



The
Great
Tribulation
Theory.

What saith the Scripture?

THIRD . . . 3^D . . . EDITION.

W. HOSTE, B.A.



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The GREAT TRIBULATION THEORY.

Do the Scriptures teach that The Church must
pass through "The Great Tribulation?"

BY
W. HOSTE, B.A.

THIRD EDITION

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DIAGRAM.

RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH (1 Thess. 4.).

Interval not defined in Scripture.	
A. Beginning of Day of the Lord, probably Rev. 6. 1.	THE DAY OF THE LORD.
B. Seven Years' Covenant made between the Man of Sin and the nation of Israel under Antichrist. (Dan. 9. 27).	
C. Ministry of Two Witnesses, lasting 3½ years. (Rev. 11. 3-6).	
D. Breaking of the covenant in the midst of the week; Sacrifices cease (Dan. 9. 27; 11. 31). Death of Two Witnesses (Rev. 11. 7). Full manifestation of the Man of Sin and of Antichrist.	
E. Great Tribulation (Matt. 24. 21); and "The time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30. 7); Heavenly Signs (Matt. 24. 29).	
F. The Great and Notable Day of the Lord, or in other words the Appearing in Glory of the Son of Man. (Matt. 24. 30; Acts 2. 20).	
G. The destruction of the enemy and the deliverance of Israel (Dan. 12. 1; Zech. 14. 3; Rev. 19. 11-21). Judgment of the Nations (Matt. 25). First resurrection completed (Rev. 20. 4, 5).	
H. Satan bound. Rev. 20. 2. Millennial Reign.	
I. Satan unloosed. Last revolt of man and demons at close of Millennium (Rev. 20. 7, 8).	
J. Revolt suppressed. Satan doomed. Final judgment of wicked dead (Rev. 20. 9-15).	
K. Eternal State.	

(Order of Events upheld by writer).

The Great Tribulation Theory.

[T is important to notice the different way in which the Lord speaks of His coming in the great prophetic* chapters of the Synoptic Gospels, and in His farewell discourse at the end of John. In the first He speaks of Himself, as indeed was His wont, as the Son of Man, and of His coming as an event in the far distance, with wars, famines, earthquakes, false Christs, the Great Tribulation, and signs in the heavens to occur first; in the second He speaks in the first person: "I will come again and receive you unto Myself," with no earthly event to intervene. The same difference is apparent in the Revelation. In chapter 19 the Lord is revealed as "The Faithful and True," coming forth to make war and to judge; and in chapter 22 thrice He speaks of Himself in the first person: "I am coming quickly."

The explanation is simple. Two distinct phases of His coming are in view. The one—the subject of Prophecy—when the Lord will be revealed from Heaven to the world; the other, the unfolding of a mystery—a previous stage of that coming to take away His own "from the evil to come." The Lord would ever be before His people as the One who died for them, as the One who lives for them, and as the One who is coming for them. Thus the early Christians understood His will. They "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God: and to wait for His Son from Heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come" (1 Thess. 1. 9, 10).

The Tribulation Theory.

The object of this pamphlet is to examine a system of interpretation, which I may be allowed for brevity's sake

* Matthew 24, Mark 12, Luke 21.

to call "The Tribulation Theory." It teaches that "the Church" must pass through the Great Tribulation. Those who disseminate these views are doubtless earnest men, but I judge they have been misled by appearances, and have fallen into the common error of drawing general conclusions from particular cases. Thus they put in the forefront of their argument an "order of events" which they think they have proved irrefragably from Matthew 24. 29, and Acts 2. 20; but the whole idea is built, I believe, on the fallacy of confounding "the day of the Lord," which is a *period*, with "the day of the Lord, that great and notable day" (Acts 2. 20, R.V.), which is a *crisis* of time. Then, again, they build whole castles on the expression in Isaiah 1. 11, "The Lord alone will be exalted in that day," a condition of things which they assert will prevail during the whole period of the day of the Lord, though the words, taken in their context, bear well the meaning that the *result* of the Lord's judgments will be that He will be alone exalted. To these main arguments we shall refer at length later.

To some people the question may seem unimportant. In reality it is not so. The theory in question tends to obliterate distinctions of the greatest importance. It mixes up the present and the future dispensations. It introduces a weird confusion into the interpretation of the Apocalypse. And, in a word, would nullify at a stroke much of the distinctive teaching which servants of God have been pressing for the last seventy years. But, as one has well said, "A tentative hypothesis may account for many facts, but nothing less than a full-orbed scriptural support should satisfy us as to what claims to be the truth of God."

I believe the Tribulation Theory is a mistaken one for the following five reasons :

- I. It confounds "the Church" and Israel.
- II. It lays down a fictitious order of prophetic events.
- III. It confuses the stages of the Second Coming.
- IV. It upsets the order and character of the Apocalypse.
- V. It deprives the Church of her hope.

