

# What Will Happen during the Tribulation?

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In his eschatological discourse on the Mount of Olives (Matthew 24), Jesus prophesied the great tribulation that would come upon the earth at the time of his second coming. He speaks of wars and rumors of wars, of famines and earthquakes (Matt. 24:6-8). Then he speaks of “the desolating sacrilege spoken of by the prophet Daniel” (Matt. 24:15). When they see this, those who are in Judea are to flee to the mountains (Matt. 24:16) and not even turn back to take their coats (Matt. 24:18). Finally, “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken” (Matt. 24:29). At last, when all these fearful things have happened, “then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:30). “As lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of man” (Matt. 24:27).

This is when the Lord will gather in his new generation of Jewish and Gentile saints that have been converted during this great tribulation that he has sent upon the earth for this purpose. At this point all Israel—although not every single individual—will be converted to Christ (Rom. 11:26). The angels will be sent out therefore in all directions with a loud trumpet call to gather in the elect (Matt. 24:31). This great ingathering and harvest of the earth will probably also include all those who had been previously resurrected or translated when Christ came for his Church (1 Thess. 4:16-17; 1 Cor. 15:51-53) as well as the Old-Testament saints, who according to Daniel will be resurrected at the end of the tribulation (Dan. 12:1-3). All who are saved will be gathered in, for the Son of Man “will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matt. 24:31). This is Christ’s second coming.

Those Christians who die before the end times, if they are saved, will be with Christ in heaven awaiting these final days to receive their resurrection bodies when Christ comes for his Church (1 Cor. 15:51-53; 1 Thess. 4:16-17). Then they will continue to be with him in heaven in resurrected form and may even be in the new Jerusalem if it already exists and is not newly created at the end of the millennium (Rev. 21:1-2, 10). During the millennium, they will be with Christ and will in some way be associated with the millennial kingdom, reigning with Christ in glory (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 5:10). At the end of the millennium they will continue to be with God and live in the new Jerusalem as it gloriously descends from heaven (Rev. 21:1-2, 10). This will be the eternal state of all the saved of all ages.

Meanwhile those that are not yet dead or resurrected at the second coming of Christ and are judged worthy to enter alive in their natural bodies into the millennial kingdom of righteousness on earth will live a life of happiness and prosperity such as the world has never seen, with Satan bound and sealed in a bottomless pit (Rev. 20:1-3) and with the glorious Christ reigning visibly over them from the throne of David in Jerusalem

(Zech. 14:16; Jer. 23:5-6; Ezek. 34:23-24; 37:24-25; Jer. 30:8-9). If they die during the millennium or are still alive at its end, they too will at some point be given their resurrection bodies; and if they are saved, they will enter the new Jerusalem, which will be their eternal state, although Scripture is silent about this. There they will join all those who have died before the end times and were resurrected when Christ came for his Church or were transformed while still alive when Christ came for his Church (1 Cor. 15:51-53; 1 Thess. 4:16-17) together with the Old-Testament saints, who were raised at the end of the tribulation (Dan. 12:1-3). All will then finally be resurrected and live forever on the new earth or in the new Jerusalem, a place of indescribable beauty and happiness as St. John sees it in Revelation 21-22.

The Old Testament predictions about this future kingdom of righteousness on earth clearly indicate that the millennium will be populated by living people in their natural bodies that will work the land, drink wine, marry, and have children (Isa. 65:20-25) as well as by resurrected people who will in some way be associated with the millennial kingdom. If the Lord has already raised up and given resurrected bodies to all “the dead in Christ” (namely the Church) as well as to those Christians who were still living at that time and were to be saved, as St. Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 and in 1 Corinthians 15:51-53, then it will be the new living saints that have been converted to Christ and sanctified by the tribulation of Matthew 24 and Revelation 6-19 that will enter the millennium in their natural bodies and work the land.

They will also be joined by those new saints that died natural deaths during the tribulation as well as by those that were martyred by the Antichrist (Rev. 13:15) during the tribulation (Rev. 20:4), together with all those that were previously raised and translated in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-53 as well as the Old-Testament saints (Dan. 12:1-3). Somehow both resurrected and unresurrected people will both inhabit the millennium, perhaps in different spheres, positions, or ways; or perhaps in clear and open fellowship with each other. Scripture is silent about how this will take place.

