

HAS THE
TRIBULATION

BEGUN?

AVOIDING CONFUSION AND
REDEEMING THE TIME IN
THESE LAST DAYS

AMIR TSARFATI

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Has the Tribulation Begun?

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HAS THE TRIBULATION BEGUN?

No. Calm down. Breathe deep. You heard me right. The tribulation has not begun.

“But, Amir, look at the world around us! Political chaos, financial meltdowns, rampant immorality! Surely this must be the tribulation!”

No, it is not.

“The world is overheating in the summers and freezing in the winters. There are global pandemics and devastating earthquakes. There is war in Europe and constant conflict in the Middle East and Asia and all over the world. Technology has gotten to the point that they are starting to microchip people. Are you blind?”

It’s true that without my glasses my sight may be a bit iffy. But I am not blind, and the answer is still no. One hundred percent, unequivocally, without a doubt, the tribulation has not begun.

How can I be so confident? Quite simply, it’s because my focus is not on the world, but in the Word. The Bible makes it clear that what we are experiencing now is a firecracker compared to the nuclear weapon of the tribulation. My advice for those who do not follow Jesus Christ is to enjoy the good times now; they’re not going to last.

There you go. You're welcome. You can relax once again.

I recognize that from a literary standpoint, I have just committed a cardinal sin. In what might be a compositional record, I answered the propositional question of this entire work in the first word of the book. I solved the mystery before anyone even knew there had been a crime. It's like Agatha Christie or Arthur Conan Doyle beginning one of their great who-dun-it novels with the line "The butler did it." I have just spoiler-alerted the title of my book into oblivion.

But before you put this book back on the shelf with a contented, "Well, that was easy," let me tell you that there is a method to my madness. There are much deeper and more important issues at play here than simply the timing of the tribulation. Timing is the easy part. Certainly, I could have left the question "Has the tribulation begun?" hanging throughout the entire book, building the suspense chapter by chapter, creating concern and fear in your minds. But that would just be sensationalism. I would be playing with your emotions. Easy questions demand easy answers. Here, the easy answer is "No, the tribulation has not begun." In subsequent chapters, I'll fill you in on why I can so adamantly make that statement, why it is so important to understand the tribulation, and how you can know that the tribulation has actually begun should you happen to still be around when it launches.

There is one more even greater goal for this book. Early in the life of the church in Thessaloniki, the people were asking much the same question that we are answering in this book. Rumors were circulating that the end-times scenario had kicked off. The members of this church didn't know what to believe. That's when Paul stepped in, writing, "Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come" (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2). The apostle then proceeded to teach them and remind them of what he had said in the past, easing their troubled minds.

When you are done with this book, I want you to be able to do the exact same thing with your loved ones, your friends, your fellow church members—anyone who needs to be comforted with the truth. My goal is for you to be equipped to be able to explain to anyone why this cannot possibly be the tribulation, how they can know the signs that the actual tribulation has begun, and how they can ensure that they won't be around to experience it.

IT'S NOT SO BAD

A primary theme through Paul's second letter to the Corinthians is perspective. He constantly returned to the idea that we need to look at the temporary nature of this life through the lens of eternity. In the fourth chapter, he wrote:

Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal (2 Corinthians 4:17-18).

The apostle, who himself knew great suffering through his life, wrote that no matter what it is you are going through, it is really nothing when you look at it in God's big picture. That can be a jarring assertion to hear, particularly if you are dealing with a chronic issue. The woman with multiple sclerosis, the man with ALS, the young adult with cerebral palsy—doubtless your life feels like anything other than a “light affliction.” But Paul's encouragement is “Just wait and see what God has planned for you. When compared with the exceeding and eternal weight of the glory of God—experiencing the beauty and joy of being in His incomparable presence—the pain of these earthly days will seem like nothing.”

The opposite is true when it comes to the tribulation. Once those seven years begin, the troubles of our current situation will also seem like “light affliction.” However, it will not be because life will become so much better. Instead, people will long for the tranquil days of mask mandates and government overreach and wars in countries not their own. “Remember when the government closed all our businesses and shut down our churches? Oh, life was so much easier then.”

