

Into Thy Word Ministries Bible Study www.intothyword.org

General idea: Suddenly, John sees a crowd of people so vast that it cannot be numbered, standing before the Throne of the Lamb. This multitude comes from all walks of life and people—groups where there is no division in caste or pedigree, where there is no separation of color or wealth or language, all in Christ, all glorifying Christ. This is reminiscent of Christ's "Triumphal Entry" (Mark 11:1-11) just before His execution, where He is first praised, and then betrayed. But, here there is no betrayal, only praise; there is no separation, only those who are assembled in Him; there is no fear, only triumph and achievement. This is an image of strength and unity, of victory and assurance, of hope that is achieved and received, then expressed by the shouting of praises to Christ for who He is and what He has done. This crowd is not just shouting praises—they are experiencing them; they are involved as they partake in the worship of Christ. They are overcome with His presence, and in awe as the crowd, angels, and witnesses again fall, prostrate before the Sovereign Lamb.

Behold all the people who have been virtuous, who have persevered in life, have overcome obstacles, withstood temptations, and have remained faithful to our Lord. He is our shelter and our hope, and He will get us through no matter what we see, feel, or face. His leading has a reason, and our experiences have a purpose when we remain faithful in Him; this is our purpose here on earth and this is what booms and echoes throughout eternity (Rev. 14:1-5).

Vs. 9-12: This passage comes to us like a "parenthesis," a seemingly *addendum* or digression in the midst of the context of judgment. However, it is not some detour or distraction. Rather, it is a telling of God's mercy and love (Rev. 10:1-11:13). This passage is about hope and a reason for us to persevere in whatever we may face, both now and/or in the future. This is a respite in judgment and a look at what lies ahead.

- *A great multitude.* These people may be a different group of people from those in the previous passage, or perhaps a different depiction of the same grouping, a common Jewish use of expression. Some have suggested these are the martyrs from chapter six (Gen. 41:25-27; Rev. 5:9; 6:11; 7:1-8; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6. 17:15).
- *No one could count/innumerable* indicates that this crowd was so big it was impossible to count, but it does not mean infinite.
- *Standing before the throne* infers that because of Christ, we now have direct access to Him!
- *White robes* indicate coming before the Lord in worship, clothed with the proper attire of attitude and reverence. (See Revelation 3:1-6.)
- *Palm branches* pointed to a celebration of victory, such as Israel's victory over Egypt in the Exodus, as well as God's faithfulness. They were used for celebrations such as the "Feast of the Tabernacles." This was also a prediction from Zechariah that all nations will partake in this celebration (Lev. 23:34-43; Num. 29:12-38; Duet. 16:13-15; Zech. 14:16; Luke 19:28-40; John 12:12-13).
- *Cried out.* We come before God's throne as unworthy guests, clothed in His atonement and reserved by His love. This is a vow to follow Him as Lord!
- *Salvation belongs to our God/Salvation comes from the LORD.* He delivers us, as He is the only One who can. This is a prayer seeking His help (Gen. 49:18 John 2:9).

- *Fell down* is an aspect of real reverence and worship. In context, this is also how we are totally dependent upon God for every aspect of our lives.
- *Praise* acknowledges Christ as Lord over all, including us; it is recognizing His attributes, His sovereignty, and His control, and then seeking His *strength*. The purpose, for us, is to realize that we must eventually learn to surrender to Him and be trusting and obedient to Him (Gen. 18:18; 22:18; Isa. 60:1-5; Gal. 2:20-21; Phil. 1:6; 3:1-14; Rev. 5:12; 10:11; 12:5; 13:7; 14:6-8; 15:4; 17:15; 18:3; 19:15; 20:3; 21:24-27).

This passage gives us great comfort and hope. Christ shows us He is always with us; thus, we can live a life that is worthy—a spirit-filled, empowered life that will be acknowledged by Him both now and in the future, and will have an intention for us in the present. When we face hardships, we can know for sure that He will wipe away both our tears and our fears!

