



The Great Anguish

now

By

Philip Wren

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INTRODUCTION

For many the Great Tribulation casts its shadow over the blessed hope of our Lord's appearing. The Tribulation has been presented in a way that naturally encourages Christians to want to be out of this world when it occurs.

In the 'The Late Great Planet Earth' by Hal Lindsey & C C Carlson we read; "God's word tells us that there will be one generation of believers who will never know death. These believers will be removed from the earth before the Great Tribulation. Before that period of the most ghastly pestilence, bloodshed and starvation the world has ever known."

Published in the 1970's Hal Lindsey's book 'The Late Great Planet Earth' had a great impact on people's understanding of prophecy. The *New York Times* called it the "number one best-seller of the decade." It sold over 15 million copies.

The Rapture

Lindsey's views on the timing of the rapture and the nature of the tribulation have influenced many in their understanding of how this present age will close. His views were not particularly original. They were a re-statement of the widely held dispensational interpretation of the Second Coming prophecies. Views so widely held that in the US they are regarded by many as the only acceptable interpretation of end time events. The majority of books on prophecy go along with the dispensational scheme of interpretation.

One of the key elements of dispensationalist teaching has been the belief that the church will be removed from the earth before this terrible time of tribulation takes place.

When the idea of a secret snatching away of the church prior to the Tribulation was first put forward in the 19th Century, many Bible scholars and teachers disagreed. They questioned the scriptural authority for separating the gathering of the faithful from the actual physical return of Jesus Christ to this earth. The disagreement continues today and sadly divides those who study prophecy. Jesus gave a cautionary word with regard to His return. *"You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour which you do not think," Matthew 24: 44.* Whatever views we have on the return of Christ they need to be held with humility. Jesus has warned us in advance that there is a strong chance that we will get it wrong.

Will the gathering of Christians and the physical return of Christ be separated by a significant period of time? This booklet is written in the belief that they are not. If they are not then Christians will still be on earth during the Tribulation. Therefore we will do well to seek a better understanding of what is in store.

A time of anguish

Jesus spoke of this coming time of Tribulation in His talk to the disciples on the Mount of Olives. He had been asked by the disciples when the temple would be demolished, and what would be the sign of his coming and the end of the age. In His answer He warned that immediately before He returns there would be a great anguish. *"For then there will be a great anguish, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will."* Matt 24:21.

In the above verse the word anguish has been deliberately substituted for tribulation. Affliction, anguish, distress and trouble are all legitimate alternative translations of the Greek word *thlipsis*. Changing the word will help us to take a fresh look at what Jesus meant when He spoke of a time of great anguish.

That we will not doubt

Why does what we believe with regard to the rapture matter? It will matter if things don't turn out as some confidently predict. If the church has been removed before this period then none of us will have any further concerns regarding the correct interpretation of prophecy. We will be with the Lord and that is all that matters. But if we are still here and if the events take a different course, we need to know that this still fits prophecy.

In the chapters which follow we will consider how the time of great anguish will affect different groups of people, believing Jews, unbelieving Jews, Christians and the world in general. Each group will be affected in different ways.

The time of anguish

First a few thoughts on the time of anguish by looking at the two places it is specifically mentioned.

The only place in the Bible where the time is referred to as the 'The Great Tribulation' is in Revelation 7: 14. Here it is connected with what appears to be a huge end time harvest. That in its self should make us stop and think. How is the harvest going to be reaped if all the faithful have gone? This vision is not about either an absent or a defeated church. It is about a triumphant church pure and holy ready to meet her Lord.

The only other place where there is mention of this time is in the verse we have already quoted from Matthew's gospel in which Jesus speaks of 'a great anguish'. He then goes on to warn about false prophets and false Messiahs and continues by stressing the need to watch and be ready. The great danger He foresaw for Christians was not persecution but deception.

One other verse can be taken as a reference to this time. Jesus was almost certainly quoting Daniel 12: 1, *“And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time;”* Here, this verse is clearly connecting the time of distress with Israel. In Jeremiah the period is called the time of ‘Jacob’s trouble’.

The triumph of the church

Our attitude to prophecy needs to move away from being fatalistic or escapist. Instead we should be triumphant. Through prayer we can hold back some of the evil which is coming on the world. Through our faithfulness we will see many coming to the Lord. Jesus tells us to lift up our heads when these things begin to take place. As we study this time of great anguish we will discover not only that Christians will be on earth during that period but it is essential that they are present. There may well come a time when the church appears to be crushed and defeated. But just as the cross was turned from defeat into victory so these final years will lead up to the glorious triumph of the church.

THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION

The beginning of Anguish

The time of anguish will start with an event described by Jesus. *“when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.” Matthew 24: 15 - 16*

“Let the reader understand”, what are we to understand? Jesus told those who were listening and through them, us as readers, that we will recognise this event if we study the book of Daniel. The abomination of desolation is a reference back to Daniel 11:31 *“Forces from him will arise, desecrate the sanctuary fortress, and do away with the regular. And they will set up the abomination of desolation.”*

Daniel 11 foresees a succession of events which occurred in the Middle East in the fourth, third and second centuries BC. By following this series of events through, we conclude that the setting up of the abomination of desolation refers to the desecration of the Temple by Antiochus Epiphanies. In December 168 BC he erected an altar to Zeus over the altar in the Temple. Later he added to the desecration by sacrificing a pig on that altar.

For the disciples of Jesus this was the recent history of their nation. These events would have readily come to mind as they listened to Jesus. The people looked back to the glorious days when, under the inspired leadership of the Maccabees, foreign rule had been thrown off.

Both the disciples and the early Jewish readers would have had no difficulty in understanding what Jesus was saying. The beginning of

the future time of anguish would be marked by an event recognisably similar to the desecration of the Temple by Antiochus.

The destruction of Jerusalem?

Many commentators interpret this verse as a warning about the impending destruction of the Jerusalem by the Romans. If Jesus intended to point us to an event similar to that perpetrated by Antiochus that destruction is readily dismissed. In the period 66 to 70 AD there was neither a repeat event nor even a similar event which could be understood as fulfilling the Abomination prophecy.

The sign in the parallel passage in Luke's Gospel was fulfilled. *"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near. Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains". Luke 21:20,21.* In AD 66 the Roman armies under the command of Cestius Gallus did surround Jerusalem. They then withdrew affording Christians the opportunity to escape. Incredibly and unexpectedly this prophecy was fulfilled exactly as described.

The Abomination of Desolation

The abomination of desolation standing in the holy place is the warning sign that anguish is about to begin. To exactly repeat the events of Antiochus' reign would require the Temple in Jerusalem to be rebuilt and the sacrificial system reinstated. Many see the statement by Jesus that the Abomination of Desolation will be seen standing in the Holy place as endorsing this interpretation. The Jews referred to the sanctuary of the Temple as the Holy Place.

There are a number of verses which taken together appear to provide a strong argument for the Temple to be rebuilt prior to the return of Christ. According to 2 Thessalonians 2: 4 the Man of Sin will take his seat in the Temple. Later in Daniel there is another reference to the Abomination, *"From the time that the regular is abolished and*

the abomination of desolation is set up," Daniel 12:11. Here the setting up of the abomination of desolation is connected with the abolition of the regular. Many translations insert the word sacrifice after regular, indicating that the sacrificial system will have been re-established and by association the Temple rebuilt.

There is a danger in being wedded to a single idea. If another interpretation was intended we may not recognise the sign when it comes. That is the trap the Jews fell into at the time of Christ's first coming.

