



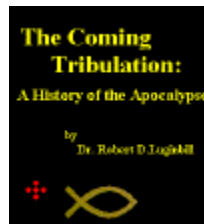
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The Coming Tribulation: A History of the Apocalypse

Part 7

Preparing for Tribulation: Revelation 22:6-21

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- I. The Importance of Alertness: Revelation 22:6-21
- II. A Tribulational Code of Conduct
- III. Paradigms for the Tribulation
- IV. Preparing for Tribulation
- V. The Kingdom of God

I. The Importance of Alertness: Revelation 22:6-21

(6) And he said to me, "These words are worthy of being believed and are true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets sent me, His angel, to demonstrate to His servants what must happen quickly. (7) Behold, He is coming quickly. Happy is he who guards the words of the prophecy of this book [in his heart]." (8) And I, John, am the one who saw and heard these things. And when I had seen and heard them, I fell down at the feet of the angel who was showing them to me in order to worship him. (9) And he said to me, "Don't do this! I am a fellow servant of your brethren and of the prophets and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God!" (10) And he said to me, "Do not seal up these words of this

book's prophetic message], for the time is near. (11) Let the unrighteous continue to act unrighteously, and him who is filthy continue in his filthiness, and let the righteous continue to produce righteousness, and him who is sanctified continue in his sanctification". (12) "Behold", [says the Lord], "I am coming quickly, and I bring my wages with me for each to be repaid according to his work. (13) I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. (14) Happy are they who wash their robes so that their right of access to the gates will also be like their right of access to the tree of life, that they may enter the city. (15) Outside (i.e., in the lake of fire) are the dogs (i.e., the unclean and worthless), and those who indulge in witchcraft, and the sexually immoral, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and makes use of the lie (i.e., unbelievers of various stripes)".

(16) "I, Jesus, sent My angel to testify these things to you concerning the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the bright Morning Star. (17) And the Spirit and the bride say 'Come [and be saved]!' And let the one who hears say, 'Come [and be saved]!' And let the one who is thirsty come [to salvation]. Let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost. (18) I bear solemn witness to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, [that] if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues written in this book. (19) And [that] if anyone takes away from the words of this book of prophecy, God will take away his share of the tree of life and of the holy city which have been written [about] in this book." (20) The One who bears witness that these things are so says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen! Come quickly Lord Jesus! (21) The grace of the Lord Jesus be with [you His] holy ones.

Revelation 22:6-21

The importance of spiritual alertness in anticipation of the coming Tribulation and our Lord's return is clearly the theme which runs throughout these final verses of the book of Revelation. These things are prophesied to be about to "happen quickly" (v.6), and Jesus is "coming quickly" (v.7a). Therefore making a special effort to be alert and "guard the words of the prophecy of this book" is essential for every believer (v.7b): the book of Revelation is essential reading so that believers may remain alert and become properly prepared for all that is soon to come, and for that reason it must not be "sealed up" (v.10a), because "the time is near" (v.10b). This is no doubt the reason for the inclusion in verses 8-9 of John's reaction to the angel's emphatic presentation of this message of warning

and the angel's equally emphatic reproof: those who "keep the words of this book" (v.9a) are fellow servants of all the elect angels and the prophets. Learning and holding onto the truths of the book of Revelation in all spiritual alertness is what will lead to deliverance, whereas being overly impressed by what we may see and experience (the holy angel's impressive appearance in John's case, the pseudo-miracles of the beast in the case of those who live through the Tribulation) will only distract us from the true object of our faith, our hope and our worship, namely, the one true God (v.9b). The angel's permissive command in verse 11 is also meant to emphasize the imminence of the end times and to encourage us in our proper application of the Word of God thereby: there is not sufficient time for vacillation; these dramatic events are about to transpire so quickly that no believer will be able to count on having the opportunity to behave like a spiritual yo-yo and still be prepared for what is soon to come – and it is likewise pointless for unbelievers to flirt with salvation without a genuine and whole-hearted commitment, so short is the time (v.11; cf. 1Cor.7:29-31). For the Lord is "coming quickly" and it will soon be time "for each to be repaid according to his work" (v.12). Therefore we need to stay alert at all costs, remembering that He is our "Alpha and Omega" (v.13), fixing our hearts on pleasing Him that we may have access to all the blessings of eternity (v.14), and keeping clearly in mind the terrifying alternative reality awaiting those who fail to do so (v.15).

In the second paragraph beginning in verse 16, the theme of alertness continues with our Lord reminding us that this blessed book of Revelation has come to us directly from Him through the angel He sent. He is the origin, "the Root", of all these blessings, and He is the Light, "the bright Morning Star", the Word of God Himself, to whom we must pay close attention in all spiritual alertness to guide us through that coming darkness until He "rises" (2Pet.1:19), and we rise with Him on that great day of days. That day of salvation is at hand (v.17; cf. Is.49:8; 2Cor.6:2). Therefore diminishing the truth and completeness of this prophecy by adding to it or removing anything from it – particularly in one's heart by embellishing it or failing to believe any part of it through wishful thinking – will blunt spiritual alertness and risk spiritual catastrophe (vv.18-19; cf. Deut.4:2; Prov.30:6; Matt.5:19). For our Lord Jesus Himself tells us that He is "coming quickly" (v.21a) and we should embrace this truth and the spiritual alertness it recommends: "Amen! Come quickly Lord Jesus!" (v.21b). Only in this way will His grace be fully with us for our spiritual safety and deliverance – and great reward for all eternity with all of our brothers and

sisters in Christ who have likewise committed themselves to remaining alert throughout those dark days soon to come (v.22).

(1) "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. (2) Five of them were foolish and five were wise. (3) The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. (4) The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. (5) The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. (6) At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' (7) Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. (8) The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' (9) 'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' (10) But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were **ready** went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. (11) Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!' (12) But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.' (13) Therefore **keep watch**, because you do not know the day or the hour."

Matthew 25:1-13 NIV

All of the main issues which pertain to the need for spiritual alertness during the Tribulation are covered here in the parable of the ten virgins. The ten represent believers during the Tribulation, the light of their lamps represents their faith, the arrival of the bridegroom represents Christ's 2nd Advent return, and the oil – which runs out before He arrives and causes the foolish five to miss the celebration – represents the truth of the Word of God taught by the Spirit which feeds and empowers faith, keeping it awake and alert. The phrase emphasized in verse 13 above, "keep watch", means, more precisely translated, "stay awake!", and refers to the need to maintain one's faith during those trying times ahead. Spiritual alertness is all about faith (and prayer is an important part of staying spiritually alert: Matt.26:41; Mk.14:38; Lk.22:40; 22:46; Col.4:2).

