***The Tribulation Period, No. 2

RV46-02***

In the book of the Revelation, one of the churches the Lord Jesus has addressed is the church in the city of Philadelphia. This is segment number 14 in our study of this letter which is found in Revelation 3:7-13. The fundamentalist spiritual maturity structure type believer in the Philadelphia church has been promised by Jesus Christ that he would not go through the future tribulation period of world history. The church, as the body of Christ and His future bride, is removed from the earth in what we call the rapture before the era of the tribulation begins. I want to read this passage that gives us that truth in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17. This passage is speaking about the same thing that Revelation 3:10 is referring to. The saints in Philadelphia were told that they would be kept; they would be preserved; and, they would be guarded from the hour of trial of tribulation which will come upon all the world to try them who dwell upon the earth.

**The Rapture**

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13, we read, "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them who are asleep (that is, Christians who have died0, that you sorrow not, even as others who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again. Even so, them also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the Word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord (Christians who are alive on the earth when Jesus returns) shall not precede (go before) them who are asleep (Christians who have died.) For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God. The dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so shall we ever be with the Lord."

Those of you who have friends and loved ones who are who are believers and who have died are in verse 16. Those people are in verse 16. Those of you who are now alive are, in all likelihood, are going to find yourself in verse 17. When the Lord returns, you will be alive on this earth. In any case, both living and dead Christians will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. His feet never touch this earth. The Lord Jesus does not at that time return to this earth. He simply meets us in the air, and with the angelic hosts, escorts us into heaven itself. Then begins another series of events which we shall get to in the next verse or two, which are coming up, relative to the judgment of our lifestyle and the consequent rewarding or loss of reward for that lifestyle.

While that is going on in heaven, and while the marriage to Jesus Christ takes place in heaven and the rewards are passed out, and all these judgments are made, back on earth, a terrible time in human history has broken forth. This is the time which is referred to here in Revelation 3:10 as the time of tribulation that comes upon all the earth.

This is a time when there are worldwide divine judgments which are reminiscent of the Mosaic plagues which were exercised upon Egypt. The tribulation judgments are really an exercise of God's wrath on unbelievers. These are described "in the words then that dwell upon the earth." These are people who have rejected the Word of God, and who have rejected salvation, and they find themselves left behind at the rapture as unbelievers.

**Believers will not be Part of the Tribulation**

In Revelation 6:17, we read, "For the great day of His wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?" This is the same era referred to in Revelation 3:10. In 1 Thessalonians 5:9, we have this promise to those who are believers: "For God has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." Revelation 6:17 says, "For the great day of His wrath is to come. Who will be able to stand?" 1 Thessalonians 5:9 says, "We who are believers have not been appointed to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." Wrath is not in the future of the believer. Once you are born again, all possible experience of divine wrath is in the past – never, never again to be faced.

**The Tribulation**

The tribulation period is a period of seven years. It's the time of God's dealing with Israel before the establishment of the worldwide messianic kingdom which is to be ruled by Jesus Christ from Jerusalem. The timetable for these prophetic events was revealed to Daniel, and we have to go back to Daniel to get that timetable. When we do research Daniel, we discover that 483 years of a total of 490 were fulfilled up to the very crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Daniel was told that God has 490 more years of dealing with the Jewish people, from the time the order is given for them to go back after the Babylonian captivity and rebuild the temple and rebuild the city. When that order was given, 483 years of history cranked by. We have the monumental work of Sir Robert Anderson in The Coming Prince. In that book, he chronologically researched the order of dates. Nobody has ever refuted this book. He discovered that the 483 years ended at the very day that Jesus Christ was crucified. This was fantastic fulfillment of Scripture. That's where He was cut off.

Suddenly, God stopped dealing with the Jewish people. Suddenly, seven years of the 490 seemed to have evaporated. What actually happened was that the church age interrupted the divine dealings with the Jewish nation, while the bride of Christ has been gathered out from all humanity. After the church is complete, which is what God is doing now, in between year 483 and year 484, which begins the tribulation period, God is taking out the church (you and me) to be a special close bride relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ for all eternity. When the church is finished (when the church is complete), then the world's darkest hour begins.

The tribulation era is a time of mass human suffering, and that's the only way you can describe it – just mass human suffering. The world is free at that time from all Christian influences and all Christian controls. Secular humanism is then in full control of all humanity. The nations of the world will line up under Satan in open rejection of God, and in open rejection of all biblical principles. The angelic warfare rises in its intensity to a crescendo of human agony. The promise to the church believer to escape the tribulation horrors is indeed no small blessing.