Vs. 13-17: This passage covers the period before the second coming of our Lord that Jesus tells us about in Mark 13:6-8. It is about calamities, tumults, and chaos that are expected in suffering because of the impact and veracity of sin in the world. It is a continual experience, as the people in John's time were going through this and, in varying degrees, we have already or will go through it. But, this is also an apex and a climax coming just before the final judgments, when the world gets a "break" and an opportunity to know Christ before His final pronouncement (Matt. 24:14). This passage's primary purpose was not to predict the details of final events; rather, it was meant to encourage us to go through them with increased faith and our eyes focused upon our Lord. It is not important to know what takes place when, what our presumptions are, or which "end times" theory is best, as we will all be wrong on that. The important lessons are how Christ will be glorified and how we will learn and grow through it!

- *One of the elders asked me.* It was common for Jewish teachers to ask *rhetorical* questions to guide their students, with questions that they knew but the people did not, or questions that the other person did not know (Dan. 7:16; 8:13-16; 12:6-8).
- *Great tribulation* refers to the sufferings and trials Christians go through. *Great* meant a more significant period of it, such as war and pestilence like the Seven Churches were going through. These great trials come about frequently throughout church history, such as the Roman occupation of Israel and the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., as well as our more current civil wars, world wars, or extreme persecutions such as in Sudan. This may also refer to "the great tribulation," as stated in Daniel, denoting extreme persecution and hostility that comes about at the end of the age, and that may come about before Christ's return. However, the application is more likely in mind here, and not just the foretelling of events. The point is that when we persevere in our faith, in spite of the obstacles that a sin-infested world provides us, and we prevail as we persevere in our faith, we will come out of the tribulation because neither great or small crises or doubts will have gotten us since we are in Christ (Dan. 12:1; 2 Thess. 1:5-6; 1 Tim. 3:1-12; Rev. 1:9; 2:9-10).
- *Washed their robes... in the blood of the Lamb* denotes more of a ritual cleansing than just an image. It is acknowledging what Christ has done on our behalf. It refers to sacrifice and how the blood in ancient Jewish rituals was a cleansing that preceded worship (Heb. 9:21-22).
- *Before the throne of God* is the Jewish image of a messianic banquet at the end of the age (Isa. 25:8; John 10:1-18; Rev. 4:6-7).

- *Serve him*. This echoes a new “exodus” where the faithful Elect leave their troubled lives on earth and ascend to a new home in eternity. This also denotes that we still will have a plan and a purpose in Heaven; we will not merely sit on a cloud playing a harp!
- *In his temple* means God is our refuge. The word used for “temple” in this book indicates the *inner shrine* and the tabernacle (used before the temple), where God's presence dwells, not the campus or main, outer building (Lev 26:11-13; Psalm 121:5-6; Isa. 4:5-6; 49:10; Rev. 4:6-7).
- *Shepherd*. He is the One who leads; He is the One we look toward to lead us. Some ancient kings considered themselves to be the shepherds of their kingdom (Gen. 48:15; 49:24; Psalm 23; 80:1; Micah. 7:14; Matt. 2:6; John 10:11-18; Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 5:4).

The sufferings and trials of life did not derail this crowd from His plan and purpose. Not even their hurt feelings, their being betrayed themselves, or the tribulations of life, whether overt or benign, dejected them. These are the Christians whose faith is real and applied. They have succeeded in their faith and now they take their triumphant entry into His presence and their reward. It is always worth it, because no matter what we face or what we go through, there is an intention from our Lord; His leading is what is best for us, including our growth and rationale. In Christ, we will succeed and prevail!

The Preterist view: They see this passage as referring to the saints who escape (emerge from) the tribulation or are the martyrs from the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. Many see this as Judaism's end and that the church replaces Israel. (I do not believe this is biblical). See Romans 9:1-13.

