

What Saints will be in the Tribulation?

J. N. Darby.

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The question, Will the saints be in the tribulation? suggests itself to every one who is occupied with the hopes of the church of God and the prophetic declarations of Scripture as to the close of this earth's painful and laborious history. Personal anxiety suggests it on one hand, and on the other it connects intimately with the gravest and most vital points of prophetic enquiry; or rather of the true character of the church of God and its condition at the close.

I cannot, in the space allowed me here, enter at large into the declarations of the Old Testament as to a remnant, nor of the New as to the church. But a short answer to the question itself will help to throw light on the points I allude to and on the rapture of the saints. I purpose adding a development of the true force of 2 Thessalonians 1, 2, so often introduced in the discussions which have arisen on these subjects.

And first, as to our being in the tribulation: How do I know there will be a tribulation? I must get some revelation of it. He who would place the church in it will answer me, I am sure, that the Scriptures are clear on the point. There will be at the close a tribulation, a time such as there has never been, till the Lord's coming brings deliverance. What, then, are the Scriptures which tell us that there will be such tribulation? I am not aware of any other direct ones than these: Jeremiah 30: 7; Daniel 12: 1; Matthew 24: 21; Mark 13: 19 (Luke does not speak of it nor of the abomination of desolation); to which we may add the more general passages of Revelation 3: 10; chap. 7: 14. The first four passages do effectively prove that there will be a time of tribulation such as never was since there was a nation, or, as it is expressed in Mark, "such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created, neither shall be." The passages from Revelation apply, we shall see, to a wider sphere than the preceding ones; but as they speak of a great tribulation, I have, of course, quoted them. There will be then a tribulation. The other part of the question still remains: Shall we, who compose the church, be in this tribulation?

The answer to this question must be sought in the passages which speak of the tribulation itself. The first of them, Jeremiah 30: 7, is as clear as possible in announcing those to whom it applies: "It is the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be delivered out of it." This time, then, of trouble, such as never was nor will be (so that there cannot be two), is the time of Jacob's trouble. Nothing can be clearer or more distinct. The whole chapter may be read, which sets it in the clearest light. It is not merely that Jacob may be found there, but when it is said, "Alas! for that day is great, there is none like it," the trouble spoken of is Jacob's trouble.

111 The next is Daniel 12: 1. This is also positively declared to be of Daniel's people. The whole prophecy is the description of what is to happen to Daniel's people in the last days. Dan. 10: 14. Michael, also (compare Dan. 10: 21), Will then stand up for that people, and, as Jeremiah had said, they will be delivered (that is, the elect remnant - those written in the book). Daniel's testimony then is also quite clear. The tribulation is the tribulation of Daniel's people. But this is the rather important because it carries us at once to Matthew, the Lord Himself declaring that He speaks of this same time and same event, using the terms of Daniel, and referring to him by name as well as to the statements of the passage. Compare Matt. 24: 15; Daniel 12: 11.

But all the language of the passage in *Matthew* confirms this. Those who are in Judea are to flee to the mountains. Those who are on the housetop are not to come down to seek anything. The

abomination which causes desolation stands in the holy place. They are to pray that their flight may not be on the sabbath. False Christs and false prophets are to seduce with the hopes cherished by the Jewish people. All is local and Jewish - has no application to hopes which rest on going to meet Christ in the air. What is in question is "flesh" being "saved" (i.e., life spared on earth). *Mark* relates evidently to the same event and almost exactly in the same terms. Thus these four passages, which speak of the unequalled tribulation, apply it distinctly to Jacob, Jerusalem, and Judea, and the Jews, not to the church. It is entirely another order and sphere of things from the church, and professedly so.

There are two passages which, as I have said, are more general: Revelation 3: 10 and Revelation 7: 14. Do these, then, apply to the church? The language of Revelation 3: 10 is this, "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world to try them which dwell on the earth." That is, when the church is addressed, it is with a declaration that she will be kept from that hour which shall come to try others. So that thus far the testimonies of Scripture declare that the unequalled tribulation is for Jacob, and that, when the time of temptation is spoken of in addressing the church, it is to declare that the faithful shall be kept out of it.