**A Blessed Hope**

We don't want to get too much into the question that there are a few Christians, here and there, who have a death wish type of mentality that just cannot believe that the grace of God is going to prevent us from suffering the tribulation horrors. They come up with various excuses for justifying the idea that the church is going to go through the tribulation, or partly through it. But nothing could be further from the truth, or out of keeping with what is called "our blessed hope." After you get through with this session, there will be one thing that will be very clear in your mind – that nobody could call the tribulation period experience "a blessed hope." If you and I potentially are going to go through the tribulation, the one thing you would never call it is "a blessed hope." A "blessed hope" is something you're looking forward to see. "A blessed hope" is what Mrs. Ken Boozer is looking forward to, but not the nightmare of the tribulation. That is not a blessed hope. It's just because people don't stop to think, as I hope we can do in this session, and get a feeling for what's going to happen during that seven years. Then you would have a totally different perspective on the possibility of Christians being thrust into that kind of a situation. It is no small blessing to escape the tribulation horrors.

**Liberalism**

A God of loving kindness and patience has, of course, given His warnings through Scripture and through Bible doctrine expositors worldwide for centuries that this era is coming. Liberalism today connotes all that opposes divine viewpoint, and it is liberalism which reaches a climax in the tribulation period. The key features of liberalism today are expressed in the term "quality of life." You hear that dropped from politicians' lips all the time: "the quality of life." They say that this is why women should be able to afford a living human being, because their quality of life would be affected – either the mothers or the child's, and so on. There is really a grim humor in the tribulation, because the tribulation and the organization of the world at that time is going to be the climax of all that liberalism stands for today. I'm going to let you judge as to what kind of quality of life they're going to experience once it gets rolling, and God judgments begin falling.

So, today, mankind is struggling to create a world of peace; of prosperity; and, of happiness while completely abandoning the Bible. Liberalism rules supreme. Apart from the Word of God and apart from the Bible, mankind has no guidelines to follow to reach peace, prosperity, and happiness. So, the world today is on a collision course with Almighty God, and the tribulation period is the point of impact. That's where it all explodes.

So, in this session, I would pause to say that if you are here as an unbeliever, without the certainty of possessing the absolute righteousness which you will receive from Jesus Christ when you trust in Him as your savior; if you are here in that condition, then you will face the tribulation if you are alive when the Lord comes to remove the church from this earth, and to permit this era (this final seven years of divine judgment) to fall upon the world, and, particularly, upon the Jewish people, All who are followers of a system of trying to satisfy divine justice by means of human good works, I can guarantee you, are going to face the tribulation scene if they are alive at that time. If you are here today trusting in some kind of human doing to meet the justice and the holiness of God and the wrath of God against you, you're whistling in the dark, and you are doomed to face the tribulation if you do not reverse course. I cannot urge you strongly enough, therefore, to flee to the Lord Jesus Christ for safety; for eternal peace; eternal prosperity; and, eternal happiness. If you do, you will not only escape the tribulation era, but you will find that, after the tribulation is over, and Jesus Christ takes over control of all the world, you will be ruling with Him in the millennial kingdom.

**The United States**

So, we're going to have a preview right now of what we Christians are going to escape. All of the current world events are lining up humanity for the tribulation period. The religion of secular humanism is rapidly replacing all Christian concepts. Economic systems of socialism are rapidly destroying initiative. Promotion of internationalism for a world government is widespread. In our country, since the days of Woodrow Wilson, the Council of Foreign Relations, and in recent times, the Trilateral Commission have been exclusively devoted to bringing about world governments to destroying, particularly, the sovereignty of the United States, because when the United States goes down as an independent sovereign nation, then world governments will very quickly become a reality. It is only God's client nation, the United States, that prevents world government today. That's all that stands in its way. Everything else is ready to go. Everything else could be imposed. Until the United States is removed, world government is not a possibility.

Today, there is the discrediting of the Bible, not only by unbelievers, but even by believers, through the rejection of the doctrine of inerrancy. Inflation through deficit spending has become a way of life – government by bureaucrats. The concept of spending your way to prosperity, since the days of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, has captured the thinking of Americans. It's a terrible disease, and most Americans don't even know they have it. They don't realize that they are functioning on the concept of government being able to provide an individual with prosperity. Of course, if government does, it must do so by taking away somebody else's prosperity so that there is eventually less prosperity all around. That's where we have come now.

The world power blocs are aligning themselves into the four major groups that the Bible recognizes. There is, worst of all, the decline of the United States as God's client nation since the time of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and the reinterpretation of the Constitution. It has been reinterpreted from its original meaning and intention of limiting government to what it could do, to being reinterpreted by the Supreme Court that general welfare means the government can do anything it doggone well pleases, as long as it views that as being beneficial to somebody.