Let us examine these points in their order.

I.—IT CONFOUNDS THE CHURCH AND ISRAEL.

It tends to break down the distinction between the Church and Israel. From Romans 11 we learn that Israel as a nation, owing to her rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ, has been herself for a time rejected. She is now left “without a king, without a prince, without a sacrifice, without an image, without an ephod, and without teraphim” (Hosea 3. 4), that is, she is bereft of national and religious privileges, and has been “left empty” by the unclean spirit of idolatry. This spirit will later on return in a form seven-fold worse than before. Now, the setting aside of Israel has left room for the revelation of “the mystery of Christ kept secret since the world began” (Rom. 16. 25)—a Church composed of believing Jews and Gentiles, between whom the middle wall of partition has been broken down under the headship of a glorified Christ. Israel was an earthly people with an earthly inheritance and a “worldly sanctuary.” The Church is a heavenly people with a heavenly calling, priesthood, and inheritance.

The Threefold Division.

In 1 Corinthians 10. 22 Paul divides the population of Corinth (and the same held good for the whole Roman earth) into the “Jews,” rejecting Jesus as Messiah, “the Gentiles,” without Christ, without God, and without hope, and “the Church of God,” consisting of all from the two first-named classes, who had received Jesus Christ as Lord. As long as “the Church” is on the earth, no Jew or Gentile can receive Christ without being by that very fact at once incorporated into the one body. Witness 1 Corinthians 12. 13, R.V., where Paul, addressing the Corinthians, writes, “In one Spirit were we all baptised into one body, whether Jews or Gentiles.” When the Church is gone, then the old distinction will hold good again, and there will be companies of believing Jews and Gentiles, not only distinguished from the world, but from one another. It is clear, then, that if the Scriptures speak to us of a future moment when the

temple worship shall be restored in Jerusalem, and saved Israelites be once more recognised as such, the Church will be no longer on the earth.

Now apply this to Matthew 24. We have here a prophetic address delivered to four *Jews* (see Mark 13. 3). They had received Jesus as the promised Christ, but it would be strange had they ceased to be Jews because they had accepted their national Messiah. These four Jews, then, were looking forward to the setting up of Messiah's throne on the earth, or in other words, to that moment when "the kingdom should be restored to Israel." They were, it is true, destined to a higher place; they were later to form part of "the Church which is His body." That, however, was the mystery hid in God (and first officially revealed through the Apostle Paul), and of its hopes and destinies they then knew absolutely nothing. The Lord addressed them as representing the faithful Jewish remnant of the last days.

Surely the atmosphere of Matthew 24 is ultra-Jewish. The scene of the events foretold is Jerusalem and Judæa (Matt. 24. 16; Luke 21. 20). The temple destroyed in A.D. 70 will have been rebuilt, for a certain sign foretold by Daniel concerning "his people" will be seen "in the holy place." Then the faithful ones are to flee, and let them "pray that their flight be not on the Sabbath," for reasons obvious to any pious Jew. Now, what has the Church to do with the Sabbath? And why should the Church be found specially in Jerusalem or Judæa? And what part or lot has she in "the holy places made with hands"? No, there is nothing of the Church in Matthew 24; the very thought is a gross anachronism, but if she were there, then believing Jews, serving God according to the old rites, could not be there at the same time, for they would form part of the Church themselves. But we have just seen that believing Jews are the very people addressed, and therefore we conclude that the Church is excluded from this chapter, and from the Great Tribulation therein described. By "the Church" I mean, all through, "the Body of Christ."

The "Great Multitude."

Apply the same test to Revelation 7. The "Tribulationists" ask us to believe that the "Great Multitude" of verse 9 is the Church caught up to Heaven. Why, then, is there no mention either of "the Lord's coming" or of "the rapture" in the chapter, and why are the 144,000 faithful Israelites, sealed as servants of God, mentioned *before* the Great Multitude? This order is awkward for the Tribulation Theory, so much so that one writer quietly reverses it, and writes as if the "Great Multitude" were the next thing mentioned after the heavenly signs of chapter 6. It is true that all the events of the Revelation cannot be taken in the sequence as written, but that is no excuse for this tampering with the order of events in chapter 7, in order to fit in with a special theory. But how can the "Great Multitude" be the Church, when these 144,000 saved Israelites are existing as such on the earth at the same time? And if the "Great Multitude" is the raptured Church, why have the 144,000 been left behind? We may be quite sure that neither company represents the Church. The former is, I believe, the fruit of the testimony of the latter—the sealed of Israel.