This is not to downplay anything that has been happening recently. These have been difficult times. This is particularly true for those of you in America. I am not from the United States, so I can speak as someone who is looking in from the outside. Those of you reading this who are Americans have been raised expecting the ideals of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. You hold on to them as your birthrights—your “inalienable rights”—and you say that you will fight to the death to maintain them. And, up until now, you’ve done an excellent job of doing so.

That’s why everybody wants to come to America. Whether legally or illegally, the United States is the world’s immigration capital. With 50.6 million foreign-born residents, you have over three times more than the second-place country.¹ And with good reason—America is a great place to live. People don’t risk their life or livelihood to leave their country and go to one that’s worse. They go to a place that’s a step up. They travel to a new land that will give more opportunity for themselves and for their children. So much of that is based on those American ideals of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

In Europe, people don’t have those same ideals. In the Middle East, they’re not part of our mindset. Go to Afghanistan to pursue your rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and your head will be rolling down the aisle. In the rest of the world, we are used to government overreach. We expect our rights to occasionally get trampled on. We don’t like it, but it’s the nature of things. Now, you in America are experiencing this for the first time. You’re saying,

“What’s going on? They’re changing the rules! They’re going beyond their constitutional mandates!” And the rest of us in the world are saying, “Welcome to the club, Yanks!”

And because I have the gift of encouragement, I will say to those of you in America and the rest of the world, “It’s only going to get worse!” There you go! *Mazel tov!*

THE SCRIPTURES AND THE POWER OF GOD

In the week before His crucifixion, Jesus had a confrontation with the Sadducees. The Sadducees were a sect of Judaism that did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. Once your ticket was punched, it remained punched. Dead meant dead. They approached Jesus with a question that was a true “gotcha.” They had probably used it many times throughout the years, honing it to perfection. Now, they were going to thrust this sharpened theological dagger at this backwoods country preacher from Nazareth, of all places, so they could send Him scurrying back to whatever rock He crawled out from under.

Teacher, Moses said that if a man dies, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up offspring for his brother. Now there were with us seven brothers. The first died after he had married, and having no offspring, left his wife to his brother. Likewise the second also, and the third, even to the seventh. Last of all the woman died also. Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had her (Matthew 22:24-28).

You can hear the smugness in their tone, starting out with what for them was probably a very sarcastic “Teacher.” No one else had ever been able to satisfactorily answer this doctrinal brain twister. Certainly, this bumpkin didn’t stand a chance.

Jesus’ answer was exquisite.

“You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God” (v. 29).

Jesus said to these self-important religious teachers, “Have you never even read your Bibles? Obviously not. And because you don’t know God’s Word, you don’t know God.” He went on to prove His authority to call them out by explaining familial relationships in heaven and proving that there is life after death—all in four sentences. The crowds were astonished, and the Sadducees were silenced.

The deficiencies for which Jesus called out these religious leaders are the same ones that are causing people today to ask whether we are in the tribulation. Too many inside and outside of the church don’t know God’s Word and, therefore, don’t know God. This biblical illiteracy opens the hearts of many to fear and their ears to the rampant sensationalism that has permeated the Christian airwaves and social media.

Deception is rampant and so many in the church are caught up in the lies because they are desperate for that one special insight, that next hidden mystery. Our “bigger and better” society craves the tidbits of information that lift an individual to an elite status of being “in the know,” while the rest of those poor saps in the church are still holding on to those old, simple beliefs. Where once a believer was content with the words written on the pages of their Bibles, now they have the online preacher who unlocks the code and gives them the “words behind the words,” the secret meanings, the obscure cultural insights. I can’t tell you how many times someone has wanted to explain to me, a Jerusalem-born Jew, the deeper meanings of the Old Testament Hebrew. I tell them, “Uh, you do know who I am and where I live, don’t you?”

But it is those little presuppositional nuggets that the Scripture-twisting teachers use to make claims like, “The Bible said, ‘But of that day and hour no one knows,’ but I’ve figured out the timing!”