**Communism**

The United States, of course, is a thing of great concern to us. The question always comes, as we look at the tribulation, where is the United States in this? Well, there are some very limited directions of where the United States can fit into all this. One, obviously, is that the United States can be taken over by communism. That it is the most desirable route for Russia. Russia does not want to come into a country that's been devastated by war. They want to take this rich country while it's functioning – a country that they have not been able to build, and a country that they could not put together, and they want to be able to come in, and to take this nation over intact. So, the primary direction and role of Soviet Russia today is to turn the United States into a communist country. This has been done through the road of Fabian Socialism, which we've already studied – gradual socialism, by adding a little bit of government control; a little bit of government benefit; a little bit of government welfare; and, by doing this a little piece at a time. That was the system used in England to bring England down. This has been the system since the days of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the domination of the Democratic Party. The philosophy of the Democratic Party is Fabian Socialism – gradual, increasing social programs where the government provides benefits from people by taking money from those who are the producers. That's one possibility of where the United States fits in – that we just become a communist country.

**A Nuclear Attack**

The second possibility is that Russia strikes us with a nuclear attack, and establishes world communism by destroying the United States. The United States, of course, today is comparatively helpless to defend itself. If Russia were to decide tomorrow morning to take over the world by destroying the United States with a nuclear attack, there is no way the United States could prevent it. In all likelihood, most Americans would be killed. The government has already established in its analysis reports that 160 million of us would die with the first blow of the attack. What would be left would be in such tattered shreds, particularly after the last four years of systematically taking apart our military defense system, that there would be very little we could do. That's another option of a possibility of where the United States goes.

**Western Europe**

The third one is that the United States, of course, because it is a descendant of the Roman Empire (a fragment of a nation descended from the Roman Empire), that it becomes aligned again with Western Europe. The power base has to go to Western Europe. The United States will not be a powerful nation in the tribulation. I can tell you that. It will play a very secondary role. The power base shifts to Western Europe. Western Europe, of course, now is infinitely stronger economically and politically and socially than the United States is. Most people do not appreciate what has happened when those ten nations of the European Economic Community have gotten together. They are a power force in the world that is eclipsing anything that the United States and that Russia can ever hope to be. As they gain momentum, it will become increasingly clear that that's where the power of the world has shifted.

**Tracking Everybody**

There is not only this decline of the United States, but there is, of course, the computer control of society, which gives government full controls. This is increasingly taking place. Now the government wants to make it a law that every baby born must be given a Social Security number, and they might even just put the laser number on his forehead or something, so you could easily find it ... and that would provide a simple way. But what is the purpose of this? Well, we want to bracket everybody. We want to button everybody down. Well, it is absolutely possible today, with the master three-story computer in Brussels, that everybody in the world can be identified and kept track of. That is what is being programed in that computer now.

**Sexual Immorality**

Sexual immorality is rampant today. I mean blatantly rampant. I saw a television talk show the other day where a man was there with his wife and his three or four girlfriends that he has. They were talking about how relaxed and how sophisticated they are about marriage, and how open it all is, and how it has become a very loving situation. Our national television would even give these creeps time to sit there, carrying on in their sophisticated manner, and he has written a book about this new lifestyle. You must imagine God in heaven, sitting there looking down on that program, shaking His head and knowing what He is getting ready to do to everyone who subscribes to that kind of viewpoint.

**Drug Use**

The use of drugs in our society, of course, is lining up for the tribulation world. The tribulation world is going to be a heavy drug society. Our reports this week on television on the drug abuse in this country indicated that there is no way that we can stop anything but a tenth of the drugs that come into this country – one-tenth, which is nothing. So, most of what people are bringing in, and most of the drug traffic is running full speed, and nobody can touch it and reduce it. In the tribulation, it will be greater than ever.

**Peace between the Antichrist and Israel**

Well, as you think about the tribulation period, a period of seven years, it is important to think about it as being divided in two, because that's how the Bible divides it: three-and-a-half years and three-and-a-half years. Some dramatic things take place in the middle which then affect the rest of the tribulation period. This beginning point is when the rapture of the church takes place. Now, the prophetic program that God has outlined to Daniel, again, begins taking place. The last seven years, that have never been fulfilled of the 490 predicted, now come into action. The antichrist, we're told in Daniel 9:27, signs a seven-year treaty with the nation of Israel to assure them protection against all attacks by all world powers. The antichrist (the man of sin) becomes a powerful force in the world because he is the protector of Israel.

**The Four Power Blocs**

This man is the head of the Western Confederacy, which probably is going to grow out of the current European Economic Market. Other world power blocs exist at that time. There is the power of the north, which is dominated by Russia. There is the power of the south, which is dominated by Egypt and African nations. There is the power bloc of the east which is dominated by China and other oriental groups. So, these groups are all in kind of a point of equilibrium with one another as the tribulation begins. The Bible indicates that Israel now feels secure because she has this powerful man as her protector. Israel then proceeds to fully reestablish its temple; its worship; its sacrifices; and, the whole bit. Israel believes that it has finally come into a position of peace.