Just as being physically tired often induces physical sleep which, if it comes on suddenly and unexpectedly at an inappropriate time or manner, may have extremely negative consequences, so also allowing oneself to become spiritually tired is a problem at any time – how much more so during the dramatic testing of the Tribulation? In the parable of the ten virgins, the light representing the faith of the five is seen to be on the point of being completely "quenched", with the unhappy result that the foolish miss the

return of our Lord – which can only mean that they are not resurrected at His return. And since all believers who survive until the Second Advent will be resurrected at that time, this can only mean one of two things: either the five have lost their faith entirely (so as to no longer be believers) or they are no longer alive (having unnecessarily perished **not** from martyrdom but from poor choices made under the pressures of the Tribulation). The detail of their running off to buy oil at a most inopportune moment is also critical. From this we may surmise that 1) they did not have a sufficient store of truth amassed in their hearts before the troubles began to be able to withstand the otherwise unbearable stresses and strains of the Tribulation, and 2) this lack of usable truth made real in their hearts through believing in it and consistently applying it before the time of testing came rendered them vulnerable to taking actions which for Christians are at the very least not salutary and at worst capable of producing the shipwreck of one's faith. And while it may be true that some such unprepared Christians may not lose faith entirely during the Tribulation so as to apostatize (though one third of the Church will do so as we have previously seen, so the danger of this is very real and not to be minimized in any way),² that is precisely what the five here are meant to represent, namely, believers who have lost their faith and who miss the resurrection as a result: as our Lord says to them, "I tell you the truth, I don't know you".

Whether the believers in this group indulged in inappropriate activities because of their lack of spiritual knowledge (such as becoming involved in some guerilla movement against the beast's forces and being destroyed outside of the will of God as a result; see section II below), or were caught up in the world's enthusiasm for antichrist and through lack of spiritual preparation abandoned their faith altogether and accepted his mark, the result in either case was apostasy. What then, should the foolish five have done to avoid this horrendous outcome? What should they have done to stay spiritually awake? The answer is the same as it has always been: only God's truth consistently sought out, believed and applied in faith can produce spiritual maturity which in turn makes possible the corresponding spiritual alertness necessary to avoid falling spiritually asleep. These foolish five should have been growing up through the milk and solid food of the Word of God before the Tribulation began – storing up sufficient "oil" to keep their "light" of faith aflame during days of darkness ahead – and, having done this, they should have taken great pains to recall that truth and live by it instead of falling into a state of spiritual lethargy. Doing both, i.e., hearing and believing the Word *and* putting it into practice (Matt.7:24-26;

Lk.8:21; 6:47-49) are the hallmarks of the mature believer. And while it may be possible for the spiritually immature who are failing to advance to survive life's pressures today and not lose faith, this will be a much more difficult proposition during the Tribulation (as the Great Apostasy will bear witness).

Therefore being "ready", "keeping watch", and "staying alert" are all synonyms for maintaining one's faith and faithfulness (Eph.6:18; 1Pet.5:8; cf. 1Cor.10:11-12). The three major threats to this posture of Christian readiness, watchfulness and alertness – deadly at all times but even much more so then on account of the nature of the Tribulation – are 1) deception, 2) pressure, and 3) temptation. This may be seen from the many passages in scripture which warn us to be alert during that difficult era soon to come.

(35) "Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, (36) like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. (37) It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. (38) It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night. (39) But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. (40) **You also must be ready**, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."
Luke 12:35-40 NIV

(34) "Watch out for yourselves lest your hearts be burdened down in debauchery and drunkenness and earthly cares, and that day fall upon you suddenly like a trap [snapping shut]. (35) For it will come upon all those who dwell upon the face of the earth. (36) So **be alert at all times**, praying that you might have the strength to endure all these things which are going to happen, and to stand before the Son of Man."
Luke 21:34-36

Arise, sleeper! Awake from the dead, and Christ will shine on you!
Ephesians 5:14

(1) But concerning the times and the seasons (i.e., the time-line and the specific events within it), brothers, you have no need for anyone to write you. (2) For you yourselves know full well that the Day of the Lord is

coming just like a thief in the night. (3) When [people] are saying "Peace!" and "Safety!", at that precise time destruction will fall swiftly upon them, just like labor pains on a pregnant woman. (4) But you, brothers, are not in darkness that [this] Day [of the Lord] should catch you out like a thief. (5) For you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness. (6) So let us therefore not sleep like the rest [of unbelieving mankind], but be **awake and alert**. (7) For those who sleep do so at night. And those who get drunk do so at night. (8) But since we are of the day, let us put on the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet of hope (i.e., confidence) of salvation. (9) Because God has not appointed us for wrath, but for [taking] possession of [our] salvation (i.e., full gained at the resurrection) through our Lord Jesus Christ, (10) the One who died on our behalf, that, whether we stay awake or sleep (i.e., pass on to heaven), we will be alive together with Him [on that day of resurrection].

1st Thessalonians 5:1-10

The end of all things has drawn near. Therefore exercise discretion and sober self-control for [the benefit of your] prayers.

1st Peter 4:7

1. Deception:

(3) And when He sat down on the Mount of Olives, His disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us when these things will be, and what the sign is of your return and of the end of the age?" (4) And Jesus answered and said, "See to it that no one deceives you. (5) For many will come in My Name, saying, 'I am the Christ', and they will deceive many people."

Matthew 24:3-5 (cf. Mk.13:4-6)

(24) "At that time if someone says to you 'Look [(as they will tell you then)]! Christ is here!', or 'Here [He is]!', do not believe [it]. For false christs and false prophets will arise and will perform great miracles (lit., "signs") and wonders [sufficient] to deceive even the elect, if [that were] possible. (25) Look [(as I am telling you now)]! I have told you ahead of time. (26) So if they say to you, 'Look! [The Messiah] is [out] in the desert!', don't go out there, or 'Look! He is in the inner rooms (i.e., hidden somewhere in town)!', don't believe [it]."

Matthew 24:23-26 (cf. Mk.13:21-23)

While *deception* has always been a problem in the Church, never will it constitute a graver one than during the Tribulation. With the world

following after antichrist as if he were the Christ, with the religions of the world, even putatively conservative Christian organizations, joining in the parade of apostasy, and with the beast himself and his false prophet performing a completely unprecedented display of satanically empowered "miracles", it is perhaps not remarkable that so many will be deceived. Resisting this deception will require the alertness which is the subject of this section, and that alertness will in this case consist of understanding and believing the truth about all these issues. In other words, spiritual maturity based upon prior spiritual growth accomplished through learning and believing the truth of God's Word will be required to stay alert, awake, and effectively on watch for all these developments so as not to be deceived by them when they begin to occur.

After all, we have a tremendous amount of information about the end times in scripture, but that information is of no use to Christians who have not learned it correctly or believed it fully. Without a proper understanding of the circumstances of Christ's return at the Second Advent, for example, immature Christians will be vulnerable to just the sort of deception our Lord warned against in the two quotes above, whereas mature Christians who not only understand these things but have committed them to their hearts by faith **and** hold onto these truths in faith come what may will be able to repel such deceptions through spiritual alertness. It goes without saying that, while we have been given the outlines of the history of the Tribulation (which this series has attempted to sketch in as much detail as scripture permits), many things are likely to happen which, while they may not surprise us in principle, will nonetheless be surprising in their specific manifestations (Hab.1:6).³ It is difficult to appreciate now before the fact the shock which the Tribulation's intensity will deliver to us all, or the degree to which immature Christians will be shaken by those events, or the absolute importance that every single bit of truth no matter how seemingly insignificant now will have for us as we are preparing spiritually now for the challenges ahead. For the antidote to antichrist's deceptions will be the Word in our hearts, held fast in faith and applied with determination in all watchfulness, vigilance, and alertness (2Chron.12:14; Hos.4:6; Rom.13:11; 1Cor.16:13; Col.4:2).

