

WHAT ABOUT THE GREAT TRIBULATION?

WHAT DISPENSATION IS THIS SEVEN YEAR PERIOD UNDER?

- **The Bible clearly prophesies that a period of seven years is yet ahead which is the completion of the seventy weeks of Daniel 9.**
- *“Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.” Daniel 9:24*
- **God’s program for Israel (“thy people,” Daniel 10:14; 11:14) would be completed in 70 lots of “weeks” (periods of seven years)**

Genesis 29:27,28 *“Fulfil her week, and we will give thee this also for the service which thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years. And Jacob did so, and fulfilled her week: and he gave him Rachel his daughter to wife also.”*

- **By the time the 70 “weeks” or 490 Jewish years of 360 days each, (483 Julian years) have run their course, God will have completed six things for Israel.**
- **The first three have to do with sin, and the second three to do with the kingdom.**
- **The basis for the first three was provided in the work of Christ on the cross, but all six will be realized by Israel at the Second Coming of Christ.**
 1. *“to finish the transgression”* – refers to Israel’s sin of disobedience coming to an end when she repents and turns to Christ as her Messiah and Saviour.
 2. *“to make an end of sins”* – Israel’s sin would be punished in and through Christ, her Substitute, Who would bear the sins of the world on the cross. Then at Christ’s Second Coming, He will remove Israel’s sin (Ezekiel 37:23; Romans 11:20-27)
 3. *“to make reconciliation for iniquity”* – Daniel’s prophecy promised that because of Christ’s shed blood on the cross, God’s justice would be satisfied.
 4. *“to bring in everlasting righteousness”* – This prophecy means that God will establish an age characterised by righteousness, referring to the millennial kingdom (Isaiah 60:21; Jeremiah 23:5-6)
 5. *“to seal up the vision and prophecy”* – All that God, through the prophets, said He would do in fulfilling His covenants with Israel, will be fully realised in the Millennial kingdom. (Until a prophecy is fulfilled, it is unsealed.)
 6. *“to anoint the most Holy”* – This speaks of the enthronement of Christ (meaning “Anointed One,” Daniel 7:25-27) as King of kings and Lord of lords in the Millennium.
- **These six accomplishments summarize God’s whole program to bring the nation of Israel the blessings He promised through His covenants with them.**
- **However, from the issuing of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem by Artaxerxes Longimanus, on the 5th March, 444BC, to Messiah being “cut off, but not for Himself,” is a total of 69 x 7 weeks, i.e., 7 x 7 or 49 years for the rebuilding of Jerusalem (444BC to 395BC); 62 x 7**

or 434 years until the week of the triumphal entry of the Messiah in the land of Israel, (Zechariah 9:9) in March 33AD.

“Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself:...” (Daniel 9:25,26a)

- **There is one more “week” to go for these six goals to be accomplished. We are living in a pause of Israel’s history before the final 70th “week.”**

“That principle of divine revelation whereby God in the Jewish Scriptures ignores certain periods of time, leaping over centuries without comment.” – (Edwin Hartill, Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics, “The Gap Principle,” Zondervan publishing house, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1947, page 92)

- **This final “week” was prophesied as the worst time in history -**

Isaiah 13:6, 9-11 *“Howl ye; for the day of the LORD is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty... Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay **the land** desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine. And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.” (See Matthew 24:29-30; 1 Thessalonians 5:4,9)*

Jeremiah 30:7 *“...that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; ...”;*

Daniel 12:1 *“...there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was...”;*

Joel 2:2 *“...there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it,...”;*

Matthew 24:21 *“For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.”*

- **This final “week” has not happened yet, and will be after the rapture, and will conclude with the revelation of Jesus Christ at His second coming to establish His 1000 year kingdom.**
- **So is this final week to be considered part of the dispensation of law, or of the dispensation of grace, or is it a new dispensation in itself?**
- **There is a diversity of opinion among Dispensationalists on this matter.**
- **For example, Dr John Ecob writes, “The Church Age began on the Jewish Feast Day of Pentecost...It will conclude when the Church age saints are raised and the living saints are changed and caught up to heaven at the Rapture, immediately **before** the Tribulation.” (John Ecob, The Seven Dispensations, “The Church Age” page 43)**
- **Lewis Sperry Chafer, the founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, suggested that the Tribulation period will be akin to the Mosaic Law and will include a revival of the principles of that economy.**