The Holy Place

Although the 'Holy Place' was used to refer to the sanctuary of the Temple, the term has a wider meaning in scripture. Three verses are quoted below to illustrate this:

"The priest that offereth it for sin shall eat it: in the holy place it shall be eaten, in the court of the tabernacle of the congregation".
Leviticus 6:26 AV

"Stand in the holy place with a group of Levites for each subdivision of the families of your fellow countrymen, the lay people"
Chronicles 35: 5. NIV

"he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place." Acts 21: 28 NASB

The Holy Place can also refer to the Temple courtyards. Therefore the Abomination placed on the Temple Mount would fulfil scripture.

A focus of idolatry

In the Old Testament the word translated abomination is connected with idolatry. The desecration of the altar by Antiochus Epiphanes was part of his campaign to abolish the Jewish religion. He tried to unify his kingdom by forcing people to worship his gods. In a

similar way the future abomination will be the centre of a final attempt to forbid the worship of the true God. In Revelation 13: 15 the false prophet makes an image of the beast which all are compelled to worship. This parallels the efforts of Antiochus to eradicate the worship of the true God. It is the intention rather than an exact repeat of the action which is significant.

The Regular

In Daniel 8: 12 & 13 and Daniel 12: 11 most English translations of the Bible add the word sacrifice to the regular. Sacrifice is not found in the Hebrew. The word translated 'regular' means continual, perpetual or daily but not necessarily sacrifice. The only place in the Old Testament where it is linked to sacrifice is Leviticus 6: 20. Here it is applied to the perpetual morning and evening grain offering. The grain offering is symbolic of consecration or dedication. Again we find a correspondence to the persecution under Antiochus who tried to end any outward sign of devotion to God.

The daily and perpetual prayers of the Jews at the Western wall in Jerusalem could be seen as the regular. This is where the Jews make known their dedication to God. The forbidding of prayer at the western wall, as happened under the recent period of Jordanian rule, would fulfil the prophecy regarding the suspension of the regular. The abolition of the regular will have much wider impact than locally in Jerusalem. Throughout his kingdom the man of sin will forbid any worship other than devotion to the object of idolatry he has set up.

The Temple

The man of sin *"takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God"*. 2 Thessalonians 2: 4. The word translated here as temple is used by Jesus to describe His body, John 2: 19. It is also used by Paul to refer to the bodies of believers 1 Corinthians 3:17, 2 Corinthians 6: 16 and the church Ephesians 2: 21.

It is difficult to see how a rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem could be referred to as the Temple of God. The Temple and its worship have been superseded by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Would not God regard such a construction as an abomination, for it would deny the effectiveness of the salvation offered by the beloved Son?

Therefore it may not be a literal Temple in which the man of sin will take His seat. The emphasis of the verse is on his usurping the place of God. The man of sin will display himself as divinity. A human body will be Satan's temple when he claims to be Jesus Christ returned in the flesh.

Conclusion

We need to distinguish between the definite and the may be of prophecy. The idolatrous worship of the man of sin is a definite. The rebuilding of the Temple and re-institution of sacrifices is a may be. We must be wary of setting these as a precondition for recognising the Abomination of Desolation when it is set up.

THE BELIEVING JEWS

In the sermon on the Mount of Olives, Jesus gave the following warning; *"Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains;"* Matthew 24: 15,16. It is a warning to flee Jerusalem when this event takes place.

Jesus says flee, but who will flee from Jerusalem when this sign occurs? Not the majority of Jews as they do not recognise Jesus and therefore know nothing of this warning. Out of Israel only the believing Jews, who trust in Yeshua and know the gospels, will recognise the sign and flee.

The woman clothed with the sun

To follow this story through we will go to a passage in the book of Revelation. Chapter 11: 19 closes with a vision of the Ark of the Covenant in heaven. From this we understand that the visions have moved on to look at the covenant people of God. That conclusion is confirmed by a second vision [Rev.12:1] of a woman clothed in the sun and the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars. The imagery is similar to Joseph's dream, [Gen 37:9], which refers to Israel and his offspring as the sun moon and stars. Setting the vision in heaven tells us that we are dealing with spiritual Israel, not the Israel of this earth.

At the time of Christ's incarnation there was a remnant who we could describe as spiritual Israel. It was made up of those who still trusted the word of God and believed that a Messiah would come. Mary, who in faith accepted Gabriel's word that she would bear the Messiah, was part of the believing remnant, as was her betrothed Joseph who also believed. When Jesus was dedicated in the Temple, Simeon and Anna declared their faith recognising Jesus as the one

who was promised. There may well have been many others in Israel at that time who still believed but the leaders of the people were not among them. Their attention was focused on the affairs of this world. They were blind to what God was doing.

The hatred of Satan

In Revelation 12: 4 we read of the intense hatred that Satan has for the child who will one day rule the nations. That child is Jesus. When He was born Satan stirred up Herod to kill all the baby boys in Bethlehem. Later, when Jesus willingly gave Himself as a sacrifice for our sins, Satan vented all his hatred on him. Because of the Son's perfect obedience the Father turned defeat into victory, raising Jesus up to heaven.

Satan cheated of victory focuses his wrath on Israel who brought the child into this world. Revelation 12: 6 closes with the woman fleeing into the wilderness for a period of 1260 days. The verses which follow describe the war in heaven, leading to Satan being cast out.

The victory is at least in part attributed to the faithful church which was prepared to face death rather than deny her Lord. The willingness to face martyrdom for Christ proves that Satan is a liar. His accusation, set down in Job 2: 5, that man only serves God for what he can get out of Him is proved false. When Satan is cast down to earth he knows that he only has a short time left. That statement sets the timing of what follows at the close of the age.

Verses 13 – 17 return to the woman, again it repeats that she will find a place of safety in the wilderness. There she will be nourished for time, times and half a time. By describing the period in two ways, once as 1260 days and then as time times and half a time or three and a half years (which is 1260 days), the passage emphasises that this is to be taken as a literal period and not understood symbolically. It

corresponds to the trampling of the holy city, the prophesying of the two witnesses and also to the length of the reign of the beast.

A time to flee

As stated above, this prophecy is about believing Israel not natural Israel. When the Abomination of Desolation appears believing Israel will obey the warning of Jesus and flee to a place prepared for them. In that place in the wilderness they will escape the terrible time of anguish which the rest of their nation will suffer.

It has been speculated that being given eagles wings will be fulfilled by an airlift to carry Jews to a place of safety. Exodus 19: 4 describes Israel's escape from Pharaoh as being carried on eagle's wings. To them it may have seemed more like a desperate escape in the middle of the night. But God was watching over them. In this later event it may seem like a rush to escape by any means available but God will be watching over them to keep them safe.

Where is the place of Safety?

"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognise that her desolation is near. Then those who are in Jerusalem must flee to the mountains." Luke 21: 20-21. In this parallel passage in Luke, Jesus is giving a warning of the impending destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies. In 66 AD a Roman army under the command of Cestius Gallus came up to Jerusalem. After surrounding the city for a week he withdrew. The leaders of the Jerusalem church recognised this as the sign given by Jesus to warn that it was time to flee. Within their fellowship they had received a prophecy telling them to go to Pella. The opportunity to escape was short for soon after the Romans returned to destroy the Jerusalem.