It may not be perfectly clear who the "Great Multitude" are, but they are most probably Gentiles converted by the preaching of God's witnesses, and possibly, too, in part, by the proclamation of "the everlasting Gospel" of Revelation 14. This Gospel is proclaimed to the very four classes from which the "Great Multitude" is gathered. This is all the more probable, inasmuch as just before the mention of this angelic evangelisation the 144,000 of chapter 7 reappear on the scene (Rev. 14. 1). However, whether they be Jews or Gentiles is immaterial to the present discussion. There is one thing they cannot be, that is the Church. When we say that the 24th of Matthew is Jewish, we do not, of course, mean that it has no voice for us. It is part of Scripture. It is God-breathed. It is profitable. What we do mean is that though in application it is for all who read, in interpretation it is Jewish. We are not the central subject of the Word, but God Himself and His glory.

II.—IT IS BASED ON A FICTITIOUS ORDER OF PROPHETIC EVENTS.

The second objection to the Tribulation Theory is that *it is based on a mistaken exegesis of Matthew 24. 29 and Acts 2. 20.* In the former of these passages the heavenly signs are said to follow the Great Tribulation. In the latter they are said to precede “the great and terrible day of the Lord,” and therefore, so the Tribulationists argue, the order of future events will be—(1) The Great Tribulation; (2) The heavenly signs; (3) The day of the Lord! This is certainly very clear; but it might have occurred to these teachers that were their theory as true as it is clear it would hardly have been left to our day to make the remarkable discovery. The fallacy of their argument lies in the fact that they have failed to grasp the difference between “the day of the Lord” and “the great and notable day of the Lord.” While it does say that the heavenly signs precede the latter, it does not say that they precede “the day of the Lord.”

“The Tribulation, the great one” (lit.) of Revelation 7, is to be carefully distinguished, these teachers admit, from the long period of tribulation which is even now leading up to it. Have they not overlooked the difference between “the day of the Lord, the great and notable one” (of Joel 2, Mal. 4, and Acts 2), and the long period entitled the “day of the Lord,” which precedes as well as succeeds it? This *period* of time will, I believe, dawn in Revelation 6. 1, and continue for a thousand years at least till Revelation 19 (when, according to 2 Peter 3, “The heavens shall pass away with a great noise”). “The great and notable day of the Lord” will, on the contrary, be a *crisis* of time, when Christ shall be revealed as “the Sun of Righteousness” to the healing of His people, and “as a burning oven” to the destruction of the ungodly (Mal. 4). It is, therefore, perfectly true to say that “the signs in the heavens” precede “*the great and notable day,*” but they are themselves but an incident in the long period known as “the day of the Lord.” I do not mean, of course, that in every passage

where "the day of the Lord" is brought before us, the above distinction is necessarily emphasised, but where the two expressions occur in the same passage, as in Joel 2, the distinction is as plain as it is important.

The Order of Events.

This being so, I believe that the order of events is not as the "Tribulationists" affirm, but as follows :

(1) The Rapture of the Church (divided off by some interval of time not defined in Scripture from).

(2) The day of the Lord, which will include : (a) The Great Tribulation ; (b) The heavenly signs ; (c) The great and notable day of the Lord ; and even (d) The millennial reign.

That this order is the right one, I submit the five following proofs :

(1) In several prophecies the day of the Lord has begun before the heavenly signs occur.

(2) We do not read in the prophets of a Great Tribulation preceding the "day of the Lord."

(3) The same characteristics are common to the day of the Lord and to the Great Tribulation.

(4) The same unparalleled character of severity is predicted of both periods.

(5) We do not see either in the Old or New Testament that the Lord is exalted *throughout* "the day of the Lord."

The Day of the Lord Begun.

1. *In several places in Scripture the day of the Lord is described as in full progress before the signs in the heavens are mentioned at all.* Thus, in Isaiah 24. 23, we read, "Then the moon shall be confounded and the sun ashamed, when the Lord shall reign in Mount Zion." Though the day of the Lord is not specifically named in the twenty-two previous verses, who can doubt that it is referred to in such expressions as "The Lord maketh the earth empty. . . . turning it upside down, punishing the host of the

high ones that are on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth"? It is, therefore, clear that the "day of the Lord" is said in this chapter to precede the signs in the heavens of verse 23.

Again, in Joel 2. 1, "the day of the Lord," is described as at hand. Israel are threatened with it unless they repent. It is a day of darkness and gloominess, and is connected plainly with the judgment of the land of Israel "by the hand of a great people and strong." Then *after* nine verses, giving a description of their work against Israel (see verse 6), we have the signs in the heavens in verse 10: "*The sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining.*" Later on in the same chapter the signs in the heavens are spoken of as preceding "the great and notable day of the Lord." Thus we see that the day of the Lord will have been in progress for some time before the signs in the heavens, which are themselves the heralds of "the great and notable day of the Lord." Does not this clearly justify the distinction between this latter expression and "the day of the Lord"?