- **He said for instance, the Sabbath day will apparently be observed strictly during the period (Matthew 24:20).**
- **Furthermore, it will be a time when God will deal specially with Israel again. It is the seventieth week of Daniel, and since the first sixty-nine weeks were part of the economy of the Law, it will be also.**
- **When dealing with God’s judgment, Revelation speaks of repenting of the works of their hands, which seems to be a message of a return to conformity with the law of Moses.**

“And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk: Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.” (Revelation 9:20, 21)

“And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.” (Revelation 16:11)

- **The principal objection to this view is simply that no other dispensation comes back into effect again once it has ended, and Scripture seems to indicate that the Mosaic Law ended with the first coming of Christ**

“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” (Rom. 10:4)

“But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious.” (2 Cor. 3:7–11).

- **Charles C. Ryrie said, “It would be a very unusual thing to reinstate a dispensation after a lapse of two thousand years or more. Of course, God could do that, but it seems highly doubtful.” (Ryrie, Charles C., Dispensationalism, Moody Publishers, pp. 49-50.)**
- **The second possibility is that the Tribulation is itself a dispensation in its own right. In the scheme usually presented, it would then become the seventh of eight dispensations.**
- **There are many characteristics to commend such a view:**
- **The Tribulation is a time of wrath; it distinctly deals with Israel again; the true church is absent from the earth assuming that the Rapture is before the Tribulation; and the gospel to be preached during that period is the gospel of the kingdom (Matt. 24:14) rather than the gospel of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1-6). These features seem to characterize a different dispensation to the dispensation of grace.**
- **But these are not the only considerations. To be sure, the Sabbath will be observed during that time, but by whom? By those Jewish people who find themselves in their land again and who set up their ancient worship once more.**
- **Are they doing this because they are obeying the responsibilities of a new dispensation, at the direction of God, which includes worship on the Sabbath as a requirement, or are they abiding**

by the old dispensation of the Mosaic law, or are they observing the Sabbath, because that's what Jewish people do even though it is during the dispensation of grace? God has not ordained this observance for today in the dispensation of grace (Colossians 2:16), nor will He in the tribulation period if the Tribulation belongs to the dispensation of grace; therefore, its observance does not necessarily indicate a dispensational change, because even today, Jewish people observe the sabbath.

- Does the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom during the Tribulation time mean that the gospel of the kingdom will not include the message of the cross at that time? During the Gospel accounts, the gospel of the kingdom was preached before the disciples knew anything about God's plan for the death, burial and resurrection of Christ in three days, but during the Tribulation, that will not be the case any more.
- The gospel of the kingdom was preached by the Lord during His earthly ministry (Matthew 4:17) while the dispensation of the Law was still operative. Thus, the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom was not then, nor will it be later, a distinctive enough feature to mark off a new dispensation.
- The same is true of the argument based on the seventy weeks. They are not in themselves determinative of a dispensational change. Even though God turns His attention to Israel again during the Tribulation, He does not do this to the exclusion of other peoples at this time, whereas the law of Moses was to the nation of Israel.
- To some the Tribulation with its many judgments is from the dispensational viewpoint the end of the dispensation of Grace. This is the third view.
- From the perspective of the seventy weeks for Israel, it is their last week. From the viewpoint of the true church, there is no relation, since the church will be "caught up" before the Tribulation begins. However, there is a false church which will be totally apostate at that time, the whore of Babylon. But from the dispensational viewpoint of God's running the affairs of the world, it seems more natural to consider the Tribulation as that time when He is bringing to a conclusion the economy of Grace, with judgments on men who have rejected Him and grace upon the many who will accept Him, rather than to consider it a separate dispensation.
- The true church will not be subject to the judgments, just as Noah was not judged by the Flood in his day. But in both cases the dispensation does not end until the judgments are completed.
- According to Dr Renald Showers, "*the majority (of dispensationalists) have held that the sixth dispensation will not terminate until the Second Coming (at the end of the Tribulation.)*" (Showers, Renald, There Really is a Difference!"An Examination of Dispensational Theology" The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1990, page 45)
- It is important to realise that though there is disagreement about what dispensation the Tribulation belongs to, Dr Charles Ryrie writes, "*Remember, these questions are minor in relation to the main tenets of dispensationalism. The fact that there are questions is not the fault of the system but is due to lack of detailed revelation, and differing answers to these questions will not make or break the system.*" (Ryrie, Charles C.. Dispensationalism, "What are the Dispensations?" Moody Publishers, Chicago, 1966, page 51)
- Next week, we will consider the last Dispensation, the Kingdom age.