(29) For I know that after my departure fierce **wolves** will enter in among you who will not spare the flock. (30) And even from among your own number [of elders] men will rise up and speak twisted things in order **to entice** the disciples (i.e., believers) to follow them. (31) **So be alert,**

remembering that for three years I did not stop warning each of you [about these dangers] day and night with my tears.

Acts 20:29-31

(11) Christ Himself appointed some of us apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers (12) in order to prepare all of His holy people for their own ministry work, that the entire body of Christ might thus be built up, (13) until we all reach that unifying goal of believing what is right and of giving our complete allegiance (Greek: ἐπίγνωσις, *epignosis*) to the Son of God, that each of us might be a perfect person, that is, that we might attain to that standard of maturity whose "attainment" is defined by Christ; (14) that we may no longer be immature, swept off-course and carried headlong by every breeze of so-called teaching that emanates from the **trickery** of men in their readiness to do anything to cunningly work their **deceit**, (15) but rather that we may, **by embracing the truth** in love, grow up in all respects with Christ, who is the head of the Church, as our model.

Ephesians 4:11-15

2. Pressure:

(12) Now because of the increase of lawlessness [at that time], the love of the many will cool. (13) But he who endures until the end, this [is the one who] will be saved.

Matthew 24:12-13

(25) "And there will be signs in the sun and the moon and the stars, and on the earth there will be [great] distress among the nations [who will be greatly] bewildered by the roaring of the sea and [its massive] waves, (26) [and] men will lose heart out of fear and expectation of what is about to come upon the inhabited world. For the luminaries of the heavens will be [powerfully] shaken.

Luke 21:25-26

The second factor militating against alertness during Tribulation will be the incredible *pressure* that the difficulties of that most trying time will bring to bear on the faith of all genuine believers. As the passages above indicate, the strain and stress of those difficult days will reduce many Christians who would in normal times otherwise have been able to muddle along in a lukewarm and non-committal way to antipathy towards their fellow believers (Matt. 24:12-13) and to panic and fear (Lk.21:25-26). The

Tribulation, it is clearly predicted, will rattle the faith of many, resulting in many cases in a complete loss of reward (e.g., Rev.16:15), and, in a disturbingly large number of others, in the loss of salvation (i.e., in the Great Apostasy; cf. Rev.14:9). In order to cope with the pressures of that terrible time so as not to lose reward or worse, we will all have need of a great measure of faith and "patient endurance" or perseverance (Greek: *hypomone*, ὑπομονή, etymologically a "standing up under" pressure).

I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

Revelation 1:9 NIV

If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.

Revelation 13:10 NIV

This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.

Revelation 14:12 NIV

While not impossible, developing the necessary perseverance or ability to withstand pressure on one's faith and not faint will be an extremely difficult proposition during the Tribulation itself. The antidote to having one's love grow cold, one's hope turn to despair, and one's faith dissolve under the great physical, mental and emotional burdens of the Tribulation will be the spiritual resiliency we have previously built up in our hearts through having become accustomed to applying the Word of God to difficult situations in the past, that is, not only having come to know and believe the truth, but also having had that knowledge and faith undergo prior refining in the adversities and vicissitudes of life so that we "know it" in a very deep and abiding way.

(6) In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. (7) These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

1st Peter 1:6-7 NIV

Submitting to this refining of our faith now is the only way to make sure that we will "have what it takes" to endure the severe pressures sure to come upon us then. Prior spiritual growth through believing the truth followed up by successful negotiation of the various trials and tests the Lord sends to refine our faith is thus a necessary element in the watchfulness, vigilance, and alertness needed not to "fall asleep" and suffer the collapse of our Christian virtue in the crucible of the Tribulation's unprecedented pressures.

(33) "Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.

(34) It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. (35) Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back – whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. (36) If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. "

Mark 13:33-37 NIV

3. Temptation: Just as the challenge of tribulational deception must be met through the truth in the hearts of the spiritually mature, and just as the challenge of tribulational pressure must be met through the resiliency of the battle-tested virtues of those who have made spiritual advances for Jesus Christ, so the challenge of *temptation* must be met through persistence in ministry by those who have had their dedication to Jesus Christ in service to His Body affirmed through consistent production before the darkness falls.

(34) "Watch out for yourselves lest your hearts be burdened down in debauchery and drunkenness and earthly cares, and that day fall upon you suddenly like a trap [snapping shut]. (35) For it will come upon all those who dwell upon the face of the earth. (36) So ***be alert at all times***, praying that you might have the strength to endure all these things which are going to happen, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Luke 21:34-36

For if it is difficult to serve our Lord "in the green wood", then "what of the dry?" (Lk.23:31). And if it is difficult to contend with present-day opposition to ministry, how if we must run not against mere men but "with horses" (Jer.12:5)? Just as we have learned to be consistent in our faith, believing what is true, and consistent in our hope, setting our hearts on

what is true, so we must also be consistent in our love, following through on what we know to be true in service to our brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, in absolute faith that the rewards to come are of far greater import than any temptations to slackness here on earth. Sticking to our commitment of service in the accomplishment of whatever ministry the Lord has called us to (and we have all been called to ministry in accordance with our individual spiritual gifts: 1Cor.12:1-7) is not easy in good times, is difficult in hard times, and will no doubt be exponentially more challenging during the Tribulation. The temptation to put self first, to slack off under the excuse of everything that is happening, and to back off of our previous production will no doubt be immense. But the loss we stand to incur in so doing is not to be compared to the corresponding gain we stand to reap in holding course in spite of all opposition (2Cor.4:17; 1Pet.1:13; Rev.3:11). And if we are consistent now in being zealous for Jesus Christ whether "in season or out of season" (2Tim.4:2), then we will be all the better prepared to cope with the temptations of that terrible time to come which otherwise may tempt us to relax our grip.

(5) Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. (6) He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.

Psalm 126:5-6 NIV

(42) The Lord answered, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? (43) It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. (44) I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. (45) But suppose the servant says to himself, 'My master is taking a long time in coming,' and he then begins to beat the menservants and maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk. (46) The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers."

Luke 12:42-46 NIV (cf. Matt.24:45-51)

Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

Luke 9:62 NIV

It is important therefore that believers not underestimate the difficulties of the coming Tribulation. For it will almost certainly be worse than any other

prior historical period – and history certainly records some exceedingly trying times. But in terms of the deceptions which will attack the faith of the unprepared, the pressures which will cause them to question their hope, and the various trials and temptations which will enervate their love, there is no precedent, either biblical or historical. And without extensive prior preparation and resilient readiness, watchfulness and alertness, there will sadly be many who will fall away. Let us resolve instead to be among the number of the faithful who, through taking pains to prepare now and by remaining alert then, will glorify our Lord by winning the battle of faith.