112 Revelation 7: 14 may seem more difficult; still it bears witness to the same truth. For the heavenly kings and priests (that is, the elders who have represented them from the beginning of the second or strictly prophetic part of the book) are professedly another class of persons, who have not come out of the great tribulation. One of these elders explains to John who those who have come out of the great tribulation are, another class of persons from themselves. One of them asks John, Who are these who are arrayed in white robes? etc. John refers to him, and then he explains. That is, the crowned elders are quite a different class from them; so that, while admitting the passage to be obscure in certain points, it is clear in this - in giving us the elders and those who came out of the tribulation as two distinct classes. The crowned elders are not at all represented as having been in it, but as pointing out others as those that come out of it. Every element of the description of these persons confirms this distinction

Another passage - Revelation 12 - while not using the term tribulation, yet speaking of the epoch at which it is to happen, strongly confirms this same truth. When Satan and his angels are defeated by Michael, he is cast out and come down to the earth, having great wrath, knowing he has but a short time, and persecutes the woman. Now what is the effect of this most important event on those who can celebrate its bearing? That the trial of the heavenly saints is ended, and that of the inhabitants of the earth and the sea just about to begin in its most formidable shape, because Satan is cast down there. The language is this: "Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ; for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night: and they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they loved not their lives unto the death. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea," etc. Now I do not say that this is the moment of the rapture, for I think it is included in the man-child's being caught up. But I say this that, at the moment of the commencement of the great rage of Satan for the three times and a half, the entire deliverance of the heavenly saints from his power, and their definite triumph is celebrated; that is, they are not exposed to that last time of Satan's rage. This chapter, then, confirms, in the fullest way, the exemption of the church from the last and dreadful time of trial. I am satisfied that the whole teaching and structure of the Revelation confirms the same truth; but this would evidently lead me into too large a sphere of enquiry.

113 We have found that the passages which speak of the tribulation first apply it directly to the Jews on one side, and then exclude the church from it on the other. I do not see how such a point as this

could be made clearer by scripture.

I now turn to the interpretation of 2 Thessalonians 1, 2. There is in the latter chapter and (I think I may say) acknowledged mistranslation, of which the true and undoubted sense gives the key to the whole passage. I refer to verse 2, "as that the day of Christ is at hand": it should be "is present." The word is used for, and translated in two different places, "present," in contrast with things to come - "things *present* and things to come." This is always its sense in Scripture. What the Thessalonians were troubled and upset in their minds by, then, was that they had been led by false teachers (pretending to the Spirit, and even alleging a letter of Paul to this effect) to suppose that the day of Christ was actually come. The violence of persecution was very great; and as the day of the Lord is in effect spoken of as a day of terror and trial in the Old Testament, these false teachers had profited by this to persuade them it was there.

The apostle with divine wisdom sets them morally right in chapter 1, as to their feelings and sentiments as to this, before entering in the second into positive instruction as to the fact of the Lord's coming. He shews them the folly (since Christ was to appear for that day, He Himself being present in it) of supposing that it was His own people and faithful ones He was going to make suffer and cast into distress and tribulation. No; it was His enemies and theirs who would be in affliction in that day, and they themselves in rest and peace. The very righteousness of God would assure this. It was a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble them, and to His troubled ones rest, when Christ shall be revealed, for this was what brought in the day. It was only shewn by their tribulations that He counted them worthy of His kingdom that was then to come.

114 In a word, as the day was Christ's and brought in by His personal presence, when it was there they would have rest and their persecutors trouble. It is the contrast of state when the day is there, not the epoch of its commencement, which is spoken of. Indeed, had it been so, it would have been a poor and uninspired comfort, for they would not have rest yet. On the other hand, the adversaries of the constant expectation of Christ would gain nothing; for the apostle's words so interpreted would have led the saints at Thessalonica to a constant expectation of His appearing, instead of their rapture, as the moment of getting rest. But the truth is, the using the Greek word *anesis* (rest) as significative of the moment of attaining the rest is a mistake. The word, though used for the time of obtaining relaxation, is equally used for a state of ease, or even pleasure. It is never used in Scripture for the moment of obtaining relaxation from trial, but always in the general sense of a state of ease, one contrasted with *theipsis* (distress). The whole and sole force of the apostle's reasoning is this, that as the Lord Himself was to bring in the day, it could not, when there, be a day of distress for His people, but evidently for His enemies and their persecutors. In chapter 2 he proceeds to unfold to them the real order of the events, and especially in connection with the place they had in them.

Here, again, we meet a question of criticism, but it affects very little the reasoning of the apostle. Some would change here the authorised English version, and read, "But we beseech you, brethren, concerning the coming," etc., instead of "by the coming." The preposition itself is used in both ways; but its constant force with words of beseeching is 'by' (sometimes 'for,' which has no place here). The force of the apostle's reasoning is this, that as they were to be gathered together *to* Christ, they could not be in the day which was to come by His appearing; they were to go to meet Him in the air, and hence could not be in the judgments of that day, its trials or its terrors.