The Futurist view: They see this passage as literal, and that a greater number of Gentiles will be saved than the 144,000 Jews who will be saved. There is an in-house debate over whether the Gentiles who are saved are taken before the rapture and tribulation, or new converts after the rapture, or if there is a post-tribulation rapture. Many of this view see these converts as a lesser level of Christians because they did not come to faith through the “proper” channels. Others do not believe this is the heavenly throne as the passage indicates, but rather an “earthly throne” because it contradicts their theory. They see these “Elders” as distinct from the “24 elders” who are representatives of the Church. Some see this as the rejoicing of the Christians who claim victory after the tribulation is over.

The Idealist view: They see the winds in the passage as symbolic for the “church triumphant” being glorified in heaven. The symbols of purity and victory are preeminent as the earthly trials and tribulations are over. The robes being washed in blood (that normally stains) is the ultimate “whitener” that cleans and purifies us so we can stand before God. It is all about Christ and His sacrificial death and atonement for us, His Church. Most see this as Christians overcoming the trials and persecutions of life, and overcoming, by faith in Christ, at any time in church history, not necessarily one, great, final, seven-year tribulation. It would rather include the ordeals and hardships that have besieged the Church ever since her inception. The *tabernacle* is representative of the shelter and refuge we have in Christ. He is our hope and leads us because He dwells with us; He has a plan and purpose, and will carry us through when we have faith in Him.

The Historicist view: They see this passage as an encourager to the Church when the Church will face (or has faced) extreme hardships and persecutions. The crowd is the *sealed*, as previous noted; they are the triumphant and victorious conquerors who *fought the good fight*...perhaps a small grouping of the same people who are given special favor.

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see [Inductive Bible Study](#)):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. What clothing attire best describes that of a Minister to you? Examples would be priestly vestments from a high church, a nice suit, the wearing of a cross, etc. How does your attire, or how you are clothed when you worship, reflect how you reverence Christ? Or, does it?
2. What would cause a Christian to praise Christ one day, and on another day betray Him? How so?
3. Have you ever been overcome with His presence? How so? Why not?
4. What predispositions and personalities in your church is Christ aware of? What about you?
5. How do you feel that the Shepherd knows you, all of you, including your innermost thoughts, desires, plans, and fears? How can you know Him better so you can trust Him more?
6. What does it mean that Christ is also your Shelter and your Hope? How do you feel that He will get you through your life and circumstances, no matter what you see, feel, or face?
7. Do you fully believe that His leading in your life has a reason, that your experiences have a purpose, and that when you remain faithful in Him you will be in that *crowd*?
8. How does it make you feel that there is no separation of ethnicity in Christ, and that in Heaven, there will be all people groups; that there will be no division of caste or pedigree, no separation of color or wealth or language, but we will all be in Christ, glorifying Christ? Then, why are most churches the most segregated groups in their communities?
9. Do you have a favorite theory of "The Great Tribulation?" How can our theories get in the way, and cause us to miss the main point? What is the main point of The Great Tribulation?
10. How have you celebrated victory and/or God's faithfulness in your life? Right now, carefully consider how you can celebrate God's work in your life. How would it strengthen your faith and demonstrate victory to others?
11. What can your church do to be more open and accepting of people who are different than them? How would that better reflect the church that Christ called?
12. How can you better point to Christ, showing others they have the opportunity to get their priorities in line with God's? Think of it this way, *evangelism is basically one homeless person telling another where the shelter is.*"

Tribulation Terms: *Tribulation* means “The Day of the Lord” which will come about in the “last days.” It also means “sufferings” as the Greek word “thlipsis” means “sufferings” and the Hebrew for “sufferings” means a “time of distress”. This term has been wrought with controversy in the last 100 years. I, for time’s sake, will not explore all the theories in depth (because most of them are just like the nuts left over from a squirrel convention and miss the point); however, we will look further as we progress in the book of Revelation.