These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, because He is Lord of Lords and King of Kings, and called, and elect – and ***faithful*** are those with Him.

Revelation 17:14 (cf. Rev.13:10; 14:12)

II. A Tribulational Code of Conduct

I am a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. I will follow Him faithfully to the end, come what may. I will not abandon my faith in the face of trouble or persecution. I will not worship anyone or anything other than the Lord, nor give my allegiance to any foreign god or false Messiah, nor take any blasphemous mark upon my body. I will not betray my fellow Christians in any way, nor will I hold my life so dear so as to violate God's commandments in order to preserve it. I will do my best to sanctify the Lord Jesus in my heart at all times and to witness to Him with every word and deed until He returns to rescue me. And if it be His will that I be martyred on behalf of His blessed Name, I will do my best to accept His will courageously that I may not be ashamed when I stand before Him but may instead be awarded the crown of life.

The above is offered not as the absolute last word for Christian conduct during the Tribulation but as a general model for the sorts of issues which, while applicable for all Christians living in the world since the beginning of history, have special relevance during the Tribulation. At all other times and in all other eras, during intense persecution Christians could usually count on some solidarity in some sort of familiar organizational structure, as well as some safe-haven elsewhere on earth, even if their present country was making it impossible to live a Christian life. During the Tribulation, however, and especially during its second half, the Great Tribulation, there will be no official group not coopted by antichrist, and no land or country not under his control. Additionally, the persecution will be so intense and

the opposition to genuine faith so pointed and well-organized, that even friends and family will not be reliable supports in the face of the dire threats to faith destined to come.

Do not believe a friend. Do not put your confidence in a companion. Guard the entrances of your mouth from her who lies in your bosom. For a son will treat his father disgracefully, and a daughter will rise up against her mother, and a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law. A man's enemies will be those of his own household.

Micah 7:5-6 (cf. Jer.9:4-6; Matt.10:34-35; Lk.12:51-53)

While always true in principle, therefore, the Tribulation will be a time when individual Christians will need to have their faith solidly founded upon the solid Rock of Jesus Christ alone, and without requiring any associations or associates to prop it up. Because of the dire nature of that trying time to come, moreover, it is appropriate here to provide a "short-list" of some of the major principles necessary to keep in mind to negotiate the Tribulation in an honorable way, maintaining one's faith therein:

- Do Take Shelter from the Storm
- Do Stay Objective and Avoid Reacting to Events
- Do Take Joy in God's Working out of His Plan (instead of being Disheartened by Events)
- Do Continue in Faith, Spiritual Growth, Progress and Production
- Do Heed Specific Divine Commands and Guidance
- Do Not Put any Stock in False Miracles or False Messiahs
- Do Not Continue Association with Individuals and Groups Co-opted by Antichrist
- Do Not Join or Cooperate with Antichrist's False Religion
- Do Not Take the Mark of the Beast
- Do Not Fear Persecution or Martyrdom

1. Do Take Shelter from the Storm:

(20) Get out, My people. Go into your rooms and close your doors behind you. Hide yourselves for a little while until My indignation has run its course. (21) For behold, the Lord is about to come forth from His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity. And the earth will reveal the blood shed upon it, and conceal its slain no longer (i.e., the persecution of believers will be punished).

Isaiah 26:20-21

As the passage above indicates, during this terrible time to come believers should do what they legitimately can do to take shelter from the storm (v.21a) – in order to allow *the Lord's* "indignation to run its course" (v.21b). The "taking of shelter" envisioned here, therefore, is not hiding from the enemy but getting out of the Lord's way – in a manner analogous to the Israelites staying inside "behind the cross of blood" during the first Passover when the first-born of Egypt were destroyed. It will thus be inappropriate for believers to engage in aggressive actions constituting violent opposition to the beast's regime, and not only on account of all the other spiritual problems involved in such behavior – paying back antichrist and his followers is what *the Lord* will be doing, both in the near term (e.g., the seven trumpet judgments and the seven bowl judgments), and of course also at the conclusion of the Tribulation (the seven thunder judgment). Just as there will never be a time in human history when our Lord will be more involved in overtly judging evil on the earth, so there will never be a time when we believers should be more circumspect about usurping His authority in this regard and placing ourselves inadvertently between the Hand of the Lord and His objects of punishment.

(35) "Vengeance is mine and complete retribution [belongs to Me]. At the appropriate time their foot shall slip. For the day of their disaster is at hand, and the [punishment] prepared from them comes swiftly." (36) For the Lord will vindicate his people, and, as to His servants, He will comfort them when he sees that their power is gone and entirely so, whether they be imprisoned or [still] at large.

Deuteronomy 32:35-36

Every stroke the Lord lays on them with his punishing rod will be to the music of tambourines and harps, as he fights them in battle with the blows

of his arm.

Isaiah 30:32 NIV

Our task will be to patiently "stand still and watch for the deliverance of the Lord" (Ex.14:13; cf. Zeph.3:8), and to restrain in the process any inclination we may have to allow our own arm to work deliverance for us.

(1) Gather together, gather together, O shameful nation, (2) before the appointed time arrives and that day sweeps on like chaff, before the fierce anger of the Lord comes upon you, before the day of the Lord's wrath comes upon you. (3) Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord's anger.

Zephaniah 2:1-3 NIV

As related here, the effective seeking shelter during the Tribulation will be done, for believers who know their God, more by intensifying our walk with Him than by any sort of physical separation or care taken in removing ourselves from the world and its politics (as salutary as the latter is and will be during those dark days). Just as the Israelites were sheltered from the plagues that struck Pharaoh and the Egyptians in the days before the Exodus, so we may be confident that the Lord's punishment of the sinful earth at that time will not be meant for us. In spite of all the horrors predicted to occur, many believers will survive so as to rise up in living resurrection at Jesus' return and so "meet the Lord in the air" (1Thes.4:17). There will never be a more difficult time for believers, and while we do not know whether or not it will be our lot individually to give up our lives for Jesus Christ, we can be sure that for all who refuse to let themselves be caught up in the passions of the moment, holding fast instead to the truth that we are dead to this world and to sin but alive to Christ, whatever the will of God wills, Christ will be glorified, whether by our life or by our death (Phil.1:20; cf. Rom.6:1-14; 7:1-6; 8:13; Gal.2:19; 5:24; 6:14; Eph.4:22-24; Col.2:20; 3:1-11; Jas.4:4; 1Pet.2:24; 1Jn.2:15).