Again, here is something that people in the United States often are not able to enter into – that the Jews today live under constant threat. They live under constant fear. They never know, when they go to a supermarket, but what something is going to blow up in their face if they pick something off of a fruit stand. I mean, it is not just out there someplace else or with somebody else. It is everybody. You cannot go into airport security even to leave the country without going through a series of interrogators who all ask you a series of questions that are identical in order to see if there is anything that you have that somebody has given you – something to take out that is a potential bomb that's going to be on that plane, or a terrorist set-up of some kind. So, the Jew finally gets somebody who says, "You can breathe a sigh of relief. Nobody will touch you." The antichrist, who rules the Western confederacy which will be so powerful, will indeed be a force that can give Israel that protection.

**The Seven Seals**

So, everything looks like it's coming up roses, and the tribulation period begins. Now, God in Heaven, beginning in Revelation 6 hands His Son, Jesus Christ, a book in which is recorded the judgments of God against humanity, which begins now here at the beginning of the tribulation and runs through, primarily, and in some degree, even beyond the first part. These are in the form of what are called seals in Revelation 6. We shall look at this in greater detail later. We're just going to make a fast preview now. Here is when the world has settled down now. They've had to figure out what in the world happened to all these millions of people. They're glad to see that the Moral Majority is gone. They're glad to see that Falwell is off their back. They're glad to see that all these kooks that were running around trying to change the laws in Congress to what they call biblical principles are gone. In a way, it's really nice to have that crowd out of their hair. So, the dust settles, and everything gets quiet again, and they find that life is going to go on, and they're better off without those people. As a matter of fact, these people have left much wealth behind of various kinds. They've left so many possessions behind that the people who've been left behind have been immediately enriched by the absorption of these material benefits.

**The First Seal**

So, the Lord Jesus breaks the first seal, and we read about this in the first two verses. Revelation 6:2: "And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were, the noise of thunder; one of the four living creatures saying, 'Come,' and I saw, and behold, a white horse. He that sat on him had a bow, and a crown was given onto him, and he went forth conquering and to conquer." Again, on the basis of Scripture, and the use of symbols in the Scripture, we bring those symbols back out, and we apply it to this verse, and we have an indication of what he's talking about.

**The Antichrist**

This rider on the white horse is Mr. Antichrist himself. He is "the little horn" of Daniel 7. He is the beast that is referred to in Revelation 13. This man riding the white horse has the capacity to make war. He has a bow and he has a crown of authority. The result is that he establishes a false peace on this earth. This peace is established by him by a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. He settles it simply by becoming the protector of Israel, and having a position of power now from which to function such that the Arab nations do not dare challenge him.

So, here is a peace which is brought upon this earth. It is a peace for which he has his own designs. Anytime evil men want peace, it is for evil designs. All of you are aware of the fact that the ruling authorities of Soviet Russia are in a bit of a panic, because the United States has a president now that may just stand up, even with military force, to Soviet aggression. Anytime the Soviets feel their domination of the world is threatened, their doctrine tells them to have a peace conference. Most Americans, if they were asked, they would know that Soviet doctrine. They wouldn't know that that's communist doctrine. They don't know communist doctrine. But communist doctrine says that when your position of power is threatened, immediately call for a peace conference. Immediately get your enemy together in order to lull him to sleep, and to give them the impression that things aren't really too bad.

So, anytime Soviet Russia calls for a peace conference (a summit conference, such as she's calling for now), those who understand Soviet doctrine know exactly what's going on. They know exactly what the Soviets are asking for. They are disturbed by the fact that their potential expansion, imperialism, and aggression against other nations is going to be slowed down unless they can con the United States again. It yet remains to be seen whether that's possible or not, because unfortunately, nothing has changed in the United States government. We have a new president, but the Council of Foreign Relations – all those boys are still there in positions of authority. The Trilateral Commission – all those boys are still up there running the show. So, nothing has basically changed. The rhetoric has changed a little because a president, with a different viewpoint, forces them to change their rhetoric. But as to whether the procedures (the actions) are going to be changed, that's seriously in doubt. In any case, the antichrist comes in, and he begins a period of peace, and he brings an era where the dust is settled – but not for long.

**The Second Seal**

Jesus Christ breaks the second seal. Verse 3: "And when He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, 'Come,' and there went out another horse that was red. And power was given to him that sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another. And there was given to him a great sword." This second rider, which is on a red horse, represents warfare breaking out around the world in various places. The antichrist is not able to keep the conflicts from breaking out someplace in the world. The peace that he establishes is unstable. The U.N. will always try to stifle these. They'll have a lot of discussions at the UN. They'll pass a lot of resolutions, and they'll have a lot of meetings about these conditions, but the antichrist's world is not going to be a world free of warfare.