Or, “When Jesus said, ‘I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also,’ He really meant, ‘I

will come again for you to receive Me to yourselves; that where you are, I may be also.”

Or, even, “When Paul wrote, ‘Has God cast away His people [Israel]? Certainly not!’ he actually meant, ‘You’re darn tootin’ He did!’”

When biblical interpretation moves from “What does the Bible say?” to “What does the Bible *really* say?” you’re in for trouble. Of course, there are times when historical culture is relevant and figures of speech and symbolism come into play. But those are typically very clear when being employed. Anything else is deception. And it is biblical illiteracy and the resultant lack of understanding of who God is and how He operates that makes so many in the church susceptible to the current rampant mishandling of the Scripture.

TRUTHS BEING TARGETED BY SATAN

Satan is the great deceiver, and by *great*, I mean that he’s really good at his job. As I look at the madness of this world and the ineffectiveness of the church to be able to address it, I see six biblical truths the enemy is undermining to create his chaos.

Targeted Truth 1: Jesus alone is the Life, the Truth, and the Way to God.

Jesus is the only way to the Father, the only true answer to sin’s problem, the only source of eternal life. How do we know this? He testified to it Himself. “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’” (John 14:6). Many focus on the exclusivity of the first half of Jesus’ statement, but it is the second sentence that slams the door on every other belief system. “No one” means no one! No person on planet Earth can ever come to the Father except through Jesus.

Some accuse Christians of being uncaring or unsympathetic. It is a bigoted, exclusionary, arrogant statement to say that you are right and everyone else is wrong. But I’m not saying that I’m right. Jesus

is! This isn't what Amir thinks; it's what the Lord said. So, don't try to turn Jesus into an open-armed, universalist, save-everybody-no-matter-what-they-believe-because-He's-just-so-darn-loving kind of person. You cannot believe in Jesus while not believing in what He said. And what Jesus said is that salvation is found in Him and nowhere else.

It's not just Jesus who said that He is the only way. While speaking of Him, Peter the disciple said to the Jewish religious leaders, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). The apostle Paul, writing to Gentiles in Rome, asserted, "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:9-10). Confess Jesus with your mouth and believe in your heart. That's the only way.

By the way, did you know that in Islam, if you were drunk and someone told you to say, "*Allahu akbar*," which means "God is greatest," three times and you did so, you would automatically become a Muslim? "*Allahu akbar, Allahu akbar, Allahu akbar*"—boom—that's all it takes to make Allah happy. If you sober up the next day and decide you don't want to be a Muslim, tough luck. If you leave now, it's apostasy.

That kind of mindless, heartless salvation formula is why Paul wrote the two-part presentation found in Romans. Confess Jesus with your mouth and believe in your heart. That's what brings the transformation. This is not religion; it is not ritual. This is faith. And today, it is under attack, even by people who call themselves Christians. A 2008 Pew Research Center survey found that 52 percent of all Americans who profess to be Christians believe that numerous other belief systems can lead to eternal life.² How can anyone who "knows the Scriptures and the power of God" hold to that deception?

This move toward ecumenism is directly from the enemy, and it fits right into his ultimate goal of there being one world religion

during the tribulation. In February 2019, Pope Francis traveled to Abu Dhabi, UAE, where he met with Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmed Al-Tayyeb. Together they signed a document that invited “all persons who have faith in God and faith in *human fraternity* to unite and work together so that it may serve as a guide for future generations to advance a culture of mutual respect in the awareness of the great divine grace that makes all human beings brothers and sisters.”³ Included in the statement was the call for “intellectuals, philosophers, religious figures, artists, media professionals and men and women of culture in every part of the world, to rediscover the values of peace, justice, goodness, beauty, human fraternity and coexistence in order to confirm the importance of these values as anchors of salvation for all, and to promote them everywhere.”⁴ You want to anchor your salvation? You just have to be a good person with the good values of peace, justice, beauty, fraternity, and coexistence. This is the new religion; it just doesn’t have a name yet.