When the time comes the believing Jews will be guided by the Lord where to go. Is this an argument against the empire of the

Antichrist being global? If Jesus tells people to flee there will be a safe place to flee to. Otherwise it would be a case of out of the frying pan into the fire. Will there be at least one place in this world where Satan cannot harm them? Or is this a call for Christians, despite the risk to themselves, to be ready to hide their Jewish brethren?

The wrath of God

Following the time of anguish God will pour out His wrath on a rebellious world. Among a series of prophecies in Isaiah which relate to the end of the age God calls on His people to hide for a while until his fury has passed over, Isaiah 26: 20,21. The wording reminds us of the tenth plague of Egypt when the angel of death passed over the land. At that time the people of God were to find security in their homes under the covering of the shed blood of the Passover lamb. During both the time of anguish and the judgement which will close this age believing Israel will be secure if she trusts in the shed blood of her Passover lamb Jesus Christ.

If the believers in the Messiah do not leave Israel at this time they will be caught up in the trouble coming on their nation. Such will be the anguish of that time that they will cry out to God for deliverance. But deliverance will not come for they did not listen to His word of warning. We must pray for this first group that they will remain attentive to the Lord's leading and recognise the signs. If they do they will be protected. They will escape the time of anguish, not by being gathered up to heaven, but by being guided to a place of Safety.

THE UNBELIEVING JEWS

Suffered Enough?

For those who pray for Israel and recognise that God still loves that nation it is hard to accept what the Bible teaches. As a people the Jews have suffered not just in the 20th century but throughout the last 2000 years. We feel that they have suffered enough but according to scripture their anguish is not at an end. The worst is yet to come!

When Jesus spoke of, *“a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will,”* Matthew 24: 21, He was quoting Daniel 12:1. In Daniel the time of distress is a warning for Israel. It will be the worst time that the nation has ever experienced. So that we do not confuse it with other times of suffering the nation has experienced it is said to occur just before the resurrection. The timing is confirmed by Jesus who places it immediately before His glorious return.

In the context of Daniel the distress primarily refers to Israel at a time when they have resumed their place among the nations.

Rebellious Israel

Throughout their history the Jews have, due to disobedience, brought suffering on themselves. God promised to bless them if they kept His laws. He also warned that they would suffer if they went their own way. Prophet after prophet was sent to call the nation back to God. But they persisted in wanting to be like the nations round about. Eventually, just as God had warned, they were expelled from the Land and sent into exile in Babylon. They returned from exile a chastened nation.

When their Messiah came, due to the hardness of their hearts, they would not recognise Him. Again they were sent into an exile, an

exile which lasted 1900 years. They have now returned to the land but, sadly the Bible warns that the Jews are going to commit one last tragic act of disobedience.

Another comes in his own name

"I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, you will receive him. John 5:43. Some debate whether this is a prophecy, I believe that it is. It warns that the day will come when Israel accepts a false Messiah. He will be a man who both claims to be the Messiah while at the same time standing in opposition to the real Messiah and His followers. Instead of providing reconciliation with the Father the false Christ will turn people away from God leading them to worship Satan.

Jesus spoke of the Abomination of Desolation standing in the Holy place as the sign to flee. This abomination is both an object of idolatry and a reference to a man. In 2 Thessalonians 2 we read of a man of lawlessness who is to be revealed before the coming of Jesus. He will display signs and wonders from Satan which will deceive all who have not received the truth both Jew and Gentile.

The same man is described in Daniel ch 11. The similarity in language between Daniel 11: 36 and 2 Thessalonians 2:4 points to Daniel being the source which Paul was quoting. This man's pride and arrogance will be beyond anything this world has ever experienced. A strong delusion sent by God will cause people to actually believe that this man is all he claims to be.

The Jews will accept this man as their saviour. He will bring the longed for promise of peace. At last they will believe that they will be able to live securely in their land. But the man who they hoped would save them will turn out to be a blasphemer and filled with hate towards them.

Acceptance of this man with his Satan worship will be the worst form of idolatry. It will usher in the final tragedy of the Jews, described as a time of anguish like no other by both Daniel and Jesus. It will be their ultimate rebellion and act of disobedience. The consequences of which are heart breaking not just for those who pray for the conversion of the Jews but also for God. For a time He will turn away from them allowing them to suffer the consequence of their sin.

“It will come about in all the land,” declares the Lord, “that two parts in it will be cut off and perish, but the third part will be left in it.”
Zechariah 13: 8

Of those living in the land two thirds will perish. It will be a time of anguish greater than any they have experienced in the past. The bitter lessons of the twentieth century taught the Jews that there are those who hate them so much that they want every Jew to be killed. There is coming a time when the Jews will be confronted with the real prospect of the ‘final solution’ being implemented. Such will be their oppression that they will fear that none will survive. This will become their time of anguish such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time.

For how long will Israel suffer?

At the end of the lengthy vision recorded in Daniel chapters 10 to 12, an angel asks “How long will it be until the end of these wonders?” In answer the one who we identify as Jesus replies, *“it will be for a time, times and half a time; and as soon as they finish shattering the power of the holy people, all these events will be completed.”* Daniel 12: 7. Time, times and half a time corresponds to the 1260 days that those who flee to the wilderness will be protected [Revelation 12: 14].

For three and a half years the Jews who rely on their own strength will suffer. Their suffering will continue until their power is shattered. The purpose of the suffering is not punishment but to bring

the nation to repentance. Once all hope has been extinguished then will they cry out to their God to save them.

Two other periods of time are mentioned in the closing of this vision. *“From the time the regular is abolished and the abomination of desolation is set up 1290 days. How blessed is he who keeps waiting and attains to the 1335 days”* Daniel 12: 11, 12

A possible interpretation of these three periods of time follows. The 1290 days start with the setting up of the abomination of desolation. The 1260 days refer to the period of intense suffering. It is possible that there is a 30 day period between the setting up of the abomination and the beginning of the suffering. This is a period in which those who heed the warning of Jesus are to flee. For this brief period of 30 days the unbelieving Jews will place their hope in the Man of Sin who promises to bring them peace. But it will soon turn sour. Far from being their saviour he will turn out to hate them. Over the next 1260 days the persecution will intensify.

At the end of the 1290 days when all hope has gone the remnant of Israel will cry out to God. At that time Jesus their Messiah will intervene and fight on their behalf. He will bring the time of suffering to an end. The 1335 days could refer to the event which Daniel and all sincere Jews long for. On that day having vanquished His enemies the Messiah will claim the throne of David and establish His reign of peace over the entire world. All who see the coming of that day will truly count themselves blessed.

“Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob’s trouble, but she will be saved out of it”. Jeremiah 30:7

The prophet Jeremiah calls this final period of suffering the time of Jacob’s trouble. Although many will die some will be saved. In the next article we will look at who will be saved. They will enter the kingdom as a transformed people.

THE FAITHFUL JEWS

So far we have considered two groups of Jews. The believing Jews who, if they obey Jesus' command to flee, will find a place of safety and the unbelieving Jews who accept the Man of Sin and suffer for it. We will now bring in another group, the faithful Jews. They are the ones who despite their blindness to the gospel sincerely seek to serve their God. They are known to their Saviour and will be brought through the time of anguish to fulfil the promise that once *"the fullness of the gentiles has come in and so all Israel will be saved"* Romans 11: 25, 26.