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.
Ecclesiastes 3:1 NIV

Scripture tells us that there is a proper time for everything, including a time for war and a time for peace (Eccl.3:8), and never will respect for God's timing be more important than it will be for believers during the Tribulation. Misunderstanding the timing of the resurrection is likely to

cause many Christians to enter the Tribulation completely unprepared, on account of their having anticipated being delivered from those harsh seven years by a prior "rapture". Jesus told the 12 and the 72 not to take a sword on their journeys to evangelize Israel as His heralds, but told the apostles on the night before the crucifixion that in the future (i.e., during the Church Age), a different procedure would need to be followed (Lk.22:36). Many such examples of the need to match the appropriate behavior to the appropriate time could be adduced (e.g., the difference between the pre-canon apostolic period where miraculous gifts such as tongues and healing were being given and today when they are not). Failing to appreciate the central facts about and the essential nature of the Tribulation, however, is likely to contribute significantly to the Great Apostasy, the falling away of one third of true believers under the pressures and deceptions of that terrible time to come. By misreading the timing and circumstances, some will see antichrist as Christ. By misreading the timing and circumstances, some will take arms against the beast – and will either die for their trouble or be coopted by Satan's schemes. The Tribulation will be a time like no other when believers will have to rely almost entirely upon God's grace for deliverance instead of upon their own efforts, even such as are certainly appropriate today.

"Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit."

Mark 13:11 NIV

Just as at the present time we would certainly be well-advised to prepare for any legal proceeding coming our way, or for the defense of the gospel whenever that may come up (1Pet.3:15), even so any spiritual preparation we engage in now will be of great benefit during that great trial to come. However, as in the verse above, during the Tribulation the specifics of our response in all legal contests wherein we are arraigned on account of our faith will be God's province. During that time of special testing to come we also need to understand that antichrist can only be defeated by Jesus Christ, and that martyrdom, should God will it for anyone of us, is something that cannot be avoided – along with whatever else we are going to be called upon to endure in witnessing for the Lord as shining stars in a world of darkness (Phil.2:15).

"If anyone is [destined] for captivity [to captivity he will go]. If it is necessary for anyone to be put to death by the sword, by the sword he must

be put to death. Herein lies the perseverance and the faithfulness of the holy ones."

Revelation 13:10

These will be unique times when our witness for Jesus will be the number one reason for our continued tenure on earth. Whether martyrdom or deliverance is the outcome of our tribulational experience (and martyrdom, by definition a witness, is also itself a deliverance: 2Tim.4:17-18; cf. Rev.2:10:b), in either case this witness will only be given through implicit faith in the miraculous grace of God alone, trusting in Him to provide everything in the manner of the 12 and the 72 (Lk.22:35-36). This should be a point of confidence and encouragement for believers who have come to walk closely with Jesus now, but without question it will take great faith to carry out then.

With the beast coming to control the entire world, nationalism, the divine institution provided by God for the protection of human freedom ever since the Tower of Babel, will suddenly become inapplicable, and that will have many spiritual ramifications. Coupled with the Great Apostasy as the prime spiritual trend in the Tribulation's first half and the Great Persecution as the prime spiritual trend in the Tribulation's second half, this will mean that the maintenance of our faith (so as not to apostatize) and the maintenance of our witness (so as to give a good account of ourselves no matter what we may be called upon to suffer) will be the two overriding considerations for Christian tribulational conduct. Since no amount of material preparation before the Tribulation, no matter how extensive, and no amount of physical opposition during the Tribulation, no matter how courageous, will be capable of changing our experience of that time for the good but will carry the very real threat of altering it for the worse – by causing anyone so inclined to rely on themselves at a time when direct reliance on God will be more essential than ever before – it certainly behooves Christians to take this point to heart. God must be our shelter during those seven years rather than anything we have planned or done or dare to do.

Keep me safe, O God, for in you I take refuge.

Psalm 16:1 NIV

In taking shelter from the storm, therefore, there are a number of reasons why Christians who are called upon to endure that trying time of testing to come should err on the side of reliance on God's provision rather than

attempting to make their own material preparations now or take their own aggressive physical actions then, for example:

1) The unpredictable nature of the Tribulation: While we do have much information about the end times in scripture, when it comes to the specific details of what will be happening during that time in particular places (like the USA), we are largely in the dark. We know about the major events in the most important area (Israel), and we know about the major trends of the Tribulation itself, but we do not know, for example, precisely how the beast will gain control of this country, or exactly who he will be, or what his political and religious program will entail in its specifics. Indeed, the many possible variations in those specifics are so numerous that any sort of judgment now about organizing for resistance or making material preparations in advance is almost certainly going to miss the mark. We do know, however, that the Tribulation will try the hearts and minds of earth's inhabitants as at no time before or since (Matt.24:21; Mk.13:19). That being the case, an ounce of spiritual preparation will surely prove to be of more value than a thousand pounds of hypothesizing or stockpiling. Since fully one third of believers are prophesied to fall away during the pressures of that stressful time in the Great Apostasy, we can be sure that the spiritual pressures of the Tribulation will inestimably outweigh the material ones, as great as the latter may be. We cannot predict the precise threats to our faith that the beast's religious and political activities will entail, but we do know that if we are personally ill-prepared in a spiritual sense, no social support or personal hoard will save us from falling away.

2) God's purpose for us in the Tribulation: As we have seen, Revelation 13:10 states that our "perseverance and faithfulness" is based upon our acceptance of the fact that we may very well face imprisonment and/or martyrdom. While it is true that some believers will survive the Tribulation (most likely a large number but a small percentage of those who enter it), it is also true that God's express purpose for others during that time of testing will be the witness of martyrdom. The entire complement of the 144,000 will be martyred along with the two witnesses, Moses and Elijah. Thus we may be sure that martyrdom will be a great compliment from God paid to those who are chosen to endure it. Naturally, none of us want (or should want) to be put to death. But as Christians we should all be willing to die for the Lord who died for us – should that be His will for us. We cannot know at present precisely how these things will transpire for us personally during the Tribulation, but it is fair to say that if we have committed

ourselves ahead of time to a course of "survival", we will at least be leaning in the wrong direction if it should be our Lord's will to make use of us in this unique way. The tribulational martyrs will be witnesses to the entire world of men and angels both that the power of God's truth is greater to them than their own lives – and they will be rewarded accordingly for all eternity. Planning is often necessary, although scripture is very clear that we are to be wary of putting too much stock in human plans (Jas.4:13-17), and if this planning is ever the result of worry (Matt.6:25-34), or if it should ever occasion greed in keeping our stockpiles to ourselves (and for many this would be a very real temptation), then this would most certainly defeat the purpose of such preparation. The Tribulation will be a unique time wherein there will be no safe-haven in the world to which a sagacious person might otherwise repair. There will be no place to hide and no way to resist in any effective way the beast's inevitable success in gaining control of the entire world. Since scripture is clear on these points, actions which are taken under the "old rules" of how things work now before the Tribulation will be largely missing the point, and such a mind-set could lead a person into doing the wrong things for the wrong reasons. Instead, therefore, believers should steel themselves ahead of time to continue as before as law-abiding citizens as best they can in whatever country they find themselves, drawing the line on spiritual matters only: preferring death to taking the mark or worshiping the beast.