But someone may ask whether 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-53 on the one hand and Matthew 24:31 on the other hand could just be different accounts of the same event, occurring at the second coming. They are thought to be the same event by those who do not believe that there will be a millennium. If they are the same event, then that leaves no room for a future millennium, for there would be no one left on earth in his natural body to enter the millennium and cultivate the millennial earth. But if there is to be a millennium, as St. John indicates in Rev. 20:1-7, then these two comings of Christ cannot be the same event, for then there would be no living person left on earth in his natural body to enter it. Our assumption is that Revelation 20:1-7 should be taken for what it seems that St. John intends to say—namely that there will be a thousand-year kingdom of righteousness on earth with the glorified Christ after his second coming.

According to 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, all those “in Christ” that are to be saved—both the living and the dead—will be caught up into the air to be with Christ, “and the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:16-17). The whole Church (both living and dead) that is to be saved will at this time be given resurrected bodies. This is the same event that St. Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 15:51-53, saying, “Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all

sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality.” In other words, at this event, all will be either raised from the dead or be given resurrection bodies without dying. No normal people like ourselves will be left in the world that are to be saved that can enter the millennium and cultivate the earth and have children. So if this is the final end of the world, there will be no millennium.

The only way we can make room for a future millennium in line with Revelation 20:1-7 is to allow for an interval between the resurrection-transformation-translation event of 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-53 on the one hand and Jesus’ final coming in Matthew 24:31 on the other hand to gather in all the new saints, namely the new generation of tribulation saints (both living, dead, and martyrs), and set up the millennial kingdom. It is this interval that provides a time frame when the tribulation predicted by Jesus in Matthew 24 and prophesied by St. John in Revelation 6-19 can take place, during which a new generation of living saints still in their natural bodies can come into existence and enter the millennial kingdom. This is where Daniel’s seventieth week comes in (Dan. 9:27), for it gives us an interval of one week of years (seven years) for this to happen.

What else will happen during this interval, which we can identify with the seventieth week of Daniel’s prophecy of the seventy weeks of years (Dan. 9:27)? The main actor on the scene in those days will be the Antichrist. In Revelation 13, this figure is spoken of as a beast that will exercise authority for forty two months (i.e. three and a half years, Rev. 13:5), will make war against the saints (Rev. 13:7), and everyone whose name is not written in the book of life will worship him (Rev. 13:8). All will be required to worship him or be put to death (Rev. 13:15). It is this persecution that will make new living saints that will enter the millennium in their natural bodies.

It seems that we should equate this forced worship of the beast with Jesus’ prophecy of “the desolating sacrilege” (Matt. 24:15). Daniel, who gave us the amazing prophecy of the seventy weeks of years, also speaks of such a person in the seventieth week, saying, “For half of the week he shall cause sacrifice and burnt offering to cease; and upon the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator” (Dan. 9:27). Let us assume that this is the same person whom St. John speaks of as a beast in Revelation 13, and that he is also “the desolating sacrilege” that Jesus predicted in Matthew 24:15. This seems reasonable, for Daniel is speaking about the final week of years here. He says that this person will stop sacrifices for half a week (i.e. three and a half years), the same period of time that Revelation 13 says the beast will have authority (Rev. 13:5). So this then begins to give us a picture of the Antichrist of the last days—namely someone who will stop Jewish sacrifices, set up an abomination that makes desolate, and demand to be worshiped.

Much more than this brief outline is added by the book of Revelation concerning the activities of the Antichrist, including his association with the great battle of all the kings of the earth at Armageddon (Rev. 16:13-16), during which Christ will return in glory on the clouds of heaven at his second coming (Rev. 19:11), capture the Antichrist (Rev. 19:20), throw him in the lake of fire (Rev. 19:20), slay the world’s rebellious armies (Rev. 19:21), and set up the millennial kingdom (Rev. 20:4-7).

The tribulation will occur during these seven years when God will pour out his final wrath upon the earth at the opening of the seven seals, followed by the blowing of the seven trumpets, followed by the pouring out of the seven bowls of his wrath. Each of these three series (seals, trumpets, and bowls) is more intense than the previous series until all of God's wrath has been poured out, and Christ returns in glory on the clouds of heaven.

At the end of a thousand years, Christ's glorious reign of righteousness on earth will merge with the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven upon the new earth (Rev. 21:1-2, 10), and the eternal state will begin.

This should provide us with the basic frame of reference within which we can reflect on various aspects of the future kingdom as our blessed hope.