Not a pebble will fall to the ground

The prophet Amos writes of a time when God will turn his hand against sinful Israel to destroy it from the face of the earth. Immediately following that warning the prophet adds, *"Yet I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob says the Lord"*. The prophecy then adds, *"For surely I will command, and sift the house of Israel among the nations, as pebbles are sifted in a sieve; yet not the smallest pebble will fall to the ground. All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword, who say 'The calamity shall not overtake nor confront us.'"* Amos 9: 9,10.

The sifting precedes the raising up of the tabernacle of David in the last days. In Acts, raising of the tabernacle of David is quoted to endorse the judgment that Gentiles can turn to God and be accepted while still remaining as Gentiles. In Jesus we have a king who is already reigning in heaven. The line of David has been restored. There is to be a greater fulfilment of the restoration of the tabernacle of David. The full restoration will come when Jesus returns to reign.

In every situation God works for good. He will use this final anguish to sift the nation, dividing the sinners from those He will save.

For the sinners in Israel there will be no escape. *“He who flees from them shall not get away, and he who escapes from them shall not be delivered. Though they dig into hell, from their my hand will take them; though they climb up to heaven from their I will bring them down; And though they hide themselves on the top of Carmel, from their I will search and take them; though they hide from my sight at the bottom of the sea, from their I will command the serpent and it shall bite them; Though they go into captivity before their enemies, I will command the sword and it shall slay them. I will set my eyes for harm and not for good.”* Amos 9:1- 4.

Such will be the hatred for the Jews at this time that they will be shaken among all the nations. No matter where they are those who hate them will hunt them down. In Amos the sinners who will be judged are defined as those who mock God’s warnings. They believe that in their own strength there is security.

Looking to others for security

God repeatedly warned Israel that if they forsook Him, He would bring calamity on them. Time and time again the kingdom of Judah sought security by making alliances with the surrounding nations. Each nation which they looked to as a friend soon turned against them. Egypt, Syria, Assyria and finally Babylon were all approached as allies. It is no wonder that the prophet Isaiah was so angry when he heard that King Hezekiah had shown friendship towards the king of Babylon. The nation had just experienced a miraculous deliverance by the hand of God. God had proved that He could protect them. Yet here was the king following the same old policy of looking to other nations for security.

Even after the captivity in Babylon the nation hadn’t learnt its lesson. Soon after the Maccabees had delivered the nation from Seleucid rule they sent envoys to Rome seeking a security alliance.

Before long the Roman legions were marching through their land imposing the hated Roman rule.

Those who seek security by accepting the rule of the Man of Sin will be counted by God as sinners. They will have put their trust in man rather than the Lord of all the earth who has promised to watch over them. Many but not all will trust this false Messiah. There will be those who will look to God as their protector.

The faithful

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego faced a similar challenge. Either bow down before the image of the beast (in their case Nebuchadnezzar) or accept death. In choosing death they had the glorious experience of meeting their Lord and Saviour and also received back their life. I believe that somehow God will preserve those who refuse to bow the knee to Satan. They are the pebbles, who although sieved, will not fall to the ground. They may be taken through the furnace but at the end they will meet their Lord.

Through them God will fulfil His promises to Israel. He says that after He has gathered them from the nations; *“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and cleanse you from all your filthiness and all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take away the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be my people and I will be your God.”* Ezekiel 36: 25 – 28.

This reconciliation between Israel and her God will take place on the day that Jesus returns to save Jerusalem from her enemies. They will recognise the one their nation rejected so long ago. *“then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for His only son.... ”* Zechariah 12: 10. They will mourn when

they realise that their fathers inflicted such suffering on the one who came to save them. They will also mourn as they recognise all the needless suffering the nation has experienced due to not accepting the true Messiah of Israel.

The protection of the righteous in Israel is also recorded in the book of Revelation. They are described as, *“one hundred and forty four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel,” Revelation 7: 4.* There are 12,000 from each tribe with the exception of Dan. Nothing more is said about them other than they are sealed. They are sealed before any harm is done to the earth, sea and trees.

The precise numbering of the children of Israel emphasises that God is watching over His people. Not one whom God has sealed will be lost. It will be a traumatic time for them. We would wish that none would have to go through it but even so God is watching over them to save. Possibly the tribe of Dan is missing in order to emphasise that this is still a salvation by faith. Dan was the only tribe who failed to have the faith to claim their inheritance in the Promised Land (Judges 18:1).

“And at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book.” Daniel 12: 1. On that day when Jesus comes back to deliver Israel, the sealed whose names are written in the book will come to faith. They will recognise their Saviour and accept Him as the King of Israel. These are the ones for whom Jesus said that *“for the elects sake those days will be shortened. Matthew 24: 22.* Israel will be pure and perfect with God’s law written on her heart. She will be grafted back into the rootstock (Romans 11: 23) from which she was broken off. Israel will join the Gentile wild olive branches already grafted in to become one new man in Christ. God’s eternal promise and calling to Israel will be fulfilled.

THE MAN OF SIN IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Can the return of the Lord happen at any time or are there events which must precede it? It appears that this question troubled the church in Thessalonica. Some among them were teaching that the day of the Lord was a past event. Perhaps like many in today's church these teachers believed that Christ's kingdom was spiritual, therefore there was no need teach about His physical return.

In His first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul had described how that when Jesus returns we will be caught up to be with the Lord. In his second letter he writes to clear up the confusion surrounding the timing of our being gathered to be with Jesus. At the time the letter was written there were a number of prophecies still to be fulfilled. For instance the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple were still future. By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul is led to select two key events which will precede the Second Coming of Christ.

Apostasy and the man of sin

"Let no one deceive you by any means; for that day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the Temple of God, showing himself that he is God" 2 Thessalonians 2: 3-4.

Before Jesus returns for His bride, there will be a falling away and the 'man of sin' will be revealed. This 'man of sin' is central to our understanding of the time of great anguish which will close this age. From 2 Thessalonians 2: 1 – 12, we learn that his appearing is entirely according to the will of God.

- He is revealed when God decides that he is to no longer to be restrained.

- He is permitted to appear so that the perishing are divided from those who love the truth.
- The delusion surrounding him is sent by God to ensure that all who love unrighteousness are condemned.
- He will be destroyed when Jesus intervenes.

Satan will be permitted to use all his power to create signs and lying wonders in order to deceive mankind. By these deceptions he will bring about the falling away warned of in scripture. Jesus also warned that there will be a falling away prior to the end. *“And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold”.* Matthew 24: 12.

Identifying the man of sin

There are three defining characteristics set out in 2 Thessalonians 2: 1 – 12 which link the Man of Sin to other scriptures where the same person is described using other names.

The first is his pride and blasphemy. He will exalt himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped. He will even go as far as usurping the place of God, showing himself to be God.

The second is the time of his appearing. He will be revealed just before the coming of the Lord. We are not to confuse this man with any of the other evil men who have come and gone in the past.

The third is his destruction by Jesus Christ.

The little horn

In Daniel 7 four beasts are seen rising from the great sea. From the fourth beast comes a little horn described as possessing eyes like a man and uttering great boasts. In verse 25 we are given more detail of this little horn’s blasphemy. *“He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to*

make alterations in times and in law; they will be given into his hand for time, times and half a time." The passage goes on to relate that the court will sit and this vile little horn will be annihilated and destroyed forever. Therefore the little horn of this passage shares the three defining characteristics of the Man of Sin. His outspoken blasphemy, his existence at the end of time and his destruction by the personal intervention of God, confirm that the little horn and the Man of Sin are the same person. His empire is described as; *"dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong, and with large iron teeth"*. He will crush the three preceding empires. His persecution of the saints will last three and a half years before Jesus intervenes to bring it to an end.