**The Third Seal**

Jesus Christ breaks the third seal. That's in verses 5 and 6: "And when He had opened the third seal, he heard the third living creature say, 'Come,' and I beheld, and lo, a black horse. He that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hands. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures say, 'A measure of wheat for a denarius, and three measures of barley for a denarius, and see that you don't hurt the oil and the wine. The balance denotes a shortage of food. Socialism always creates a shortage of food. You may have been wondering why the gold market is coming down – those of you who follow that. Why is gold breaking down below $500 dollars an ounce? It's because Russia is selling gold like crazy. When people sell gold in the public markets, it comes down in price. Why is Russia selling gold? Because she's in such desperation to buy food, because communist countries cannot raise enough food to feed their people.

Up to now, they've been able to buy from the United States on the wonderful basis where the United States gives them credit. They always buy food from the United States on credit. The government tells a farmer, "We will ensure that this will be paid." So, when Russia doesn't pay, the United States government very quietly has been paying the farmers for food that we have been selling to Russia, which she hasn't been paying for. So, up to now, she hasn't had to sell her gold. Now, the United States is playing dirty pool, and won't sell food to Russia anymore. And the United States is the only nation in the world that is stupid enough to go around and give food away on credit. So, now they can't find another country that's dumb enough to sell food on credit. The rest are saying, "Sure, we'll sell your food. You have your gold. We want payment in gold." So Russia is under the crimp of having to unload some of its vast gold supplies in order to have money to buy the food it needs.

Well, this problem of worldwide famine is going to become terrific. A denarius was a day's wage. That normally brought about eight measures of wheat, and it bought about 24 measures of barley. Under the tribulation, it's an inflation of one-to-three. Inflation will be running rampant, and people will have a hard time buying food. As a matter of fact, a denarius was a man's wage for one day, and he could buy three meals of cheap food for himself, without saying anything about his family. Or he could buy one good meal for himself for a day's wage. Inflation has gone hog wild.

However, there are some luxury items, oil and wine, which are abounding for the wealthy, and they are not to be touched. The oil has to do not only with cooking, but it had to do primarily with things like cosmetics and all kinds of luxury items that are associated with oil. The wine, of course, represents all the things of the good life.

All of this is brought about by the principle of deficit spending. That is the principle of government spending money that it doesn't have; printing money to pay for it; and, pretending that all is well. The result is that inflation has destroyed the buying power.

**The Fourth Seal**

Seal number 4 is in verses 7 and 8. "And when He had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, 'Come,' and I looked, and behold, a pale horse, and his name that sat upon him was death, and Hades followed with him. Power was given to them over the fourth part of the earth to kill with a sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth." Here we have one-fourth of humanity being destroyed. If there are 3 or 4 billion people upon the earth, a billion of them will die. That is an awful lot of human beings. They die by wars that are going on; by famine; by violence that is running rampant; by disease; and, by animals who are desperate themselves for food.

There would also probably be death by germ warfare. As you know, Russia has escalated its capacity for germ warfare to an unbelievable degree. One of the things that we have discovered about captured Russian tanks is that they are all designed for germ warfare. They're all seal-proof. The evidence is irrefutable now that they've been using germ warfare in Afghanistan, undoubtedly field-testing various types. In an explosion, whether it's atomic or any other kind, some people survive. But with germ warfare, it is almost impossible for anybody to survive once that's turned loose. The neutron bomb is another factor that can immediately kill people. There is no way to escape it once that thing is detonated.

You can see the huge task that's going to be involved here in just handling the bodies. So, suddenly, everything that began with all sunshine here for the antichrist with his power base as they move through the tribulation, and these seals have been broken, things are beginning to look worse and worse and worse. Now, suddenly, here at about the midpoint of the tribulation, one-fourth of all the humanity of the world is destroyed, and the shock waves are beginning to reverberate.

**The Fifth Seal**

In Revelation 6:9-11, the fifth seal expresses what the martyrs are feeling who are suffering death during the tribulation period. These are believers who have been slain on the earth during the tribulation because of their testimony for the Lord. This will be a common experience. How did they become believers? The tribulation began with everybody as an unbeliever. All of the believers are taken out at the rapture. The tribulation begins with everybody unsaved. Suddenly, here is this vast number of people who were born again. How are they born again? Because some of them begin remembering. They begin remembering things that they've heard in church. They begin remembering things about prophecies that they heard on tapes; on books they have read; popular shows they watched; and, Bibles that they began reading. They begin remembering these series of clever Hollywood programs on the antichrist that have broken out in recent years (and a new one is coming up). They remember those movies. They begin to put all this information together, and some of them finally realize that this was true, and they come to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. All of the Bible study tapes that are ever promoted in the world that are worth anything will be left behind to orient people, and they'll be there, often secretly, listened to. So, the Word of God will continue doing its work. These people are going to be saved. However, when they are marked, and when they're identified as believers, they will also be slaughtered.