This religious gobbledegook is meaningless. It is salvation determined by one’s values. But our eternity is not based on the goodness in our hearts or the nice things we do. The disciple John made the source of our salvation very clear when he wrote, “God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:11-12). Our hope is built on Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ alone. A pope may tell the world, “Those who have chosen the way of the Gospel Beatitudes and live as ‘the poor in spirit,’ detached from material goods, in order to raise up the lowly of the earth from the dust of their humiliation, will enter the kingdom of God.”⁵ But Scripture says that it is those who choose the way of the gospel of Jesus Christ who will enter the kingdom of God, and then the life of the Beatitudes will follow.

Again, Satan is very good at what he does. When he deceives, he does so using the words that he knows people want to hear. This has always been true. God said of the people of Judah, “The prophets

prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so” (Jeremiah 5:31). People love to hear religious-sounding talk, but they hold a caveat. They will listen as long as it is anything but the convicting words of God that ask them to believe in Jesus and make Him their Lord because He has already carried out the work of salvation on the cross. They don’t want to hear about repentance or sin. They don’t want to talk about holiness. “Instead, won’t you please tell me about how I can be good, fulfill myself in this world, and live my best life now?”

This ties in hand in hand with the coming of the lawless one. He will know exactly what the people of this world will want. He will come to the fore with signs and lying wonders. His words will tickle the world’s receptive ears. People will perish because they preferred lies to the truth. They will be very content to believe that Jesus is *a way*. Just don’t tell them that He is *the Way*.

Targeted Truth 2: All people are born sinners.

“Amir, who are you to call me a sinner? Sure, I may occasionally commit minor offenses, engage in small peccadillos, participate in slightly naughty behavior, and indulge in somewhat questionable activities. But a sinner? Take the log out of your own eye, mister, before you judge me!”

Trust me, my friend, I am fully aware of my own indiscretions. I am also cognizant of the fact that those activities make me a full-fledged sinner. And I am not the one who has given you that same designation—God is.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us... If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us (1 John 1:8, 10).

However, to call someone a sinner today is said to be rude and

hurtful. It's hate speech. Isn't one person's sin simply another person's lifestyle choice? This attitude is all part of the enemy's plan to de-sinify sin. Once sin is marginalized, confined to only the biggies like murder and sexual abuse and calling people by the wrong pronouns, then humanity no longer has a sin problem to deal with. The cross of Jesus is unnecessary. There is nothing separating us from God.

But the Bible makes it clear that every one of us has a sin problem. Paul wrote, "Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12). Sin may have entered the world through one man, but every one of us has jumped on the sin bandwagon. And if you have sinned, you are, by definition, a sinner. When David was nailed by Nathan the prophet for his affair with Bathsheba, he admitted, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5). We were born with sin. That's why we need to be born again. We must be born from above in order to remove the sin taint.

As we saw in the passage from John's letter, if we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves. That is the deception that Satan is spreading. "Don't worry. You're fine. You may slip up every now and then, but are you a sinner? Nah. Just relax, breathe deep, and let your conscience be your guide."

Targeted Truth 3: Israel is still God's chosen people and can't be replaced.

So many people are walking around in churches today saying that Israel is no longer God's people. He turned His back on them because they turned their backs on Him. Just like when your child, in anger, says, "I hate you," you automatically hate them back, right? Wrong. But that is the kind of thin-skinned petulance that Replacement Theology followers seem to ascribe to God. He is a reactive Father whose love for us is wholly dependent upon our actions toward Him.

“Wait a minute, Amir. Didn’t you already write a whole book about this called *Israel and the Church*? And you’re still harping on it?” Yes, I did, and thank you for reading it. And yes, I am still harping on it because it is such a critical doctrine for understanding the character of God and for figuring out the end times, particularly the tribulation.