A rather small horn

After reading Daniel 7 we may want to know more about what this little horn will be like. Chapter 8 gives us an insight. It opens with imagery of a ram and a goat which direct our attention to the Persian and Greek empires. Verse 8 foretells how the Greek empire will be split into four separate parts. Between verses 8 and 9 we jump 150 years. We are told that out of one of these four empires a rather small horn will arise. The historical setting enables us to identify the small horn as Antiochos Epiphanes. He is the subject of the prophecy not because he is distinguished or a great leader, but because of what he does to the Jews. He brings about one of the most terrible times in their sorrowful history.

The second half of the chapter provides Daniel with an explanation on the vision. In the explanation we are told, *"that the vision pertains to the time of the end"*. There are aspects of the explanation which look beyond Antiochus to an end time king. His pride and opposition to the Prince of princes, followed by his being

broken without human agency, all point to the Man of Sin. Antiochus was a fore runner, a type, of what the final tyrant will be like.

The King of the North

Towards the end of chapter 11 we come across another blasphemer. *"Then the king will do as he pleases, and will exalt himself above every god and will speak monstrous things against the God of gods;" Daniel 11: 36.* Up to this point chapter 11 has prophesied a conflict between the King of the North and the King of the South which lasted about 300 years. The conflict culminates with the rule of Antiochus Epiphanes.

At verse 36 there is a jump in time. The prophecy now closes with the time of trouble which precedes the resurrection. His blasphemy, the time setting of the prophecy and his end all indicate that the King of the North is yet another name for the man of sin.

The rather small horn told us about the character of the Man of Sin, this prophecy adds geographical location. The King of the North ruled the Seleucid Empire which stretched from Turkey to the Indus River. Therefore we expect the final Man of sin to arise in the Middle East and at the very least rule the swathe of land from Turkey to Persia and Afghanistan. The King of the South represents Egypt. Verse 40 says that there will be a rebellion against the King of the North. He will overcome this rebellion and gain control of Egypt and have support from Libya and Ethiopia [Daniel 11.42, 4] This passage indicates that the reign of the man of sin will be a troubled time with threats from outside his kingdom. It casts doubt on the monolithic global dictatorship many predict.

The Assyrian

Another man consumed with pride is found in Isaiah 10:12-27. The prophecy is set at the time when the Lord has completed His work

on Mount Zion. The work to be completed is the salvation of the Jews. At that time the Lord will intervene to punish the arrogant heart of the King of Assyria. In Isaiah's time Assyria was sent against Israel as *"the rod of my anger"* Isaiah 20: 5. She was sent to punish a godless nation. Years before King Ahaz had sought protection by forming an alliance with the King of Assyria. As with all such alliances the protector soon becomes the oppressor.

In the last days another likened to the King of Assyria will arise against Israel. God will use him to bring the nation to repentance.

"Now in that day the remnant of Israel, and those of the house of Jacob who have escaped, will never again rely on the one who struck them, but will truly rely on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel." Isaiah 10: 20.

Rely on 'the one who struck them' confirms the words of Jesus that there will come a time when Israel will accept another as their saviour in place of Him who they rejected.

The above are some of the passages from the Old Testament scriptures which describe the Man of Sin. From these we see him as a ruler rising out of the Middle East. The principal concern of the Old Testament is his impact on Israel. At the end of the age he will cause Israel a terrible time of suffering. This time is brought to an end by the intervention of the Messiah and the conversion of the nation.

THE MAN OF SIN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Before the Day of the Lord the man of sin will be revealed. Will the impact of the man of sin be limited to the Middle East and Israel? Does his influence extend over the rest of the world? What does the New Testament add to our understanding?

Significantly, Jesus does not mention the man of sin other than in the reference to the Abomination of Desolation [Matt 24:15]. The Sermon on the Mount of Olives is addressed to the disciples and beyond them to the believing church. The Abomination of Desolation standing in the holy place, is used as a sign to His followers that a time of great anguish is about to begin. Jesus goes on to warn of the coming of many false christs and false prophets showing great signs and wonders. A universal antichrist with global dominion does not appear to be what He has in mind.

By not focusing on a single antichrist Jesus alerts us that the attack will come from many directions. The whole world lies in the power of the evil one. Everything that is outside Christ can be used by Satan against us. Secular humanism, bogus science, religious fanaticism, cults, globalists, false prophets with their signs and wonders and many others, are all part of his armoury. They have already been deceived. Satan's one intent in these last days is to deceive the elect if possible.

"See, I have told you beforehand". Matthew 24: 25. The seriousness of this warning is underlined by Jesus. His words could be interpreted as, 'take note for you really need to know this'. As we enter the final years of this age, it is essential that we recognize that Satan's primary attack on the church will be through deception. He is already hard at work within the church using false prophets to undermine the truth.

The great deception

Among these many deceptions, we learn from 2 Thessalonians chapter 2: 1 - 12, that there will be one final great deception. The revealing of the man of sin and the apostasy are given as signs that the end of the age is near. This passage adds to what we have understood from the Old Testament. It makes clear that the revealing of the man of sin is entirely under the sovereign control of God. He will be permitted by God to be revealed in order deceive those who have refused the truth of salvation.

Thessalonians confirms what Jesus has already said that the deception will be accompanied by great signs and wonders and will cause a falling away. Wonders which are so great that the saints will be deceived if they do not remain vigilant. The man of sin will be Satan's masterstroke. There will be many false prophets and false christ's but the deception around this man will surpass them all.

It is said of the man of sin that he *"opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God showing himself that he is God"* 2 Thessalonians 2: 4. He will throw down a direct challenge to God by claiming that he is God. Due to the delusion sent by God the people of this world will believe the lie. They will accept this man as God and by doing so condemn themselves to judgment.

Those who are condemned are said to have taken pleasure in unrighteousness. The man of sin will legalize what God has forbidden and forbid that which God declares as righteous. He will encourage the pleasures of unrighteousness, liberating man from the burden of obeying God. As such he will be the culmination of man's rebellion against God and earn himself the title 'the lawless one'.

Jesus said that a time would come, when lawlessness would abound, causing the love of many to grow cold. We already see this spirit at work in the age in which we live. It will reach its zenith under this deception and be a cause of anguish to all who seek to live soberly, righteously and godly during this present age.

Like father like son

The character of the man of sin is the same as his father the devil as revealed in Isaiah 14: 12 – 15. That passage outlines the extent of his blasphemies. He will boast equality with God claiming to have set his throne in heaven. Writing before these things come to pass, it seems incredible that such a person will ever exist. It is hard to believe that the world would really accept the man's claims to be God. But this is the sure word of prophecy. It is what God has chosen to reveal to us in advance so that we will not be taken in.

Acquiring a good knowledge of the prophetic scriptures is one way in which we can obey Jesus' command to be vigilant in these last days and so avoid being deceived. One of the identifying characteristics of this man is the denial of the divinity of Jesus Christ. *"Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. 1 John 2: 22.* The Christian who knows his Saviour will recognize that the man is a liar. Those who have never come to a personal faith in Christ will see the signs and wonders and accept the lie. The denial of Christ closes the only way by which we may be saved and come to the Father.

After warning of the dangers of deception Jesus proceeds to describe the manner of His return [Matt 24: 27 – 31]. It will be unmistakable for those who know the Bible. Any person who comes in another way will be a false christ, a deceiver.