Isaiah 13 is another passage where "the day of the Lord" is spoken of as having begun prior to the signs in the heavens. In verse 6 we read, "The day of the Lord is at hand," and in verse 9 it is described as "cruel both with wrath and fierce anger to lay the land destitute," "He shall destroy the sinners out of it," and then in verse 10 the heavenly signs *follow*, "The sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine."

One more passage may suffice. In Isaiah 34. 2 we have the indignation of the Lord upon all nations, with its results in verse 3, *followed* again by the signs in the heaven, described in much the same terms as in Revelation 6.

How, then, is it possible to maintain, in face of such Scriptures, that the "day of the Lord" does not begin until *after* the signs in the heavens? Nor is there the hard and fast distinction that these teachers would maintain between the "day of the Lord" and "the Great Tribulation," either as to time or character. It would appear rather that the

former includes the latter. Even by the showing of the "Tribulationists" "the Great Tribulation" only occupies a part of the whole period, stretching from the opening of the first seal onward. It would be strange had this inclusive period no generic name. I believe it has, and that this name is "the day of the Lord."

As in Egypt during the plagues, so the day of the Lord during part of its course is characterised by the tribulation of God's earthly people at the hands of their enemies by His permission, and at the same time by terrible judgments against the nations of the earth directly from the hand of God, in which His earthly people also share.

Precedence of the Great Tribulation.

2. Again, if "the order of events" is, as the advocates of the Tribulation Theory teach, we should not only expect to find the "day of the Lord" preceded by the "heavenly signs" (which we have just seen is not the case) but *a fortiori* by "the Great Tribulation" or by some period which, though not bearing this name, would at any rate correspond to it in character. We have seen that it is impossible at any rate to exclude Israel from the scenes depicted in Matthew 24. Should we not expect to find her decimated and exhausted by the fearful persecutions through which she has just passed?

But where do we find such a state of things in the prophecies? It is the "day of the Lord" with which Israel is threatened if she will not repent (*e.g.*, Isa. 2, Joel 2, Amos 1, Zeph. 2), as well as the nations of the earth. Again, if the coming of the Lord in Thessalonians 4 is to deliver His Church after "the Great Tribulation," why is there no hint of this latter previously in that chapter?

On the contrary, the exhortation that immediately precedes is, "That ye study to be quiet, and do your own business, and to work with your own hands," advice hardly suitable for a people enduring a raging persecution, as the Tribulation Theory demands. Of course I do not admit for a moment that we have in 1 Thessalonians 4. 13-17 a description of the coming of the Son of Man, as in Matthew

24, but why have we not, even in the following chapter, a hint of tribulation and heavenly signs as likely to precede the "day of the Lord" therein referred to? And why in 2 Thessalonians 2 did the saints imagine that they were in the "day of the Lord," and not in the "Great Tribulation," if this was to take place first?

Likeness of Two Great Events.

3. A third reason for rejecting the Tribulation Theory is that *the "order of events" on which it rests necessitates a fictitious distinction* between the "day of the Lord" as a time when God alone judges man and the "Great Tribulation" as a time when man alone afflicts God's people. As a matter of fact the two periods are marked by the same characteristics.

It is not true that the "day of the Lord" is only a time of direct Divine judgment on man. In Joel 2, for instance, we see God's judgment on His people, but not directly. He uses "a great people and strong" to chastise them with. Israel are afflicted by man, but this is distinctly called in Joel 2. 1, "*The day of the Lord.*" In Luke 21. 22, on the other hand, the parallel passage to Matthew 24, where the "*Great Tribulation*" is spoken of, we read, "These be the days of *vengeance*, that all things which are written may be fulfilled." Surely the vengeance here spoken of is Jehovah's vengeance by the hand of His enemies. Notice, too, the expression in the same chapter of Luke (ver. 23), "wrath upon this people." What people but Israel could possibly be intended? The expression in verse 22, "All things which are written," point to this too, for Israel is the subject of prophecy, not the Church. It is perfectly true that the day of the Lord will also be marked by God's judgments against the nations (see Rev. 16), but there is no hint that these latter will have changed one iota in their hatred against those who refuse the mark of the beast.

We shall see later that the "time of Jacob's trouble" is another way of expressing "the Great Tribulation." But by comparing Isaiah 13. 8 with Jeremiah 30. 6 we see that the same strange characteristic is common "to the

time of Jacob's trouble" and "the day of the Lord." In Isaiah 13. we read that (in "the day of the Lord") "*they shall be in pain as a woman that travaileth,*" and in Jeremiah 30., where it is a question of Jacob's trouble, the words are found, "Ask ye now and see *whether a man doth travail with child,* wherefore do I see every man with his hands upon his loins?" (see also 1 Thess. 5. 3). Is not this an additional proof that "the Great Tribulation," or "the time of Jacob's trouble" (call it which you will), is included in "the day of the Lord"?