3) The counter-intuitive nature of prior tribulational preparation: The Tribulation will be a unique period of history in many ways. The fact of world-wide satanic control with no safe-haven will mean that for any idea of a "resistance movement" in particular there will be no comparable prior experience to use as a model. In the past, individuals who were opposed to national religious policies were able to flee to sympathetic countries or to uninhabited quadrants of the globe – or at least to make common cause with a large plurality of their fellow countrymen (with usually some region of a polity experiencing religious revolution holding to the previous views and being willing to defend them). None of these conditions will obtain during the Tribulation. By its mid-point, there will be no place left on earth not controlled by the beast, and the descriptions in Revelation make it very clear that the vast majority of the world's population in every nation will be very supportive of him and his policies, political and religious, even going so far as to enthusiastically worship him and his father the devil:

And [the population of the world] worshiped the dragon because he had given his authority to the beast. And they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? And who is able to make war with him?".

Revelation 13:3-4

The only place in the world where there will be any (temporarily) effective opposition to antichrist will be in Israel, and without the timely return of our Lord, the final campaign to destroy the Jewish nation would certainly have succeeded. Because of the prior events in the middle east, however, removing oneself to Israel *before* the proper and appropriate time (i.e., before the heavenly command to "flee Babylon" in the months before Armageddon), will not only be impractical but will also be fraught with material and spiritual danger.⁴ On the other hand, Babylon, the tribulational USA, may be the one place where there will be some possibility of safety for believers (not absence of persecution or trouble, but possibly the opportunity of surviving until the command to flee). For we know that many Jews will survive the Tribulation to be regathered into Israel at our Lord's return (cf. Jer.46:28). These individuals have to come from somewhere, and the USA is a very likely guess for a variety of reasons. Staying put and enduring whatever comes by going about our business without spiritual compromise will no doubt lead to martyrdom in some cases but will also most probably lead to survival in many more. However, active political and/or armed opposition to antichrist will surely lead to destruction, and it seems certain that such individuals will not be genuine martyrs since they will have chosen their own ways instead of trusting in the Lord and allowing Him to choose their path during this unprecedented time.

4) Deception: We should be careful not to underestimate the incredibly large role that clever deception will play in antichrist's ascension to power. It is likely that just as Satan has a role in many political movements on both sides of the ideological spectrum today, so during the run up to the beast's conquest of the world he will be moving all the pieces on the political board for his own ends. By signing on to a political movement, we Christians always run the risk of being spiritually compromised. If that is true today (and it most assuredly is), then how much more will that not be the case after the removal of the Holy Spirit's restraint on lawlessness in the time when the devil has more direct control over human affairs than ever before? There is not a trace of a suggestion in scripture that any positive group effort against the beast taking political or military form will have any

success. To the contrary, it is left entirely to our Lord to personally destroy him and his forces at the battle of Armageddon. Therefore, outside of communion for spiritual growth and ministry, group action of any sort by believers will not only constitute a waste of time but will also potentially be a very dangerous mistake, with the potential of proving fatal to spirituality and even to salvation in some cases. Many of the "contra" groups which do form are likely to be co-opted, and at this point our dim understanding of the precise course of political events in that time to come is more likely to result in our making just such mistakes, allying ourselves to groups whose leaders are really in antichrist's camp. There is of course a reason why the Bible has much to say about "big picture" events and little to say about the political specifics: we definitely need to know the former, but morbid attention to the latter only stands to lead us in the wrong direction and result in serious trouble.

5) Time, effort and true preparation: Finally and perhaps most importantly, everything scripture has to say about the Tribulation suggests that, when that dark final day arrives, five minutes of prior spiritual preparation will likely be of more value to individual believers than five years of material preparation (and five millennia of political preparation). This being the case, do we really want to waste our precious time and energy on something that due to the nature of the situation will be largely if not entirely useless (and possibly counterproductive in the extreme)? The better course would be for all believers to focus on the place God has put His emphasis in the Bible, namely, preparing our inner-man through spiritual growth. In that way, we shall be ready for absolutely anything, come what may. But if we are prepared for one particular material situation that does not transpire the way we suppose now, we shall be sorely disappointed, and so much the more so if as a result we have missed out in the process on the spiritual preparations we should have been making now.

(34) Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. (35) For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. (36) What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? (37) Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? (38) If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory

with the holy angels."
Mark 8:34-38 NIV

Let us therefore resolve to take shelter in the way the Lord would have us to do so, not cowering in fear or hoarding in greed, but instead being willing to die for the Lord and our fellow believers; not taking up arms in a vain political struggle in hopes of survival, but instead being willing to witness for the Lord in the precise way He has determined for each of us, come what may.

2. Do Stay Objective and Avoid Reacting to Events: The Tribulation will be a time as never before when Christians will do well not to "take it personally" when they find themselves subject to stress, ostracism and even persecution.

(20) "Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. (21) They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me."
John 15:20-21 NIV

Staying objective in this way, that is, not reacting in a personal way to the terrible things that may happen to us and ours, but keeping solidly in our hearts instead Jesus' words above, will be a great help in focusing in on the big picture so as not to get overly depressed by events. Not that this will be easy. Most of us have a tendency to concentrate on ourselves and our own problems, especially if we feel we are being "picked on" unfairly. Job courageously endured the most extreme personal tribulation with the greatest of patience because he kept his eyes on the Lord and the Lord's will (Job 1:21; 2:10), but even he was temporarily tripped up when blamed unfairly by his friends for being the cause of his own suffering. During the Tribulation, believers will be pariahs as never before, especially during the persecutions of its second half. Under such circumstances, remembering who it is we serve and why it is we are being targeted will be a great challenge – but a necessary one to meet if we are to honor our dear Lord Jesus and maintain the spiritual progress we have attained.

But with respect to the progress you have made, keep on advancing in the same way!
Philippians 3:16

(6) So then, exactly as you [originally] received Christ Jesus as [your] Lord, be walking in Him [in the very same way], (7) rooted and built up in him, established in the faith just as you were taught, overflowing with thanksgiving.

Colossians 2:6-7

Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully.

2nd John 1:8 NIV

"I am coming quickly. Hold on to what you have that no one takes your crown [away]."

Revelation 3:11

In order to avoid becoming overly subjective – an occupational hazard for believers in times of tribulation (e.g., 1Pet.4:12-13) – we need to carefully heed the Bible's advice about objectivity, and, specifically, about the true Object upon whom we should be focusing our thinking, our dear Lord Jesus:

(1) Since then we too [like the believers of chapter 11] have such a large audience of witnesses surrounding us [both men and angels], let us put off every hindrance – especially whatever sins habitually affect us – and run with endurance the race set before us, (2) turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith (cf. "Alpha and Omega"), who, for the joy set before Him, endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despise, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:1-2

And in your hearts set apart in sanctification Christ as [your] Lord.

1st Peter 3:15 (cf. Is.8:13)

And we need also to keep it firmly in mind that God will deliver us – if it is our destiny to be delivered rather than martyred.

Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath; the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment and its inhabitants die like flies. But my salvation will last forever, my righteousness will never fail.