That is why the enemy is attacking this truth so diligently. God is not a user. He didn’t choose Israel for a time only to later say, “Sorry, I’ve found somebody younger and prettier.” The gap between the Old Testament and New Testament was not God’s mid-life crisis. He made it very clear that He would never abandon His chosen people. Through Jeremiah, He said,

If you can break My covenant with the day and My covenant with the night, so that there will not be day and night in their season, then My covenant may also be broken with David My servant, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and with the Levites, the priests, My ministers. As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, nor the sand of the sea measured, so will I multiply the descendants of David My servant and the Levites who minister to Me (Jeremiah 33:20-22).

A few verses later, God reiterated this commitment:

If My covenant is not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth, then I will cast away the descendants of Jacob and David My servant, so that I will not take any of his descendants to be rulers over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will cause their captives to return, and will have mercy on them (vv. 25-26).

Think about that. He's saying, "As long as the moon is there and the sun is there and the stars are there, Israel will still be my people." That's why I tell the ayatollahs in Iran, "When you finally get your nuke, aim it at the sun. Because only when it is gone will Israel no longer exist." The sole way to say that these words in Jeremiah are not promising a lasting Israel is to claim that the church is now Israel, which is what the Replacement folk do. But read those passages again. What kind of mental gymnastics do you need to go through to turn those extremely Jewish passages into promises to the church?

If God is done with the Jews, then there is no need for a tribulation to discipline His people. If there is no need for a tribulation, then there is no need for a rapture to remove the church from God's coming wrath because there will be no coming wrath. If there is no rapture and no tribulation, what reason is there for a literal millennium? After all, there will be no need to restore God's original creation under the earthly rule of Jesus from Jerusalem. This is how we end up with amillennialism and postmillennialism.

Unfortunately for those who hold to those beliefs, we find all those pesky little passages in 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians and the Gospel of John that talk about the rapture. There's the book of Revelation, which spends a lot of time detailing the events and the timeline of the tribulation. There are many passages throughout the Scriptures, particularly in Isaiah and Revelation, that highlight a 1,000-year reign of Christ. The only way to get around those parts of Scripture is to allegorize them and say that they don't really say what it looks like they say. When the church buys into that, then the enemy's deception about Israel is complete.

Targeted Truth 4: In order to be prepared, we must know the times and the seasons.

One of the enemy's greatest victories has been convincing so many pastors and Christian leaders that Bible prophecy is irrelevant to the

church today. “There are tons of more practical subjects to preach on. Topics that affect real life,” they say. As a result, most Christians are clueless about the incredible extent to which God has moved forward on His end-times plan. As for practicality, how is it possible to discern the events taking place in our crazy world without having a biblical lens through which to examine them?

In July 2022, a very interesting meeting took place. It was a trilateral summit held in Tehran and attended by Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, Russian President Vladimir Putin, and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Another way to look at it is that it was an alliance-forming gathering of a radical terrorist regime, a belligerent expansionist nation, and a member of NATO, an organization that was created to stand up against that belligerent expansionist nation.

Strange bedfellows? Maybe to some. But what makes no sense to many fits right into Bible prophecy. Both Turkey and Iran are listed amongst the allies of Rosh (Russia) in Ezekiel 38.

Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him, and say, “Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Behold, I *am* against you, O Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal. I will turn you around, put hooks into your jaws, and lead you out, with all your army, horses, and horsemen, all splendidly clothed, a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords. Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya are with them, all of them with shield and helmet; Gomer and all its troops; the house of Togarmah from the far north and all its troops—many people are with you” (vv. 2-6).

Persia is Iran, and Gomer and the house of Togarmah are Turkey. Soon, they will together attempt to invade Israel, only to be destroyed by God.

Therefore, son of man, prophesy and say to Gog, “Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘On that day when My people Israel dwell safely, will you not know it? Then you will come from your place out of the far north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses, a great company and a mighty army. You will come up against My people Israel like a cloud, to cover the land. It will be in the latter days that I will bring you against My land, so that the nations may know Me, when I am hallowed in you, O Gog, before their eyes... I will call for a sword against Gog throughout all My mountains,’ says the Lord GOD. ‘Every man’s sword will be against his brother. And I will bring him to judgment with pestilence and bloodshed; I will rain down on him, on his troops, and on the many peoples who *are* with him, flooding rain, great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. Thus I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations. Then they shall know that I am the LORD” (vv. 14-16, 21-23).