Unparalleled Severity of Both.

4. A fourth reason for rejecting this fallacious "order of events" and this fictitious distinction between "the day of the Lord" and "the Great Tribulation" is that the *same unique and unparalleled character of severity is predicted of both periods.*

In Matthew 24. 21 we read, "There shall be *Great Tribulation,* such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, *no, nor ever shall be.*" In Joel 2. 2 it is said of the *day of the Lord,* "There hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations." In both cases the statements are made in a most general way of all the peoples and times, so that it cannot be said that the two periods are only unique in the experience of some particular class of sufferer. *Must not the two periods referred to be the same?*

Again, in Jeremiah 30. 7, we read of "*the time of Jacob's trouble,*" that "there is none like it." The Tribulationists teach that this time comes along after "the Great Tribulation," which, however, is said in Matthew 24. 21 above, to be also unlike anything before or since. Is it not clear to a demonstration that the two expressions describe, possibly from different standpoints, *the same period?* As Dr. Tregelles rightly says, "It follows inevitably that the same period is spoken of in both places."*

* See Tregelles on Daniel, p. 154.

Again, the "Tribulationists" teach that the Great Tribulation is exclusively a time of *man's persecution* of God's people, and that the day of the Lord is exclusively a time of *God's judgments* on man, but, as we have seen above, their theory demands that the Great Tribulation, of which it is said that "no time shall ever be like it," should precede "the day of the Lord," and therefore man's persecution of God's people is more severe than God's judgment on the persecutors, which is incredible. But as it is also said of "the day of the Lord," that there shall never have been any time like it before, we are reduced to saying that the "Great Tribulation" is greater than the "day of the Lord," and that the latter is greater than the Great Tribulation, which is absurd. We may safely affirm, then, that these two expressions, and the "time of Jacob's trouble," are only three ways of describing, from three different points of view, the same concurrent period. But if "the Great Tribulation" is described in Jeremiah 30. 7 as the time of *Jacob's trouble*, it is certain that it is not the Church which will pass through that tribulation, but Israel herself.

The Lord Alone Exalted.

5. It is quite possible to lay too much stress on the expression, "The Lord alone shall be exalted in that day" (Isa. 2). I believe it does not mean that all through "the day of the Lord" He alone will be exalted, but as the *result* of God's judgments He alone will be exalted. This interpretation, besides being perfectly natural, has the additional advantage of being in accordance with the facts. Where do we find in Revelation in those chapters which the "Tribulationists" especially allocate to the day of the Lord that the name of the Lord is alone exalted? Take chapter 16, for instance, when "the vials" are poured out on the earth. In verse 9 we read, "They blasphemed the name of God, . . . and they repented not to give Him glory." In verse 11, "They blasphemed the God of Heaven, and repented not of their deeds." Then in verses 13 to 16 we have the gathering of the armies of the whole world to Armageddon (with little thought of exalting the Lord

alone), and in verse 21 we read, "Men blasphemed God because of the hail."

Do such words as these fit in with this theory, that while the judgments are in progress "the Lord alone is exalted"? We know the final result will be, "His enemies will be made His footstool," and He Himself exalted above all; but this will only happen when Christ appears in Person and smites the man of sin with the sword of His mouth, and destroys him with the brightness of His coming.

It is really incredible how anyone can seriously maintain that the Lord Himself is alone exalted throughout "the day of the Lord," when at His coming He finds the beast and the false prophet in red-handed rebellion against Him at the head of their mighty hosts.

III.—IT OBLITERATES A VITAL DISTINCTION.

The Tribulation Theory *obliterates the vital distinction between the coming of the Son of Man to the earth in judgment, and the coming of the Lord in the air to call away His own.*

The former of these stages of the Lord's return (really subsequent to the other in the order of events) was foretold in the Old Testament, *e.g.*, Daniel 7. 13, "I saw in the night visions one like the Son of Man," and referred to in such passages as Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21. The latter was "a mystery" (that is, kept secret until made known in the New Testament), and revealed specially to Paul, and by him to the Church in his epistles, by a special "word of the Lord" to the Thessalonians, and as a mystery to the Corinthians, "Behold, I show you a mystery" (1 Cor. 15. 51). After speaking to the former in 1 Thessalonians 4 of what they could not possibly know from the Old Testament, he goes on to speak, in chapter 5, of that which is connected with times and seasons, *i.e.*, the day of the Lord, of which he says, "Ye have no need that I write unto you, for ye yourselves know perfectly. . . ." How could they know this? Because the day of the Lord,

and the coming in judgment, "in the great and notable day," were spoken of by the Old Testament prophets, from Isaiah to Malachi. But if the Thessalonians and Corinthians needed special revelations to inform them concerning the "coming of the Lord" for His Church, how could the apostles in Matthew be supposed to have in their minds this coming, which was at that time an unrevealed mystery?