Isaiah 51:6 NIV

The cowering prisoners will soon be set free; they will not die in their dungeon, nor will they lack bread.

Isaiah 51:14 NIV

Instead of being subjective – focusing on ourselves and our own suffering – during the Tribulation it will be more important than ever to be objective: focusing on *the* "object" of our faith, our hope and our love, the Lord Jesus Christ. At all times in human history believers have had to walk by faith, passing through this world as pilgrims and sojourners, looking unto the Lord for the spiritual refreshment necessary to get through.

(5) Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. (6) As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. (7) They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.

Psalms 84:5-7 NIV

Therefore remembering God's grace and deliverance through all of our prior personal tribulations will be one important way in which we who are called upon to negotiate that coming "valley of the death shadow" will be able to do so in confidence and objectivity – because we are keeping our eyes on Jesus Christ and His purpose for us rather than on our day to day condition.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.

Psalms 23:4a NIV

If we do make it our practice to handle personal tribulation now in the proper way, namely, remembering that this satanic opposition is not a personal thing but a necessary by-product of taking the side of our Lord Jesus Christ in this present conflict, and if we do make it our practice to do the same then, remembering and benefitting from the lessons we have learned before the Tribulation's onset, then if so wills the Will of God we can be confident of great joy and songs of exultation in the deliverance He will work out for us on that great day of days when we see Him with our own eyes, namely, at the return of our dear Lord Jesus at the Tribulation's end.

"Sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea."

Exodus 15:21b NIV

In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."

Isaiah 25:9 NIV

3. Do Take Joy in God's Working out of His Plan (instead of being Disheartened by Events):

The Tribulation will be the time of God's great judgment upon the earth, and that judgment will be its most prominent characteristic.⁵ The Tribulation will also be the time of the devil's greatest influence and control of human affairs, and, as a result, the time of the greatest persecution of believers.⁶ The fact that the Tribulation will thus be the most intensive phase of the conflict occasioned by Satan's rebellion against our Lord inevitably means that believers alive during that future day will experience the most difficult time to be alive in all of human history (a principle we have already explored at great length in this series). And while we may certainly take comfort in the fact that we will receive special protection from judgments directed by God upon the world of unbelievers, we should not expect that the unprecedented dislocations of normal human life will not affect us significantly (cf. Jer.45), even if it be our lot to be protected from the martyrdom that will claim one third of the true Church. Under such circumstances, during the Tribulation it will be more important than ever before for believers to hold fast to the heavenly high-ground in all of our thinking, to adopt and maintain the divine viewpoint in all of our sufferings, and, critically, to develop and maintain an active joy as we observe all of the cataclysmic events sent by God upon the unbelieving world – precisely because these judgments to come will represent our God's vindication of us, His Church, even as they signal the ever-nearer return of our dear Lord Jesus.

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.

Habakkuk 3:17-18 NIV

"When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Luke 21:28 NIV

The tribulational judgments from God upon the devil's world will be, after all, objectively "good things", just as the judgments He sent upon Pharaoh (a type of antichrist) also were of God in every way. The terrible things that happened to Egypt – judgments from which the children of Israel were for the most part miraculously exempted (e.g., Ex.8:23) – were necessary preliminaries to the deliverance of God's people. We know from the parallel that the Israelites were not as confident of God's deliverance or as joyous in observing these events as they should have been (e.g., Ex.5:21-23; 6:9; 14:11-12), so we should learn from their negative example and make it a point before the fact to begin training ourselves and our perspective in this regard. Knowing ahead of time from scripture precisely what it is that God is working out, we who believe can be joyful over what the world finds woeful. And so we should be, for we believe that God will bring us safely through the maelstrom to come – or glorify Himself with our witness in death if He so wills – increasing by degrees the judgment on the evil one's realm until He brings it to complete destruction.

(10) For you, O God, tested us; you refined us like silver. (11) You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs. (12) You let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but you brought us to a place of abundance.

Psalms 66:10-12 NIV

We know of a surety that when our Lord returns we shall rejoice in His victory and exuberantly so.

But to the degree that you are [truly] participating in Christ's sufferings, be joyful about it, so that at His glorious revelation, you may also rejoice with great gladness.

1st Peter 4:13

All the more reason to take on that perspective now and resolve to maintain it with dogged determination throughout those seven years to come. All the suffering we have to endure during those difficult days will come from the hands of the enemy and his minions. Therefore it will be right and proper for us who believe to rejoice in the judgments the Lord sends upon them in

response to the suffering they inflict upon us – judgments sent *in response to our prayers* (Rev.5:8; 8:3-5).

Rise up, O Judge of the earth; pay back to the proud what they deserve.
Psalm 94:2 NIV

He will repay them for their sins and destroy them for their wickedness; the Lord our God will destroy them.

Psalm 94:23 NIV

(5) [These tribulations which you are enduring] are evidence of the righteous judgment of God in His [judging] you to be worthy of His kingdom on behalf of which you are also suffering. (6) Since indeed it is just for God to repay with tribulation those who are subjecting you to tribulation, (7) and to give you who are being distressed relief along with us at the revelation of our Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful angels, (8) wreaking vengeance in a flame of fire upon those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (9) These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power, (10) when He comes on that [great] day to be glorified in the midst of His saints (i.e., resurrected believers) and to be marveled at among all those who have believed – as our testimony has been believed in your case.

2nd Thessalonians 1:5-10

"Rejoice over her, O heaven, even [all] the saints and the apostles and the prophets, because God has exacted from her the retribution due you!"

Revelation 18:20

Therefore the perspective which should be our present day "normal" Christian approach of joy in the midst of suffering (e.g., Jas.1:2; cf. Rom.5:3-5; 1Pet.1:6), will need to be carefully maintained during the troubles of that future time and wedded deeply to an attitude of hope and thanksgiving: hope in the soon to come deliverance and return of our dear Lord (Ps.14:7; Rom.8:23-24; 1Cor.16:22; Col.1:27), and thanksgiving at the recompense He is leveling upon the unbelieving world (Eph.1:16; 5:4; 5:20; Col.1:12; 2:7; 3:15; 1Th 5:18; Heb.13:15; cf. Ps.2:1ff.).^z

(1) God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. (2) Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, (3) though its waters roar and foam and the

mountains quake with their surging.

Psalm 46:1-3 NIV

4. Do Continue in Faith, Spiritual Growth, Progress and Production:

Despite the difficulties of that future trial, life will continue (cf. Matt.24:40-41). Therefore the Tribulation will be no time for us to put our light under a bushel (Matt.5:15; Mk.4:21; Lk.11:33). A morbid preoccupation with personal survival, in addition to catering to all sorts of base sinful tendencies, is likely to make personal spiritual growth, spiritual progress, and personal ministry next to impossible. But if these things are good for us to be doing now – and there is no question but that they are – we need to make it our intention now to continue to keep at them then, to the degree that we can and in whatever avenues the Lord opens up for us. Without question, those days to come will test our faith and make both receiving God's Word and ministering it to others a much more difficult prospect. But if we are not committed to doing so now, and are also not committed in our hearts to continuing on this one good road then, we are very likely to miss the path entirely.