Tribulation in this world is normal

Jesus warned that the church would always be subject to tribulation. That is the normal expectation of those who go against the tide by obeying God. In Matthew 24: 9 we read, *“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for my sake.”* At the end of this age the gospel will be rejected by the nations. In place of Jesus, the world will accept a false christ who makes boastful claims to be divine. That rejection will be expressed in a universal hatred of faithful believers. It is because of the rejection and hatred that God will pour out His wrath on a rebellious world.

So far, what has been added by the New Testament has not provided any reason to change our understanding of the man of sin from that contained in the Old Testament. There, he is a Middle Eastern ruler who causes Israel a terrible time of suffering. We have learnt that his coming is entirely according the sovereign will of God. We have also added an understanding that he will be the focus of a very widespread satanic deception. Many will believe that he is God. From the teaching of Jesus we understand that there will be universal persecution of the church as the age draws to a close, but not necessarily directly by the man of sin. Satan will use many different deceptions to delude believers and lead them away from faith in Christ. We have been warned in advance.

THE MAN OF SIN IN REVELATION

So far the new Testament has added little to our understanding of what the man of sin will be like. We turn to the book of Revelation for a much fuller description of this man.

Abaddon

Revelation 9 describes the release of a plague of demons from the pit. They are permitted to torment people for a period of time. *“And they had a king over them the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Appollyon.” Revelation 9:11.* It is easy to overlook the significance of Abaddon. It seems that he is released to disappear. Is that correct or are we in fact being introduced to the principal character in much of what follows? His names mean destruction and destroyer. Terms which are used in scripture for both Israel’s oppressor and the man of sin [Isaiah 16: 4 shadad = destroyer or spoiler, 2Thess 2: 3 apoleia = perdition or destruction].

“The beast who you saw was, and is not and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to destruction.” Revelation 17: 8. This verse confirms that Abaddon, released from the bottomless pit will take on the identity of one who is called ‘the beast’. He has been imprisoned for centuries ready for this hour. As in 2 Thessalonians he is restrained until the time that God chooses to release him. He is described as *“was, is not, and yet is”*, which gives rise to the belief that we are reading about a man who once lived, is now dead, but for a time will be resurrected. The only other person to which scripture gives the title ‘son of perdition’ (apoleia) is Judas Iscariot [John 17: 12]. There are many who have become possessed by Demons, but of Judas it is written that Satan entered into him [Luke 22: 3]. When he died it is written *“that he might go to his own place.”* Acts 1: 25. Judas was not

sent to the place of the dead but to a place reserved for him until the time that God will use him again. Although called to be among those privileged to be Jesus' close companions, he chose Satan instead of the Lamb of God. He has to bear the eternal consequence of his decision, as will all who follow him.

Abaddon will be resurrected to become the beast. *"And he was given a mouth speaking great blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue forty two months. Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God"* Revelation 13: 5, 6. His blasphemy confirms that the beast is the little horn, the king of the north and 'the man of sin' who takes the name of God claiming to be God.

Only as God Permits

"The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast." Revelation 17: 12. Both the beast of Revelation and the fourth beast of Daniel 7 have ten horns. In Daniel the ten horns are described but have no function. In Revelation we learn that they exist for a brief period of time. Their function is to give power and authority to the beast [Revelation 17: 13] and to fulfill the purpose of God in destroying the Harlot [Revelation 17: 15 – 17]. All that happens is under the sovereign control of God. However satanically inspired these monsters are their freedom to work their hateful destruction only exists to the extent God permits.

The destruction of Babylon

From the description of Babylon in Revelation 18 we conclude that the Harlot which the beast destroys represents what we would call 'civilization'. The name Babylon is the title of the kingdom of this world. She is proud and enjoys great wealth due to her trade. To us she is impressive, the height of human achievement. In reality she is

corrupt and guided by demons. Throughout, she has persecuted the prophets and saints of God. In one hour she will be destroyed.

Following her destruction, the void will be filled by the final empire of the beast described in Revelation 13. For forty two months or three and a half years the beast will be allowed to have authority on this earth.

Satan having been denied the opportunity to persecute the woman, who represents believing Israel, turns his attention to the church. *“And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.” Revelation 12: 17.* Revelation chapter 13 proceeds to describe how Satan will make war on the saints.

The chapter describes a huge deception. Through signs, wonders and a miraculous image, a second beast will cause the world to worship the man of sin. At that time the beast will be given permission by God to persecute the saints. Many will be imprisoned or killed. Once again we see that all that happens is determined by the sovereign will of God. He asks His saints to be willing to endure suffering to achieve His final purpose for this present age [Revelation 13: 10, 14: 12].

When the fifth seal is opened, John sees the martyrs who have been slain for their testimony. They cry out to God for justice [Revelation 6: 9 -11]. Revelation 13: 10 gives an assurance that there will be justice but calls for patience.

Will this man’s reign be universal?

The answer from scripture is possibly but not definitely. Statements such as *“all the world marvelled and followed the beast.”* Revelation 13: 3 and *“and causes the earth and those who dwell in it*

to worship the first beast.” Revelation 13: 12 could be taken as meaning universal rule.

Elsewhere in scripture we find that similar phrases have a more limited scope. In the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream to be found in Daniel 2, both the first empire Babylon [Dan 2: 38] and the third empire, Greece [Dan 2: 39] are described in terms which we would interpret as reigning over the whole planet. We know from history that they only ruled what we today refer to as the Middle East. We find the same use of words in Ezra 1: 2 where Cyrus claims to rule over all the kingdoms of the earth. Luke 2: 1 records that ‘all the world’ was to be registered. All the world here refers to the Roman empire.

In the sermon on the Mount of Olives, Jesus said that the gospel must be preached to all nations and also, that His followers will be hated by all nations. The word used is *ethnos* meaning all ethnic groups. The two statements go together. At the end of this age the gospel will be both preached and rejected, bringing down God’s judgment on the world. There is no doubt that this applies to all peoples living on this planet.

In Revelation an angel announces that *“The kingdoms of this world have become our Lord’s and even of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever”*. The word used for this world is ‘*kosmos*’ which generally has a universal meaning covering the whole ordered world.

While of the beast it is written *“and all the earth marvelled after the beast”*. Here ‘*ge*’ is used. Throughout Revelation the word ‘*ge*’ is usually translated earth. In many instances the context points to it being used to refer to the whole world. But the word can also mean a land, territory or region. We have to decide from the context and other scriptures what is intended in each instance.

“Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast and his kingdom became full of darkness; ...” Revelation 16: 10. *Basileia* translated kingdom, is usually used in the more limited context of a defined area. The Beast is described as having a specific realm.

“Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like a bear and his mouth like the mouth of a lion.” Revelation 13: 2. This description of the beast takes us back to Daniel 7. In that chapter four beasts were described, one is like a lion, one like a bear, one like a leopard and a final dreadful beast. It connects the final empire of the beast to these former empires. The link could indicate that this final empire covers the same territory. That territory is the Middle East and depending on how Daniel 7 is interpreted, may include Europe.

The Mark of Beast - Revelation 13: 15 – 18

The end of Revelation 13 introduces a topic which has been the cause of much speculation. Brands, tattoos, bar codes, micro chips and head bands have all been suggested as the mark. What it is will remain speculation until the time it comes into force. If the extent of the Beast’s kingdom is limited it may be that only those within the kingdom will be caused to receive the mark.