It is really most unscientific, to use a modern phrase, to read back into the apostles' minds that which, had it been there, would have been nothing less than a startling anachronism. No, the Lord was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Four of these lost sheep He was addressing, who had heard the Shepherd's voice, and they were to Him in the relation of a faithful remnant to their Messiah, and represented that faithful remnant in the last days.

All the surroundings of Matthew 24 are Jewish, as we have seen, and hinge on the destruction of Jerusalem—the tribulation of "this people" (see Luke 21, "great wrath upon this people"), and the coming of the Son of Man to their deliverance as foretold in Zechariah 14. Of course it is not meant by those who emphasise the title here used of "Son of Man" that this is never used where truths directly applicable to the Church are in question. All that is meant is, that where you have "Son of Man coming," the reference is to the coming of the Son of Man as revealed to Daniel.

One writer has referred to the "striking similarity" between the "comings" described in Matthew 24 and 1 Thessalonians 4. Unfortunately he refrained from indicating the points of similarity. We know these exegetes well. The occurrence of the same word in two passages, however divergent, establishes in their facile understanding, close connection between them. They are more occupied with *sounds* than sense and usually ignore all dispensational differences. Anyone who believes that the Scriptures are God-breathed ought to be more struck with the points of contrast than with their similarity. The words of Scripture are not used at haphazard. Differences which might mean

nothing in a mere human book have often a deep significance in the Book of God. True there are certain superficial similarities. In both passages "a coming" is described, and that of the same Person.

But the two events differ as to (1) circumstances, (2) manner, (3) objects.

Different Circumstances.

1. As to *circumstances*. Both passages indeed refer to the same Person, but why is that Person described as "Son of Man" in Matthew, and as "the Lord Himself" in 1 Thessalonians 4? Again, is there no significance in the fact that "the coming" in Matthew 24 is preceded by "the sign of the Son of Man," by heavenly marvels, and by the Great Tribulation, and is compared to "the deluge," and has therefore a character of divine judgment, whereas in 1 Thessalonians 4 there is not one word of premonitory signs or tribulation, nor hint of accompanying judgment?

Different Manner.

2. As to *manner*. In Matthew 24 the coming is thus described, "Then shall 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; and He shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather together His elect," etc., etc. In 1 Thessalonians 4 angels are not mentioned.* The saints are gathered by the Lord in Person and by the trump of God. The action here is instantaneous; that of sending out angels and gathering by their agency, as in Matthew 24, presents the idea of prolonged action.

The coming in Matthew 24 is a *public one*. "All the tribes of the earth shall mourn." There is no mention of this in connection with the coming of 1 Thessalonians 4. It is all over "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (*cf.* 1 Cor. 15, where the same coming is described), and the effect on the world at large is not mentioned.

* "The voice of the archangel" is literally "with archangel voice"—as though to describe the loudest voice imaginable.

It is beside the mark to affirm that because the Lord shouts, therefore the world will hear. In John 12. 29 we have an authentic account of God speaking from Heaven in definite words. To some who stood by it was only a clap of thunder. God can make His voice heard to whom He will, and veil it to whom He will.

Different Objects

3. As to the *objects* in view. In Matthew 24 the objects are twofold. (1) The elect; (2) The world. In 1 Thessalonians 4 the objects are also twofold, but different from those just mentioned. (1) The sleeping saints who are raised (there is no mention of resurrection in Matthew 24). (2) The living saints, who are changed. And both together are caught up in the clouds, to be for ever with the Lord. But some one will say, Do we not find rapture spoken of in Matthew 24. 40, 41? We do, but it is precisely reverse in character to that of 1 Thessalonians 4. Those taken away in this latter chapter are the saints of God removed from a world doomed to judgment. In Matthew 24, if we compare verses 40 and 41 with verse 39, we notice that those "taken" correspond with the wicked cut off by the flood, whereas those left behind correspond with Noah and his family, and will be blessed like them. When the Lord comes as in 1 Thessalonians 4 it will be blessed to be taken away. When He comes in His Matthew 24 character it will be blessed to be left behind. In accordance with this the words for "taken" in Matthew 24 and for "caught" up in 1 Thess. 4 are entirely distinct.

IV.—IT UPSETS THE ORDER AND CHARACTER OF THE APOCALYPSE.

The order of events in the Revelation, and the Jewish character of the book, are strong arguments, to my mind, against the Tribulation Theory.