These three world leaders likely have no clue about the part their countries will play in God’s plan. But Ezekiel makes it clear that there will come a day when the people of Israel will be back in their land and thriving. It is at that time that this evil alliance will attack. All one needs to do is look at how wealthy and powerful Israel has become to know that the season is ripe for these events.

This is also the time and season for the beginnings of a one-world government. For a global government to replace national governments, the national governments must disappoint the citizenry. This morning as I am writing this, not an hour ago, the US Supreme Court overturned the *Roe v. Wade* abortion decision. Liberals of the nation are promising serious repercussions in the months ahead.

Add to that, the increasing political unrest, international conflicts,

rampant inflation, droughts, and other natural disasters across the globe. Whereas others see the world adrift in a sea of chaos, Christians who know Scripture and the power of God recognize these as the birth pangs promised by Jesus when He was speaking to His disciples on the Mount of Olives. He said,

You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows (Matthew 24:6-8).

We who are Christians should not be surprised by what we see. Not only do we know that these difficult times are coming; we know that they must come. Why? Because God has already seen it happening. He is above time. That's why He said, "I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done" (Isaiah 46:9-10). He knows what is going to happen. He is not watching Eastern Europe and wondering, *Will it be Russia or Ukraine who wins?* He knows all that is going to happen, and all that happens will do so according to His will.

That is why a book written 2,000 years ago can give us insight as to what is going on today. The Bible will not go out of date because it is a timeless message from a timeless God. When Israel celebrated its sixtieth anniversary in 2008, I visited the Israel Museum, where they were showing an authentic Isaiah scroll from 2,200–2,300 years ago. I had my Hebrew Bible open as I read the words on that scroll. You know what? They matched! The Bible has not and will not change. If you are looking to make sense of the world around you—to understand the times and seasons—don't turn to Facebook

or YouTube. Dr. Google does not have an advanced-enough degree. The only place you will find truth 100 percent of the time is in the Word of God.

Targeted Truth 5: When Jesus returns, we need to be found doing the Father's business.

When I was in the military, we would occasionally have barracks inspections. Typically, these were unannounced. Why? Because our superiors knew that if they told us there would be an inspection every Thursday at 10:00 a.m., then Friday through Wednesday the barracks would be a mess. Then, Thursday at 9:00 a.m., we would have one hour of panicked cleaning so that all would be spotless for the review. Instead, in their great wisdom, they left the timing of the inspections ambiguous so that we always had to have everything perfect and ready for scrutiny. This preparedness is what Jesus was speaking of when He said,

Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them (Luke 12:35-37).

Unfortunately, if Jesus were to return today, He would not find His church ready. He would find His church distracted. Rather than teaching the Word of God, too many pastors are preaching sensationalism. Topical clickbait sermons are widespread, particularly when it comes to COVID. “The vaccine is the mark of the beast,” they announce, causing panic and division within their congregations. “Take it and

you are irretrievably bound for hell.” Believe me, there is a lot to criticize about the vaccines, but it is not the mark of the beast. Will the church even be around for the mark of the beast? Absolutely not.

I have even read of pastors saying that the coronavirus is tied into the work of the first rider of the apocalypse.

Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, “Come and see.” And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer (Revelation 6:1-2).

You saw it there, didn’t you? Plain as the nose on your face. The rider is wearing a crown. The word *corona* means “crown.” Boom! Proof positive right in the text. That same logic also led me to discover that since Corona is the name of a beer, the rider’s saddle likely sported a drink holder. There’s got to be some deep theological truth in that tidbit too.

This kind of irresponsible, unbiblical teaching is causing so much fear and division in the church. Love and Christlike compassion for one another has been replaced in many circles by vicious attacks over mandates and vaccines. My heart broke when I read this *New York Post* headline: “Pastor threatens to kick out mask-wearing worshippers from church.”⁶ Can you imagine Jesus getting up in the front of a synagogue and saying, “You, in the yarmulke, you think that will save you? Get out of here! And you with the phylacteries, take a hike!” What are we turning our churches into?