A person who follows Christ is sealed with the Holy Spirit [2 Corinthians 1: 22, Ephesians 4: 30]. The seal is a mark of ownership. The Christian no longer belongs to Satan and the kingdom of this world. He has been bought with the precious blood of Jesus and now belongs to the heavenly kingdom.

The mark of the beast is Satan’s imitation of the seal of God. It identifies all who belong to him. Revelation 13 reveals a trinity of evil which mirrors the divine trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Satan models himself on the Father. The Beast is the incarnation of Satan imitating the Son. The false prophet imitates the ministry of the Holy

Spirit. He deceives people into worshipping the Beast and seals those who have made that commitment.

Whatever the nature of the mark proves to be, accepting it will seal a person's destiny. Those who accept it will share the same fate as Satan. Revelation 14: 9 – 11 warns of the eternal torment which will be suffered by all who receive the mark of the Beast.

Christians who refuse to worship the beast or receive his mark are in line to be beheaded. When Jesus returns they will be rewarded with the privilege of reigning with Him [Rev 20: 4].

Thwarting Satan's rule

Satan intends to rule over the whole world. He will be permitted at the end of this age to use all his power to deceive mankind and bring that rule about. But we come against him in prayer backed by all the power of Jesus Christ. That sounds as if we are to pray against the will of God, which permits Satan to deceive the world. But God also has another purpose in mind. At the end of this age there will be a final harvest [Revelation 7: 14].

From scripture, we are assured that Jesus has the final victory. It is for the church to stand against the schemes of the devil and prevent them coming about. That is why he will hate us so much. The vigilant church, which has seen through the deception of Satan, will in suffering have the joy of seeing many saved. In the end they will witness Satan's defeat. We are confident because we follow the one who has already won the battle and is very soon going to reign victorious over all the earth. Hallelujah.

HOW WILL SATAN DECEIVE THE WORLD?

Towards the end of this present age there will be a great celebration in heaven when Satan is cast down to earth. Satan was the accuser of the brethren. But soon he will no longer be able to appear before God to bring his accusations. The reason for his overthrow, as given in Revelation 12: 11, is the faithfulness of those who were prepared to face death rather than deny their Saviour the Lamb of God. The martyrs have been prepared to serve God even if it costs them everything. By their deaths they have proved Satan a liar.

Cast down to earth, Satan is enraged with the woman Israel and her offspring the followers of Christ [Revelation 12: 9, 17]. They have been the cause of his downfall. If he is going to enforce his rule as god of this world the faithful must be silenced. How will Satan deceive the peoples of this world into accepting his rule? How will he turn them against those who choose to belong to the kingdom of God?

Many interpretations of prophecy, relating to the time of anguish at the end of this age, look at it through western eyes. The ideas put forward assume that the whole world is like the West with the same political, economic and technical conditions. Therefore, the man of sin is presented as a political leader who enforces his rule through the power of technology.

But the population of the western world is a small proportion of the whole. The conditions which might enslave the West do not apply in Africa, India or China. The teeming millions of India have little regard for rules and authority. It is recognized that there are several economies in India which function in parallel. Hundreds of millions live outside controlled economy. Satan, given three and a half or even seven years to enforce his rule will be faced with an impossible task.

Politics is not strong enough to bring everyone under his control. Therefore another strategy will need to be employed.

The time of chaos

In Revelation seven trumpets are sounded as warnings that the end is near. The final three are described as woes for the inhabitants of this earth. When the fifth trumpet is sounded [Revelation 9: 3] a demonic plague likened to locusts is released from bottomless pit. They torment men for five months. The intensity of the torment causes people to long for death. With this plague comes their ruler Abaddon. It is confirmed later in revelation that Abaddon will become the beast [Rev 11: 7, 17: 8].

Following the time of torment the sixth trumpet is sounded. Four angels, who have been bound in preparation for this hour, are released. They are evil angels who are given the commission to kill one third of mankind. Their demonic armies bring plagues on men described as fire, smoke and brimstone. This foretaste of judgment is intended to bring people to repentance but mankind refuses.

If our understanding of the order of events is correct it is after these woes that the beast is revealed. God allows Satan to inflict on man this time of suffering as a call to repent. For Satan it is a time of chaos designed to prepare the way for His man who has been released to fulfil this hour.

The political rulers of this world will look for a leader to rescue them as crisis after crisis engulfs humanity. Many in the secular West will also accept a leader who promises to guide them through the calamities which are destroying the planet. In the wider world it is not a leader but a prophet which is called for. It appears that Satan has been preparing for this day for thousands of years. The religions he created have placed in men's minds the longing for a saviour.

One world religion

The Bible recognizes this twofold deception. Revelation 13 describes two beasts. The first is the 'man of sin'. The second is the false prophet who causes the world to worship the 'man of sin'. The false prophet, as well as acting as a counterfeit to the Holy Spirit, will fulfil the role of saviour that Satan has created in the hopes of every religion. He will be of greater significance than the beast when it comes to bringing the people of the world into line.

Hindu's hope for Krishna, Buddhists' for Maitreya, Zoroastrians for the Saosyants. Of most interest is the belief of Muslims who occupy that part of the world which will be the epicentre of end time events. It is difficult to generalize about Muslim beliefs as reliance is placed on the Hadith [the sayings of Mohammed] to interpret the incomprehensible Qur'an. There are many collections of these Hadiths. This leads to the variety of belief held by the various sects within Islam. Some Sunni Muslims dismiss the belief in the coming Mahdi as a Shi'a concept. Others disagree claiming that the belief in the Mahdi is as much Sunni as Shi'a. Mahdi al-Muntadhar means awaited saviour.

However both branches of Islam are agreed that an essential sign of the end of the age is the descent of Jesus Christ from heaven. Popular Islamic writer Harun Yahya quotes the following hadith regarding Jesus' coming. "Allah will send 'Isa (as) son of Maryam to Earth. He will descend with two angels wearing two beautiful garments in his palms to the white minaret in the east of Sham [Damascus]. (Tirmidhi, Fitan, p. 59)

Islamic eschatology runs parallel to Biblical teaching on the end times but reverses the rolls. In Islamic teaching Jesus when he comes, besides denying his divinity and breaking the crosses, will also fight against the Dajjal the Islamic antichrist. The Christian student of

prophecy can see a match in the Mahdi supported by the Islamic Jesus with the beast and false prophet of scripture.

The Bible says of the 'man of sin' that his coming is "*according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs and lying wonders and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish...*" 2 Thess 2: 9, 10. Could it be that one of the lying wonders which Satan has prepared is the apparent descent of his false christ from heaven? After all, it is Satan who wrote the scripts which the false religions follow.

Contemplate what effect such a wonder would have on this world. Muslims would be overjoyed proclaiming this as the absolute confirmation of the authority of their prophet. The other religions would see in this miracle a sure sign that the saviour they hope for has come. The supernatural hoax will unite all religions as one.

According to the hadith the Mahdi will bring to Jerusalem the Ark of the Covenant and the tablets of the law. Would not such a token of good will immediately win over the hearts of the Jews?

What of Christendom? Many Roman Catholics will look for a lead from their Pope. If he is deceived by this sign they will follow. The Eastern Church which follows a patriarchal system will also largely look for a lead from the hierarchy.