The apostle had taught them in his first epistle that they were to be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Hence he could refer to it as a known truth. The saints were not to await the coming of the day of the Lord on the earth, but to go up to meet Him in the air, and be for ever with Him. Did He appear,

they, we know, would appear with Him. But here he speaks of what they ought to have remembered, that they would go up before the day, and hence they could not possibly be there in their actual state on earth, if the day was. The church's connection with the return of the Lord was, to go up to meet Him in the air, to be gathered unto Him. The day was entirely another thing; it was vengeance from His presence. Neither could the day therefore come before the objects of vengeance were there. An apostasy would come, and the man of sin would be revealed, whom the Lord would consume with the breath of His mouth, and destroy by the appearing of His presence.

115 That is, we have two things (which from other scriptures also we know to be distinct, exactly in this way, Christ's coming, and the manifestation of it; for when He appears, we shall appear with Him - hence we *must* be with Him before even He appears at all, yet at His coming), the coming of Christ and the public epiphany of His presence, with one of which the saints are directly connected, by being gathered together to Him; with the other, the day, because at His appearing He will execute judgment against the ungodly. They will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power. But He will come to be glorified in His saints, and admired in all them that believe; that is, they will be in the display of this glory in that day. They will appear with Him in glory - be like Him. Now it is quite certain they will not appear *with Him* when they are caught up to meet Him in the air. Thus it is not merely particular expressions, though these are clear and forcible, but the bearing, and object, and course of reasoning of the whole chapter, which shews the distinction of the rapture of the saints before Christ appears, and the coming of the day when He is admired in them.

What is important to remark is, the entire difference of relationship in which the saints are put with Christ: we belong to Him, go to meet Him, appear with Him, are glorified together. The practical result is, not merely to clear up a question of dates and of time, but to change the whole spirit and character of our waiting and Christ's coming. We wait for Him to come and take us to Himself, the full realisation of our heavenly calling. There are no events connected with our relationship with Christ. We have no need of judgment to participate in blessing under Him; we go out of the midst of all events to meet Him above. The Jews and the world are delivered by judgments. Hence they must await the course of events and the full ripening of earthly evil for judgment; for the day will not come before. Hence, we find in the Psalms the appeal for judgment and the times of it, the declaration of the overwhelming character of evil, and the cry to God to shew Himself and render a reward to the proud. The church on earth has no need to seek this; she belongs to Christ, and will be caught up to heaven out of the evil.

116 I add a few words on another passage suggested to me as one by which difficulties have been created in some minds, really desirous of the truth. I mean the connection of chapters 4 and 5 of first Thessalonians. I confess it does not affect my own in any way; but as it does the minds of others, it is well to notice it. The difficulty, if there be any, arises from a serious confusion in the minds of those who make it - the very confusion into which the Thessalonians were led, namely, taking tribulation for the day of Christ. For the day of Christ, Christ must appear. Let us only keep this clear in our minds, and all these difficulties vanish.

The Thessalonians looked so earnestly for Christ's coming, with no further knowledge of the manner or order of it, that they thought believers who had died, and perhaps died even for Christ, would not be there to meet Him. This mistake the apostle corrects. He tells them that they must not grieve as those without hope; that they would not be left out of the *cortege* of glory; that Christ would bring them with Him. He then explains to them the manner, and shews that it is by their resurrection, which would take place before even the then living ones are changed; and when this is also wrought by

divine power, all would go up to meet Him in the air, and so they would be for ever with the Lord. This parenthetically explains the manner by express revelation. They will go up to meet Him - subsequently, as we have seen from Colossians, appear with Him when He appears. The parenthetical part merely gives the association of the saints with Christ Himself, which is our proper portion.

But he had said, as a general truth, in answer to their fears, that God would bring them with Christ. This leads him naturally to the general subject. He had no need to speak of times and seasons. The Thessalonians knew perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night, and when they (the world) say Peace and safety, sudden destruction would come upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; he adds, "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief: ye are all children of the day." It is alleged that the apostle could not have said that the day would not overtake them as a thief, if they were not to feel liable to be in some sort overtaken by it. Now, if the teaching of the apostle be examined, even in the place, there is no possible ground for this: for the day of the Lord Christ must appear. But he had just taught them that they were to be caught up to meet Him in the air and be brought with Him. That is, he had taught them what made it impossible to suggest that the day could overtake them in any way or manner whatever. They were of the day, so to speak, as he indeed says, "ye are children of the day," "let us who are of the day."

117 This passage says nothing of not being in the tribulation - we have treated that point already; but the objection confounds the tribulation and the day which really closes it. The tribulation is Satan's power (though God's judgment in woe); the day is Christ's, who makes it and binds him. But the passage speaks not at all of the tribulation, though it supposes nothing of the kind; but it does speak of the day of the Lord, and with instruction as to the portion of the saints, which shews that it can have in no way whatever to do with them. They are of it and to come in its power. All it says is - The day will overtake them as a thief: but it will not overtake *you*, for ye are of the day. It says nothing of times and seasons, but negatives the application of the well-known truth to them.