Satan is gaining victory after victory as the church becomes more divided than ever. What’s sad is that frequently, people are battling over issues that don’t pertain to salvation. Jesus laid out a mandate for His disciples when He said, “A new commandment I give to you,

that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35). Jesus had plenty to disagree with when it came to the attitudes and actions of His disciples. Still, He loved them sacrificially, and He told them that they must have that same kind of love for one another.

In the church, we are each other’s “one anothers.” We may not always agree when it comes to certain issues, be they doctrinal, political, or social. However, we do agree on the gospel, and we are all striving to be led by the Holy Spirit in righteousness and holiness. That must unite us together, and it must unite us now! We cannot wait until ten minutes before inspection to clean up our act. We must be about the Father’s gospel business today and every day until our Savior returns to take us to be with Him.

Targeted Truth 6: Believers will be raptured before the tribulation.

So many pastors have bought into the deception that there is no rapture of the church, and they are teaching that belief to their congregations. Confidently, they hold up their Bibles and announce, “The word *rapture* isn’t even found in this book.” And to a degree, they’re right! But neither is the word *replacement*—just saying.

I’ve got news for the naysayers: *rapture* is in the Bible. It’s just not in your English Bible. The New Testament was written in Greek, and one of the words used was *harpazo*, which you’ll typically find translated as “caught up” or “caught away.” When the Greek New Testament was translated into Latin, this word became *rapturo*, which is where we get the word *rapture*. So, when people say, “Paul didn’t believe in a rapture. Neither did Jesus,” my response is the same one that Jesus gave to the Sadducees: “You obviously don’t know the Scriptures or the power of God.” We’ll get into more detail about this in a later chapter.

This lack of belief in a rapture is so sad because it steals away one of the great hopes of the Bible. The strength of this deception is so great that some people appear to be hoping that there will be no rapture, as if avoiding the horrors of the tribulation would be a terrible thing. A number of years back, a blogger dropped a post called “9 Reasons We Can Be Confident Christians Won’t Be Raptured Before the Tribulation.”⁷ It was, at its core, a summary of an article by a well-known and highly respected theologian⁸ as to why we can rest easy that we’ll get to enjoy firsthand God’s wrath upon His creation. Phew, what a relief! I really wanted to see what a 100-pound hailstone looks like!

But we are not destined for the wrath of God. If you want to go through the tribulation, have at it. Just remember to stretch your neck out so your executioners get a clean shot. And it’s not that I’m desperate to conjure up a reason why I don’t have to endure the horrors of those tragic years. My hope doesn’t come from devising some outlandish interpretation or uncovering hidden meanings in the biblical text. My hope comes from Paul’s words—he wrote very clearly, “God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing” (1 Thessalonians 5:9-12). No wrath for the Lord’s church. That’s as comforting as a warm sheep’s wool blanket on a damp winter’s night.

DEEP-SEATED DECEPTION

Truth is under assault. Satan has already garnered a tremendous victory in the world through his lies. Sadly, he also has a foothold in the church, which continues to strengthen. Will his deceptions ever end? Thankfully, they will. John wrote:

I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He

laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while (Revelation 20:1-3).

There will come a time when the devil will be shut up so that he can't deceive anymore. His deceptions, however, are so ingrained in this fallen world that he doesn't need to be present for his influence to spread. Even during the idealistic period of Christ's reign on the earth when Satan is held captive, corrupted flesh will continue to corrupt souls. When Satan is finally released, he will find a populace ready and willing to follow his lead. If the deception will continue to be so strong when he is bound, imagine its power when he once again has free reign.

But before we get to that 1,000-year period of Satan being bound in the abyss, the world must undergo a seven-year period of God's wrath. No, the tribulation has not begun, but by all evidence, it is close. How can we know that? What will it look like when it comes? Both are good questions. But before we can determine the *what* of the tribulation, we need to examine its *why*. That is what the next chapter is all about.