In chapter 1. 19 is given the threefold division of the book, chapter 1 representing the first; chapters 2 and 3,

the second, namely, "the things that are," not only messages to seven literal churches, but, as is generally admitted, a prophetic and panoramic view of the Church from the apostolic to the last days; in chapter 4 begins "the things which shall be hereafter," the very phrase being found in verse 1, in slightly stronger form. At this point John is caught up into the open Heaven, from which he looks down on the earth, and is henceforth taken up with Israel, Babylon, and the nations. Why does he deal no longer with "the churches?" Because, as I believe, the rapture of John is only representative of the rapture of the whole Church, who may be represented in chapter 4, under the figure of twenty-four white-robed elders. These are *seated round* the throne, in contrast with the great multitude of chapter 7, who are seen *standing before* the throne. In chapter 5 the Lord Jesus is spoken of as "The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David," evidently in relation to *Israel* (for it is not in such terms that He is presented to us in relation to the Church).

The Lamb.

Later on the Lion is seen as "the Lamb," a word used of Him only in the Revelation, and quite distinct from that employed in John 1. 29, 36; Acts 8. 32; and 1 Peter 1. 19. It is as "the Lamb" that He purchased the world, and can claim to break the seals of the book, the title deeds of the purchase. It is to Him as "the Lamb" that the living creatures and the twenty-four elders bear witness, as also to "the blood," the purchase price (see Jer. 32. 8-12). As each of the first four seals is broken, a living creature calls, Come! and at once there is a corresponding manifestation of energy on the earth, which shows that though man proposes and Satan opposes, it is still God who disposes.

The Conqueror.

Many believe that the conqueror of chapter 6 is only Satan's counterfeit of that other conqueror on a white horse of Revelation 19, and is none other than the "man of sin" of 2 Thessalonians 2, and the coming prince of

Daniel 9, who is destined to make a seven years' covenant, not with the Church, but with Daniel's people, "Israel." The fifth seal may very well correspond in measure with the Great Tribulation, consequent on the breaking of that covenant in the midst of the period of seven years. This tribulation, identical, I believe, with the time of Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30. 6), continues to the end, to that "one day" of Zechariah 14. 7.

It is noticeable that in verse 1 of this chapter the Revised Version reads, not "*The* day of the Lord cometh," but, "*A* day of the Lord cometh"—a special day—described below as a day "when the light shall not be clear nor dark," "not day nor night," owing, may it not be, to the darkening of the heavenly bodies? These signs, we know from Matthew 24, immediately precede the coming of "the Son of Man in power and great glory." I believe this "one day" is the day named in Scripture "the day of the Lord, the great and notable one."

It is generally recognised that the Revelation cannot be read consecutively, except within certain limits. The Spirit of God again and again carries us on to the end, although "the end is not yet." Thus chapter 5 leads us on to millennial scenes, chapters 6, 14, and 19, to what appears to be in each case (at least in the two last) the climax of final judgment. But wherever we are, the record is tinged with a Jewish colouring. The very prayer of the souls beneath the altar (chap. 5), which cries for vengeance on their enemies, surely suffices to show that these are not Christian but Jewish martyrs. While the reply shows that the day of tribulation was still in progress. The 144,000 Israelites of chapter 7; the rebuilt temple of chapter 11; the character of the testimony of the two witnesses of chapter 11; and that of "the everlasting Gospel" of chapter 14 (which, though of course based on the same foundation as the "Gospel of the grace of God" of this dispensation, is surely distinct from this latter, as its terms show), and many similar points, all go to prove that the Church is not in view in the Apocalypse from chapter 6 and onwards until she comes with her Lord in chapter 19.

V.—IT DEPRIVES THE CHURCH OF HER HOPE.

Finally, "*The Tribulation Theory*" deprives the Church of her hope. The hope of the Christian is neither long life nor painless death. It is neither the conversion of the world nor the judgment of the world. It is neither "the day of the Lord" nor "the Great Tribulation," but the coming of the Lord. The Tribulation Theory eclipses this hope by interposing between it and the Church "the Great Tribulation."* Now one of the last promises of Christ was, "I will come again," and His last assurance before the Book closes, "Behold, I come quickly." It was Himself, not events on the earth, much less "the Great Tribulation," He would have us wait for.

Somehow I cannot help suspecting that at the back of this theory there lurks, unsuspected by its votaries, legality. The Church has not been what she ought to have been, either collectively or individually, therefore she must go through the Great Tribulation—a kind of Protestant Purgatory—to atone for her manifold failures. Truly, if it were a question of desert, she has deserved worse fires than a Great Tribulation can threaten.

But the same grace that saved us gives us an object to look for—*that blessed hope* (Titus 2.). The One who died for our sins is coming to take us to be with Himself for ever. Now, certainly, "the Great Tribulation" is not a blessed hope, and would effectually blot out any such hope beyond it.

An Awkward Parallel.