Tribulations also refer to the hardships we face. The same word in the Greek is found at: (Matt. 13:21; 24:9; 24:21; 24:29; Rom. 2:9; 5:3; 8:35; 12:12; Col. 1:24; Heb. 10:33; Rev. 1:9; 2:10; 2:22, to name a few), meaning afflictions, anguish, distress, persecution, trouble, and of course as tribulation as singular and plural. In Daniel, it is the period of suffering instigated from God because of the world’s wickedness and denial of Him. God does not always cause those hardships to go away; rather, He carries us through and uses them to bring about our maturity and character. Trials build faith and character, allowing us to be better used to glorify Him. Trials are not a personal attack against us; rather, they allow God to work more deeply in us to make us of better use to Him, and for the sake of others.

The Great Tribulation is the time Jesus warned of (Matt. 24) as the ending of the age (Rev. 6-19), and the *week* is a *day of the Lord* found in Daniel (Dan. 12:1; Thess. 5:2). These accounts are described in various ways in Scripture; “the day of the Lord,” “tribulation(s)” and “Jacob’s trouble” are found throughout Scripture. Besides the examples already referenced above, we also see it in Isa. 2:11, 17, 20; 6:5; Jer. 30:7; Amos 5:18; 8:9; Joel 1:15; 2:2-11; Zeph. 1:14; Dan. 9:27, 12:1; Matt. 24:21; and Rev. 7:14; 16:17-21.

Many believe this has already taken place, as in the “Preterist” view. Josephus, an early Jewish historian who was there during the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem, describes the devastation similarly to how Jesus foretold it. Others (Futurists) believe this only applies to a future period of great distress at the end of the age before Christ’s Second Coming. Still others, such as the Historicists, see it as cycles that keep repeating. A more balanced biblical view would include both; sufferings will keep coming and they will culminate in a final fruition of great turmoil before His return.

The point of tribulation is not the specifics or when or how; rather, it is our God, who wants us focused upon Him as Lord. What we learn in our preparations is far more valuable than what will come about in our theories. Its principle purpose is to reveal Christ as Lord and the end of the age. It also gives us firm instructions on how to live our lives by being faithful to Christ and receiving His promises as well as His warnings in our life now (Jer. 22:10; 30:7; Amos 5:16-17; Matt. 24:21; Rom. 5:1-11; Rev. 2: 1-7).

However, neither The Great Tribulation, or tribulations in general are to be feared, as the righteous will receive the comfort of Christ in tribulation, for He is still loving and shepherding us through (Isa 25:8; 66:13-14; Matt. 5:4; John 14:16-18; Rev 21:4). Remember, this is not just about what will or may happen, but how we are through it (Isa. 35:10; 51:11). No matter what is facing us and no matter what we have experienced, what we go through in life is meant to form our character and maturity. What we learn is what we carry into eternity. When we fail and do not overcome, it is disappointing in our Lord’s sight. Being faithful is the key that opens to us the door to living in the New Jerusalem (John 13:34; 16:33; Phil. 1; 1 John 4:20; 5:4-5; Rev. 2:11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:1-22:5).

Here are some more popular terms on this:

- **Preterism** means “fulfilled eschatology,” or that the date, 70 A.D. that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 24 was all fulfilled. The Tribulation teaching is in reference to the rapture and resurrection of the saints that has already occurred; we are now living in the millennial age.
- **Partial Preterism** means some things have been fulfilled, but Christ has not yet come back.
- **Pre-tribulation.** This view teaches that the Church will not go through the tribulation but will be “raptured” away to heaven. The Tribulation is specifically to break the will of Israel and save them as a nation, as well as to have the world repent because of the judgments found in the book of Revelation.
- **Mid-tribulation** refers to a mid seventieth-week rapture. The church will be taken out before the Great Tribulation which occurs when the Antichrist goes into the Temple and declares himself God approximately 1,260 days before Christ comes back.
- **Post-tribulation** believes that Christ will come back at the end of the Tribulation and those who remain alive through it are raptured. There are four views within this position as well: Classic, semi-classic, futurist, and dispensational.
- **Partial-rapture** subscribes that only those who are watching, waiting, and are making themselves prepared will go.
- **Pre-rapture-wrath** is a three-fourths view that believes the church will go through much of the tribulation to purify and perfect the bride.