In this passage, they call out, "How long, O lord, holy and true, do you not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on earth?" There's that expression again: "them they dwell on earth" – the unbelievers. So, they are given the white robes of ultimate sanctification, and they're told to be patient for a little while as a few more of their brethren are still going to be killed.

**The Sixth Seal**

Then the sixth seal is broken in Revelation 12-17. Here is havoc in nature: "And I beheld, when He had opened the sixth seal, and lo, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood." A singularly great earthquake takes place. As you know, the earth's surface and the floor of the oceans are covered with a network of fault lines. So, no earthquake is an isolated incident. It's all connected to this web of fault lines on the earth. The geologists now realize that the earth's crust is capable of fantastic upheavals. When they had the great Alaska earthquake, somebody had a home movie camera, and they were shooting movies across a field. I saw the film. As the earthquake was taking place, at first I thought it was water. Then I realized that he was shooting across a field, and the earth was coming in waves. It looked like you were looking out across the sea with the waves heaving up and down as that earthquake was pitching. The earth's crust has fantastic flexibility under pressure. A killer quake is a nightmarish experience, and it will be common in the tribulation period.

**Earthquakes**

The Bible tells us that when earthquakes increase, they are a sign of the nearness of the Lord's return (Matthew 24:3-4 and Matthew 24:7). I need not remind you that if there's anything that you're hearing more and more about in the news today, it is about earthquakes – and killer earthquakes. The one most recent is the one in Greece. But I mean, it's not coming along just once a year now. There is hardly a month that goes by but what Italy gets hit; a South American country gets hit; or, Greece gets hit. Repeatedly, almost every month, there are major earthquakes. And, of course, everybody expects California to get hit just momentarily.

"And the stars of the heavens fell upon the earth even as a fig tree cast her untimely figs when she is shaken of a mighty wind." So, here you have the sun darkened; the moon takes on the appearance of blood; and, and you have a meteor shower that strikes the earth. "And the heavens departed as a scroll that is rolled together, and every mountain and island were moved out of their place." Heaven is rolled back. It's a little hard to interpret that exactly, but it seems like what it means is that heaven is rolled back, and perhaps people even see God sitting on His throne observing this scene. As we shall see later, there is no doubt in anybody's mind, who is living in the tribulation, who is doing these things. It is very clear and they direct blasphemy toward God because they know that He is responsible for their suffering. So it seems that the heavens are rolled back to let them see, while all this is taking place in nature, that God is up there pushing the buttons and pulling the levers and making all this possible.

"Every mountain island moved out of its place." Mountains and islands moved. These are upheavals in the earth's crust. All of this brings fantastic bewilderment into the antichrist's world. In the situation that now exists here, during particularly the first three-and-a-half years, great terror has struck these people. What did they do?

Revelation 6:15: "And the kings of the earth; the great men; the rich men; the chief captains; the mighty men; every slave; and, every free man hid themselves in the dens and the rocks of the earth. Whether you're a government ruler or whoever you are, everybody is in the same boat, and they're seeking to hide themselves in caves: "And say to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him that sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of His wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?'" This confirms the thought that when the heavens are rolled back, what it means is that the door is open to heaven, so to speak, and people can see God there functioning and performing these events.

Matthew 24:4-31 give these same events. It's fantastic! It gives these same identical events in this order as the seals extend on through the whole tribulation period. We're not going to go through those, but you might like to compare that yourself. In Matthew 24:4-31, Jesus was saying, "Here's what's going to come to the world." He gave them the same picture as that which we have in these seals.

**The Harlot Church**

During this time, the ecumenical church is going to rise to the zenith of its power. This church is described in Revelation 17:1-6. This is going to be a world-wide religion. The ecumenical movement, as we know it today, is going to end up in a harlot church. That is the way the Bible refers to her. In Revelation 17:5, we read, "And upon her forehead was written the name Mystery Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the earth." In our previous studies in Revelation, we've already seen that Babylon was the source of the Nimrod religion, the kingdom of man on this earth, opposing the kingdom of God and mystery. Mystery Babylon had a religious system which came down and was incorporated into the Roman Catholic Church today. All of the basic things that the Roman Catholicism does in its worship, and its doctrines, and its beliefs: purgatory; the mass; the nuns; the monasteries; the convents; priesthood; and, the whole bit – were absorbed from the Babylon mystery religions. This group now reaches the epitome of its power as the religions of the world are unified by the ecumenical movement.

