationally for Judah, and congregationally for the church at Ephesus. In both instances, God had given ample warning in advance. We find an explicit version of such in Leviticus 26:

And if ye will not for all this hearken unto me...I will destroy your high places, and cut down your images, and cast your carcasses upon the carcasses of your idols, and my soul shall abhor you. And I will make your cities waste, and bring your sanctuaries unto desolation, and I will not smell the savour of your sweet odours. (vv. 27, 30, 31)

Jacob flees to Egypt

It is of much interest to us that God applies the phrase, “great tribulation” (*thlipsis megalē*), rendered “great affliction” in Acts 7, to the events surrounding Jacob's migration to Egypt during the time of the famine:

Now there came a **dearth** over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and **great affliction**: and our fathers found no sustenance. (v. 11)

Jacob's eventual departure from Canaan, the Promised Land, was 215 years *after* God's promise to Abraham that Canaan would be an EVERLASTING POSSESSION to his seed. An unthinkable action it was for a descendant of Abraham, a patriarch no less, to leave, to forsake the inheritance given by GOD. Yet we read: “**So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers**” (Acts 7:15). In Jeremiah 16, God makes reference to the Promised Land as that which Israel defiled, establishing the relationship between the House that they defiled (Jer. 32:34; Ezek. 5:11; Dan. 11:31) and the Land:

And first I will recompense their iniquity and their sin double; because they have **defiled my land**, they have filled mine inheritance with the carcasses of their **detestable and abominable things**. (v. 18)

The point should also be made that the primary cause driving the forced-departure from Canaan was that of severe famine. Having noted that God refers to that event as the time of “great affliction [tribulation],” we wonder if famine of any sort was to be experienced during the time of the great tribulation in the New Testament era, when the believers would be told to depart out of the churches now “defiled” - and indeed, we find this solemn prophecy in the book of Amos:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it. (8:11, 12)

The Eternal Church, the Bride for whom Christ died

Of course, this does not mean that somehow, God would forsake His people. What is the identity of His people? They are, of course, those for whom Christ came: "...and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Christ is the Savior of this "body" (Eph. 5:23c). It is this "church" which Christ "loved...and gave himself for..." (Eph. 5:25). Is it in fact not the "sheep" for whom the "good shepherd giveth his life" (John 10:11)? Since the Scriptures make it abundantly clear that as concerns God, He *hates* "all workers of iniquity" (Ps. 5:5), and that even the elect of God, prior to salvation, are "by nature the children of wrath," (Eph. 2:3), it would be certainly unbiblical, to say the least, to hold forth that God's giving of Himself in the ultimate expression of love was for the virtuous woman as well as the "harlot" (Ezek. 16:35); she who "committeth adultery, which taketh strangers instead of her husband!," the woman "that breaketh wedlock" (Ezek. 16:32, 38). The Bible's sure teaching on God's particular grace will *not* allow for the understanding that Christ's atoning love was for the totality of the visible church, heavily populated by "tares" (Matt. 13:24-30; cf. Matt. 7:15-23, 22:1-14, Matt. 25).

God's people are they whose "names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20), those who are "buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead," they should also, in the "newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). They are the "vessels of gold and of silver" made unto "honor," *not* the "vessels of wood and of earth" made unto "dishonor" (2 Tim. 2:20; cf. Rom. 9:21-26). The *Elect of God* they are, with the name of God and the city New Jerusalem written upon them (Rev. 3:12). In fact, New Jerusalem itself is a figure which points to the Bride of Christ (Rev. 21:2), the "wife" of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7). *This church is the eternal "tabernacle of God...with men"* (Rev. 21:3b). This is the eternal church, comprised only of those who experience the "first resurrection" (Rev. 20:5, 6).

The Church of the Firstborn

Hebrews 12 distinctly sets apart the eternal body of Christ with this most descriptive of language:

But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant.... (vv. 22-24a)

It would require much imagination to somehow turn the above into a description of the visible, corporate church. As seen in the previous references in Revelation, the "heavenly Jerusalem," by definition, is the antithesis of the "Jerusalem which now is" (cf. Gal. 4:25). Indeed, **all** the "children of promise," as "Isaac was," belong to the "**Jerusalem which is above**" – she being the "mother of us all" (cf. Gal. 4:22-31): these are not "born" after the flesh," but "by promise" (Gal. 4:23).