And the Protestants, will they see through this deception? Jesus said that the false prophets would deceive even the elect if that were possible. He continues in the Sermon on the Mount of Olives to emphasize the need to be vigilant. This points to the possibility of the elect being deceived if we do not watch. Part of watching is to be familiar with the teaching of scripture. Jesus makes clear, that when He actually returns it will be unmistakable [Matthew 24: 29 – 31].

Be vigilant

There is within the church an appetite to see all things supernatural as proceeding from God. Without discernment, based on the knowledge of scripture, Christians will be deceived by Satan's wonders. Like the five foolish virgins when Jesus actually appears they will not be ready.

Two questions were posed earlier in this chapter. The first question was how Satan will deceive the world into accepting his rule. The answer is that his man will be seen as the only one able to save the world from the demonic chaos Satan has inflicted. The second question was how will Satan turn the people of this world against those who choose to belong to the kingdom of God? The answer could be that by creating an apparently supernatural appearance he will convince the world that Jesus Christ has returned. According to Islam this false christ will break the crosses and declare to the world that he is not divine. He will seek to eradicate all worship of him as the divine Son of God. The world's false religions will obey their prophet and take up his cause against those he has declared infidels.

Jesus said that there will come a time when his followers are hated by all nations. Praise the Lord we know that we are on the winning side. Far from defeat, the Bible indicates that, for those who are prepared, these times will see a harvest of souls for the kingdom.

Living in victory

This booklet reflects on the period of anguish which will close the present age. We have looked at the abomination of desolation which will be the sign that the period of anguish is about to begin and have considered the impact that tribulation will have on the Jews. Then we have set out what the Bible teaches about the 'man of sin', who becomes the central character in the time of anguish.

The first chapter opened with a quote from Hal Lindsey's book 'The Late Great Planet Earth'. The quote referred to the tribulation as "...that period of the most ghastly pestilence, bloodshed and starvation the world has ever known". Comfort is provided by the belief that we as Christians will be gathered out of this world before that time of tribulation starts.

Many find that the arguments used to justify the belief in an early rapture of believers are weak. The more natural and obvious meaning of scripture is that the gathering of those who remain coincides with Christ's return to earth. If that is correct, the Christian church will be on earth throughout this time.

A common mistake, made by those who teach that the church will be raptured before the time of anguish, is to confuse the tribulation with the outpouring of God's wrath. The tribulation is the culmination of man's rejection of the gospel. It states in 2 Thessalonians 2: 10 that the final deception comes about because men "*did not receive the love of the truth*". Instead of the gospel, the world will accept a false christ as its saviour.

The wrath of God is His response to the rejection of the gospel. A rejection that has been demonstrated by the world's treatment of the faithful church. Whereas the anguish will last three and a half years, the wrath may only last a few days. It is represented in the Jewish

feasts by the 10 days of awe, which come between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. This is the final chance to get right with God before the Day of Judgment. Christians do not come under God's wrath. They will either be removed or hidden during this time [Psalm 57:1, Isaiah 26: 20, 21, Zephaniah 2: 3].

What will it be like to live through the time of anguish?

The word tribulation has been deliberately replaced with anguish. This has been done to help us take a fresh look of what Jesus meant when He spoke about a time of anguish such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world.

The first thing to say is that it will be a time of anguish. Those who hold fast to their faith will be heartbroken as they see many, who they once walked in fellowship with, taken in by the deceptions of the devil. In Thessalonians 2: 3 a falling away is coupled with the revealing of the 'man of sin'. Jesus also said that *"...because lawlessness will abound the love of many will grow cold"*. Matthew 24: 12.

It will be like the days of Noah. Noah built the Ark as a testimony to the people. For years he had warned of coming judgment. It is easy to picture him, after all the animals had been taken in, still standing at the door. Standing, waiting, hoping that some of those he had warned would come in and be saved. Eventually God had to shut the door. Noah's sadness must have been very great as he came to terms with the realisation that none had listened. Yet for us, as we will see, there is an assurance that in the dark days which lie ahead many will listen and be saved.

Earlier it was noted that Jesus did not speak of just one deception, but that there will be many false christs and false prophets. In the final time of anguish, more than ever, we will need to be on our guard against wolves in sheep's clothing. The prime concern that Jesus had for His followers was not persecution. He gives the strength to endure

the hostility of the world. His main concern was deception. Discerning of spirits is a spiritual gift which we need to cultivate in these last days. Discernment, reinforced by our knowledge of the word of God, will enable us to recognize the false spirits at work leading the church astray. It is probable that large sections of what is called the church, lacking discernment, will accept the 'man of sin' as who he says he is. This will add to the anguish of those who understand the times, recognizing the deception for what it is.

Tribulation now

Millions of faithful followers of Christ are already in a time of anguish. For them there will be little difference between what they are experiencing now and what is to come. At present they are persecuted by fanatical members of false religions or by totalitarian dictatorships. They already know what it is like to be despised and rejected; to be falsely accused and imprisoned; to be denied work or housing. Jesus said that we must count the cost before becoming one of his disciples. Even now, many of our brothers and sisters in Christ know that the cost of discipleship will probably be their death. The main change for them during the final years will be that, as well as the disparate groups who hate them; opposition to the gospel will be unified and focused in one man.

Because there is reason to believe that the direct rule of the 'man of sin' will not necessarily be global there is hope for our suffering brethren. The letter to the church in Philadelphia [Revelation 3: 7 - 13] commends them for remaining faithful and keeping the command to persevere. Because of that they are kept from the hour of trial which shall come on the whole world to test those who dwell on the earth. Some in our time who have already suffered will not be called on to endure more. Although multitudes will be deceived, not all nations will accept the rule of the 'man of sin'.

Now is the time to prepare

But in those nations which are destined for judgment, which includes Europe, we must prepare to endure the suffering that our brethren already know. False accusations and discrimination will be our lot. Economic isolation may well follow. The 'man of sin' when he is revealed, like his forerunner Antiochus Epiphanies, will ban all worship other than that directed towards himself. Before that time there will be economic collapse which will affect many nations.

"In the world you will have tribulation but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world". Matthew 16: 33. Nothing can happen to a Christian without the Lord permitting it. If He permits it, He will give us the strength to endure it. In the days of tribulation the Lord is purifying His bride. He will also be reaping the final harvest in which the full number of the Gentiles is gathered in. We read of that harvest Revelation 7: 14. The harvest will be reaped by those who remain faithful. Jesus said that in these times when we are hauled before the courts we are not to worry about what to say. He will grant us wisdom which our adversaries will not be able to refute [Luke 21: 12 – 19].

A triumphant church

Our attitude to prophecy needs to move away from being fatalistic or escapist. Instead we should be triumphant. Through prayer we can hold back some of the evil which is coming on the world. Through our faithfulness we will see many coming to the Lord.

Jesus tells us to lift up our heads when these things begin to take place. In this period of great anguish not only will the Christians be on earth but it is essential that they are present if God is to complete His work among the Gentiles. Towards the end of the anguish there may well come a time when the church appears to be crushed and defeated. But just as the cross was turned from defeat into victory so, these final years will lead up to the glorious triumph of the church.

Promises to those who overcome

Those who stand firm will in His strength overcome.

“To Him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.” Revelation 2: 7

*“He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death”.
Revelation 2: 11*

“To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.” Revelation 2: 17

*“ And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations, ‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like potters vessels’, as I have received from my Father; and I will give him the morning star.”
Revelation 2: 26 – 29.*

“He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.” Revelation 3: 5

“ He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him my new name.” Revelation 3: 12

*“ To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”
Revelation 3; 21*