**The Ecumenical Movement**

So, the ecumenical movement today, again, is laying the groundwork for what is coming. It's not an innocent: "Just let's all get together and be good friends." It will rise to the height of its power.

There's an uncomfortable thing for the antichrist at this point. Up to the middle of the tribulation period, the antichrist is here, and the woman is riding him. She is on his back. She is controlling him. This is an irritant to him. But up to this point, he needs the support of this worldwide religious system which backs him, and apparently is opposing the communist bloc. This false church opposes true believers, and it opposes all witnesses of Jesus Christ. Revelation 17:6 describes how there is constant persecution of all the Philadelphia type believers: "And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus, and when I saw her, I wondered with a great wonder." What did John mean by this? "Wonder with a great wonder" is a way of saying, "I was just amazed. My breath was taken away. I couldn't believe it." What is it that has shocked John? Well, the thing that has shocked John is that he's looking at what is called "the church of the Lord Jesus Christ." John looks at the church of the Lord Jesus Christ and he sees marked upon it all of the stamp of the ancient Babylonian religions which John knew well. He sees the church of the Lord Jesus Christ marked with the word "harlot," a terrible word. John cannot believe that this very church representing God is killing true believers. John says, "Now, that is amazing. That really shocks me." Yet that is exactly what is going to be taking place during the first three-and-a-half years of this tribulation era.

**The 144,000**

There is a special group of 144,000 Jewish evangelists, and they will be given immunity from death. 144,000 Jews are going to be raised up: 12,000 from each of the ancient 12 tribes. They will be propagating salvation. It will not be the gospel of the grace that brings you into the church. That era is passed. It will be propagating salvation, again trusting in Christ as Savior indeed, and it will be salvation by grace, but they will be back on Old Testament ground. These people, the 144,000 Jewish evangelists, will be witnessing, and they will be given protection. Revelation 7:4-8 tell us that they cannot be killed. They're immune, no matter what the antichrist tries to do.

How do you think he's going to explain all these things? Here are these terrible things happening in the world. Well, the explanation, of course, is going to be by managed news (censored news), and plausible explanations will be given. Today, we have no appreciation for how little the Russian people, for example, know. What they know is managed news. They are given perspectives that the government gives them, and that's all. The only thing that raises doubts in their mind is when they hear the voice of American radio programs, and these programs that override into Russia that give them the scoop on what's going on. But otherwise, the population is very carefully controlled by the information that it's given. Huge amounts of money will relieve the disaster areas of God's plagues, and great debates will be conducted in the U.N. which will give them the impression that they're on top of things. The picture will be given that somehow things are going to get better.

**The Northern Confederacy**

The Northern Confederacy, which is Russia and certain specific allies, who incidentally, are falling into association very rapidly with her. One of them is only half with her now – the ancient nation of Persia. Half of Persia is known as Iran today, and the other half is known as Afghanistan. Libya is already in the camp. Ethiopia is already in the camp. Togarmah (East Germany) is already in the camp. All of these are to line up with the northern power, the Bible says, before she swoops down upon Israel. The association is not yet complete. Iran has still not been taken over, and neither has Turkey. Turkey is the other one that's to be part of that association. But most of them have already come into the communist-controlled orbit.

So, this Northern Confederacy is going to be in a Cold War standoff with the antichrist at the midpoint of the tribulation. At that point, Russia decides that she's ready to go. With her allies, she swoops down upon the nation of Israel. Mind you, all this breaks out when all these terrible things have already been taking place upon the earth that we've looked at so far. The worst is yet to come. You haven't seen anything yet as to what kind of a world the tribulation world is going to be, and why it's a blessed hope that we are going to escape it. But with all this turmoil, and Russia sort of counting, apparently, that the world is in really desperate straits, the Russians always move when they think that no one is going to stand against them. If they see somebody put a muscle out and threaten them, Russia will always back off, because Stalin said always go two steps forward and one step back anytime you have to. And then go two steps forward and take one step back until your enemies are again at ease. Then take another two forward. Never jeopardize yourself until you are overwhelmingly powerful so that they cannot stop you. So, Russia backs off until this point. Now she moves.

Now, the antichrist is desperate. The world is in desperate straits, and things look serious. Suddenly, the communication rooms gets an amazing report. They tear it off the telex; run upstairs to the antichrist; and, say, "Read this." And there, before his unbelieving eyes, he reads that five-sixths of the Russian invading force has been destroyed by natural events from outer space. The Bible tells us that God will cut down five-sixths of Russia and her military forces. Only one-sixth of them will be left to limp back to Russia. And the attack against Israel will be stopped. The Jews will be burning the debris and cleaning up the debris of war for the next seven months. It will take them, the Bible says, seven months to get all the bodies picked up all over Israel that will have died in that destruction. It will take seven months. Do you know how many bodies that is to take seven months to clean up bodies in every place after that, when they pretty well have it cleared up? As people move along, they will establish a system of markers that if somebody stumbles across a body, he'll put a marker there so that the burial crews will come later and clean that one up. The devastation will be unbelievable.