Judgment is to the Jew first

The bible teaches that the Jews were a people unto whom were "committed the oracles [sayings] of God" (Rom. 3:1; cf. Heb. 4:2, 6). Before any other nation, the descendants of Abraham were set apart and given God's testament, His word. Christ, too, came first to the Jews; and this pattern was followed even after the cross:

Then Paul and Barnabas...said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. (Acts 13:4; see also 3:25, 26; 17:1, 2)

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. (Rom. 1:16)

Because of the Jews' "first" position as regards God and His word, the Bible teaches that they are those God will "first" judge:

Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; (Rom. 2:9)

So too, we are living in a time when we are witnessing God's preparation for the Last Day, as God will no longer forbear the sins of the "great house" (2 Tim. 2:20), those to whom God's word was **first** given in the N. T. era. Indeed, He is judging "between cattle and cattle, between the rams and the he goats," "between the fat cattle and between the lean cattle" (Ezek. 34:17, 20), for she who ought to be the "virtuous woman" (Prov. 31:10), "not having spot, or wrinkle, or any other such thing...holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27), has become as "women that break wedlock" (Ezek. 16:38). Indeed, her "sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities (Rev. 18:5):

For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? (1 Pet. 4:17)

And the LORD said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem...and smite...Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women...and begin at my sanctuary. (Ezek. 9:4-6)

The warning is for the church

The above Old Testament reference comes from Ezekiel, a prophet who was called of God for the most specific purpose of being the instrument to warn "**NOT**...a people of a strange speech and of an hard language, **BUT**...the house of Israel" (Ezek. 3:5). In chapter 5, God tells us in v. 5 that He has Jerusalem in mind - "**This is Jerusalem**" - and declares that He will "do in thee that which I have not done, and whereunto I will not do any more the like, because of all thine abominations" (v. 9). Of course, the language of this warning brings us directly to chapter 24 in Matthew, where the Lord Jesus, speaking of the Great Tribulation, declares, "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (v. 21). The cause? Ezekiel 5:9 told us that it was "because of all thine abominations." What are the "abominations" God has in view? Verses 6 and 8 describe the nature of Jerusalem's abominations in detail:

And she hath changed my judgments into wickedness ...and my statutes more than the countries that are round about her: for they have refused my judgments and my statutes, they have not walked in them...Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I, even I, am against thee, and will execute judgments in the midst of thee in the sight of the nations.

As the open rebuke above was in the face of the sins of "house of Israel," i.e., "Jerusalem," with the sentence articulated in v. 9 paralleling that of Matt. 24:21, so too the Great Tribulation of the New Testament era focuses entirely on the churches and congregations.

God's judgment is upon the totality of the visible church
Would the House of Israel take heed? Can we accurately say that Judah did really know what her end was to be? 2 Kings 20 is yet another example of such a warning:

And Isaiah said unto Hezekiah, Hear the word of the LORD. Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house...shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD. (vv. 16, 17)

Sadly, God tells us in Ezekiel how the house of Israel, so forthrightly warned, would react: "But the house of Israel will **not** hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for **all the house of Israel are impudent and hardhearted**" (Ezek. 3:7). Is it a mere hyperbolic expression on God's part, or could it actually be that "**all** the house of Israel are impudent and hardhearted"? Jeremiah 9:26 identifies the house of Israel with the heathen nations, emphasizing the comprehensive, nationwide corruption of the people called by the name of God: *Egypt, and Judah, and Edom, and the children of Ammon, and Moab, and all that are in the utmost corners... for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart.*

We know, of course, that Israel and Judah - together the "church" of the Old Testament era - were utterly destroyed by the Assyrians and the Babylonians, respectively. They were destroyed utterly because they were utterly corrupt. This comprehensive destruction is amazingly echoed in the New Testament. In Matt. 24:2 (see also Mk. 13:2) we read the following:

...See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

Not *one* stone, our Lord declares - will we heed the warning and "*Come out of her*" (Rev. 18:4)?

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