What I can only describe as a very inadequate attempt has been made to get over this difficulty. An effort has been made to suggest a parallel between the Church waiting for her Lord and a company of citizens waiting for the arrival of their king. True, these latter know that their

* We are assured that the Great Tribulation is only like a semaphore which dips to show that the train is due; but the illustration is not very happy, for if a semaphore dipped and the train did not arrive for 3½ years, we should suppose there had been an accident.

king must be preceded by a squadron of cavalry and a military band, but would this spoil their hope of seeing him? Would they not rather strain eyes and ears to catch the first sight and strains of the head of the procession? So the Tribulationist apologist argues. Very good, but what would correspond in the case of the Church to these joyful strains of music? The most awful persecution the world has ever known, worse than the massacres of a Tamerlane, fiercer than the *autos da fè* of a Torquemada, more bloody than the butcheries of an Abdul-Ahmid. "A Great Tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matt. 24. 21). If, to go back to the supposed parallel, the citizens knew that before their king could possibly appear they must endure three and a half years of prison, torture, and massacre, I maintain it would be idle to talk to them of the coming of their king with this awful shadow across their path. The Thessalonians were taught of God "to wait for His Son from Heaven," to expect the Lord Himself, because it was, so to speak, the next thing to happen on the heavenly programme.

It is true that Peter was warned (in John 21) that he would glorify God by a certain form of death, but it is doubtful whether the words of our Lord, couched as they were in metaphorical language, were necessarily clear in their meaning, at the time, to the apostles. They did not, in any case, prevent Peter himself from speaking of the immediate return of the Lord Jesus as a possibility contingent on Israel's national repentance (Acts 3. 20, 21, R.V.).

A Modern Fiction.

In 2 Thessalonians we gather that the Thessalonians were called to pass through persecutions at the hand of man so severe in character that they could only suppose they were in the last days. Now, were "the Tribulation Theory" correct, it is easy to perceive the particular form of error they would have fallen into. They would have imagined "the Great Tribulation" was upon them, for this

period is supposed by the Tribulationists to *precede* "the day of the Lord." But what did they think? "The day of the Lord is present" (2 Thess. 2. 2, R.V.). Why does the apostle not put them right at once by quoting "the order of events" laid down by the Tribulation Theorists, and remind them that they could not be in the day of the Lord, because the "Great Tribulation" and the "heavenly signs" had not yet taken place? Why does he not even refer to these two last-named events? Because he knew nothing of this modern fiction of a "day of the Lord," preceded by a Great Tribulation and heavenly signs. Now, it is true that the simple and direct way of correcting their error would have been to remind them that "the coming of the Lord" had not yet taken place, and that therefore "the day of the Lord," which all are agreed must follow it, could not be in progress. But the apostle does do this indirectly, by appealing in verse 1 to "*the coming of the Lord and our gathering together to Him,*" as a motive for not being "soon shaken in mind" by the novel theory they had received; but, as in other places, guided by the Spirit, he not only wishes to correct their mistake, but to take advantage of it in order to bring out further light for the saints of God in all time.

He therefore starts with "the day of the Lord" (R.V.), and works backward, and says, simply, you cannot be in the day of the Lord, for before that day can come there must be a great falling away, and the man of sin, borne along on the wave of apostasy, must be revealed. It is generally affirmed that "that which withholdeth" is the Church, and "He who withholdeth" is the Holy Spirit.

Some however have suggested that this hindering cause is rather the breaking down of law and order going on around us to-day, and that it is only when that is complete that Satan's man will appear. In a previous edition I adopted this view, but feel obliged now to return to the older interpretation. One special point seems to me to show the fallacy of above. It is true we live in anarchical days, but the Man of Sin will be himself the last. *Governmental* head of the Roman Empire, and himself the very

representative of autocratic rule—certainly conferred and supported by Satan, but none the less one of the powers that be that are ordained of God. So great will be the energy of Satan in these days that nothing but special Divine power will restrain him. When we speak of the Holy Spirit being taken away we do not mean, as our critics insist on supposing, that He will cease to work on the earth. He worked all through Old Testament times, before He came at Pentecost. But when He is taken away it will only be in the sense of ceasing to do the work He is doing to-day of baptizing all believers into one body. Probably when the Church is gone and the indwelling Spirit, He will work on the earth in the conversion of sinners in a way never before realized, and that through Israel restored to the place of testimony for God on the earth.

Let it be said in conclusion that though the revelation of Christ *with* His saints is often spoken of in connection with the Church as an incentive to faithfulness, because that appearing will be the moment of the manifestation of the saints in their position of reward, and their place in the kingdom, it is none the less true that it is the coming of the Lord *for* His saints which is set before us in the epistles as the hope of the Church.

May we, then, be "WAITING FOR HIS SON FROM HEAVEN," and have our hopes so fixed on Him, that we may purify ourselves, even as He is pure; "Giving thanks unto the Father, who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1. 12).