**The World Ruler**

But, of course, it will rejoice the heart of the antichrist to see all these guys piled up in dead heaps, because now a power vacuum has developed. And he, who at this point was ruler only over Western Europe (perhaps with the United States as an affiliate), now becomes the ruler of the whole earth. He takes over full domination over every nation on the earth, and he becomes what he always wanted to be, and what Satan wants him to be: a true substitute Christ – an anti-Christ, in place of the ruler of the world, Jesus Christ.

What the devil is doing is trying to forestall the millennial kingdom. He is trying to forestall the prediction of Jesus Christ ruling over all the earth by putting his own man over the nations of the earth before God can execute the plan. So now with Russia gone, he is clearly able to take over.

**The Two Witnesses**

Now, there is a little irritant in the woodpile here. Revelation 11:3-13 will tell you about that. Two witnesses are raised up. During this whole three-and-a-half year period, they have been prophesying, and they have been immune from death just like the 144,000 Jewish evangelists. Every time the antichrist sends someone out to cut them down, something happens. They bring fire down from heaven, or they do something such that they are untouchable. But they bring misery to the antichrist's world, because they prevent the rain from coming; and, they go around turning water into blood. Now, that's irritating. For a guy to go around turning your freshwater springs into blood, that'll make anybody mad. Then they go around bringing all kinds of plagues of one kind or another on the earth. These guys are just a nuisance, and they want to get rid of them. They're an irritant, but they can't touch them until, suddenly, right here in the middle of the tribulation, God withdraws his protective hand, and the two of them are killed.

Well, when they bring that communication from the calm room downstairs up to the antichrist, he really goes bananas over this one. He says, "I want you to leave them right there in the street. I want you to get all the television cameras on them. I want 24-hour coverage all over the world. He controls the whole world now. Now, Russia is gone, and now the other thing that has bugged him were these two witnesses, because they have been dealing misery, because they've been the last of the Philadelphia type believers communicating on the earth along with those 144,000. But these two witnesses, apparently, bear a tremendous impact on the world's thinking.

And so the result is that for three-and-a-half days, their bodies are permitted to lie out in the street there, and people rejoice. It's not only the antichrist, but all the people of the world are so delighted that they decide to push Christmas ahead. So they start having Christmas there to celebrate the death of these, and they give each other presents. Revelation 11:10 says, "And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another, because these two prophets tormented them that dwell on the earth." Now, I know that this idea is going to start in California. That's the state of flowers, sunshine, fruits, and nuts. I'm sure that this is where this whole idea is going to come up. They'll probably say, "Let's put up Christmas trees. Let's just have a wonderful time. We'll move Christmas up early this year to celebrate this wonderful gift from the gods to us to get rid of these irritants."

While they're in the midst of their revelry about these two witnesses, verse 12 brings it to a sudden halt: "After three-and-a-half days, the spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet, and great fear fell upon them who saw them?" Now, who's going to see them? Everybody in the world is watching television: "And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, 'Come up here.' And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies beheld them." They're watching these people rising before their eyes, and the television cameras are following them, and the antichrist goes into a panic, saying, "Stop it. Blank it out. Get it off the air. Don't let them see that." But it's too late. Everybody sees it. And they have all of these videotape machines so you can run reruns. And then that evening, everybody is sitting around watching these things again: ... "Look at this one now. Isn't it something?" Here are all these fantastic scenes taking place? These guys are floating in the air. They were dead. There's no doubt about it. They were slaughtered dead.

Now, that throws fear into the people of the world. Yet there are some poor Christians who think it would be so wonderful for us as the church to call this "our blessed hope."

Well, the Bible tells us in verse 13 that the departure of the witnesses is followed by a great earthquake, and a part of the city of Jerusalem falls, and 7,000 people are killed. The remnant were terrified, and gave glory to the God of heaven. And the ecumenical church itself, in the middle of the tribulation (Revelation 17:16) is destroyed. The antichrist turns against the Jews. He sets himself up in their temple as their God (Matthew 24:15, 2 Thessalonians 2:4). He points to false prophets now to be the ruler over all the religious system of the world (Revelation 13: 11-18), and Satan then comes to his final face-off at high noon. It is the big shoot out of all eternity out in outer space between his majesty the devil, Lucifer, and the mighty archangel Michael. In the next session, we'll tell you how it all came out.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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