Without question, continuing to seek out substantive Bible teaching, continuing to walk the way Christ would have us walk, and continuing to help our fellow Christians as we minister God's grace through whatever spiritual gifts we have been given will not be without risk during the Tribulation, and the concomitant activities they entail will no doubt run entirely counter to the "safe" course and will most certainly be inimical to the "survival" approach. And that is the point. We remain here on earth after salvation for the primary reason of serving Jesus Christ through the three-fold process of growth, progress and production. He is our hope and the one we long for (Col.1:27; Tit.2:13; cf. 1Thes.1:10; 1Tim.6:14), not the world and the things of the world (1Jn.2:15-17). But if we react to the troubles of that dark time to come by giving all our efforts only to preserve our physical lives, the best we can hope for is to survive until the Lord's return. But even if we do, how happy can we expect Him to be with us if we have "survived" only by neglecting the work He had for us to do? In reality, there is no physical safety without spiritual safety. If we are physically "safe" but compromise our spirituality in the process, nothing is gained and much may be lost. But if instead we focus on our spiritual safety and leave the rest to the Lord, even if we are called upon to give up our physical safety entirely in the ultimate sacrifice of martyrdom, we may be assured that Jesus will be with us in so doing and that our reward will be great. This life

is very short. What is coming is what really counts. Knowing all this full well ahead of time – and believing it to the depth of our being – it behooves all serious Christians who want to please Jesus Christ above all else to take pains then as now to maintain our faith, our hope, and our love, come what may.

But when the Son of Man returns, will He find **faith** [still existing] on the earth?

Luke 18:8b

[W]e who are awaiting the blessed **hope**, namely the epiphany of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (i.e., when we too will be resurrected in glory when He appears).

Titus 2:13

(12) Now because of the increase of lawlessness [at that time], the **love** of the many will cool. (13) But he who endures until the end, this [is the one who] will be saved.

Matthew 24:12-13

This principle is especially applicable to pastor-teachers and all others who have ministries upon which others depend. For all who are running a good race in anticipation of the three crowns, the Tribulation will very much be the time which tests the quality of that work – and no time to shrink back from doing what Jesus expects us to keep doing.

But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded.

2nd Chronicles 15:7 NIV

(3) Strengthen the hands that are weak. Bolster the knees that are giving way. (4) Say to those with anxious hearts, "Be strong! Don't be afraid! Behold! Your God will come, as an Avenger. [Your] God will come, as a Rewarder. He will come, and He will deliver you.

Isaiah 35:3-4 (cf. Zeph.3:16-17; 2Chron.32:7-8)

(33) And those among the people who have insight will teach the people who will be persecuted by sword (i.e., martyrdom), and flame (i.e., torture leading to martyrdom), and captivity (i.e., imprisonment), and plundering (i.e., confiscation of property), for some time. (34) And when they are

persecuted, they will receive a little help . . .
Daniel 11:33-34a

The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."
John 21:17 NIV

5. Do Heed Specific Divine Commands and Guidance: In addition to the holy scriptures which provide every believer with voluminous, complete guidance for living the Christian life, during the Tribulation there will be specific prohibitions and directives to meet some of its unique circumstance, and paying close heed to these commands and this guidance will be critical for our spiritual safety. Some of these instructions are no doubt not known at present. We can expect, for example, that in the direction of their worldwide evangelical ministry Moses and Elijah will have much to say to all believers for our benefit. Some of these Tribulation-specific instructions we already know about from scripture, even if their precise circumstances have not yet been completely revealed. Perhaps the most obvious of these is the prohibition against taking the mark or name of the beast (Rev.14:9-11). While we do not know as yet of what precisely this will consist, the Bible is so very precise and insistent about the fact that taking this mark or name will result in condemnation that there can be no question or doubt about the need to be equally adamant in our refusal to do so. Given the importance of this specific command, we have devoted a separate point to it below. There are, however, others, notably the command to "flee Babylon".⁸ Responding correctly to this command will require careful attention to God's timing, refraining on the one hand from exiting Babylon before the appropriate time (for believers living here during the Tribulation), yet not hesitating to depart immediately once the command is given. There is a "right time" for everything, and getting that timing right through heeding God's specific directives in a precise fashion will never be more important than during the Tribulation.

To every [thing there is] a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.
Ecclesiastes 3:1 KJV

(1) But concerning the times and the seasons (i.e., the time-line of future prophecy and its specific events), brothers, you have no need for anyone to

write you. (2) For you yourselves know full well that the Day of the Lord (i.e., God's eschatological time of judgment beginning with the Tribulation) is coming just like a thief in the night. (3) When [people] are saying "Peace!" and "Safety!", at that precise time destruction will fall swiftly upon them, just like labor pains on a pregnant woman.

1st Thessalonians 5:1-3

6. Do Not Put any Stock in False Miracles or False Messiahs:

"For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible."

Matthew 24:24 NIV (cf. Mk.13:22)

This warning from our Lord Himself is very important information to have – otherwise, not only would there be the danger (for those who are not adequately versed in scripture) of mistaking antichrist for Christ, but even believers who do recognize that the beast is the antichrist (and that his prophet is the false prophet), might potentially be led astray by someone else claiming to be Christ or a prophet. As it is, during the Tribulation, the world, including, sadly, many Christians, will go following after antichrist, and certainly not because he is unpersuasive in his performance of signs and miracles and in his pretense of being Jesus Christ.⁹ Faithful Christians who truly know their God must assiduously avoid getting wrapped up in the hoopla prophesied to come (whether emanating from the beast himself or from others falsely claiming to be from God) by focusing instead on what the scriptures actually say and not on what our eyes see or our ears hear.

"At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it."

Mark 13:21 NIV (cf. Matt.24:23)

"Men will tell you, 'There he is!' or 'Here he is!' Do not go running off after them."

Luke 17:23 NIV

He replied: "Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and, 'The time is near.' Do not follow them."

Luke 21:8 NIV

"So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time."

Mark 13:23 NIV

7. Do Not Continue Association with Individuals and Groups Co-opted by Antichrist: At Hebrews 10:25, Paul instructs the Jerusalem believers not to "give up meeting together", but what is often overlooked in this passage is the purpose of assembly: to "encourage one another" – and genuine Christian encouragement only comes through the truth of the Word of God (whether from the pastor or from fellow members of the congregation). In our era of Laodicea, association with lukewarm congregations and/or denominations while often a negative thing in spiritual terms, partly because of the waste of the time and effort which could be used to grow in the truth, partly because of the false, legalistic and watered-down teaching (if any) which is the rule in such groups, is not necessarily spiritually fatal. That will not be the case during the Tribulation, however, when most if not all such groups will be amalgamated into antichrist's universal religion. Continuing fellowship under *those* circumstances will not only not be encouraging or spiritually edifying but will actually be spiritually dangerous in the extreme since antichrist, the devil's son, will by then have become the object of worship, not Jesus Christ (not even by way of the tokenism which is often the case today).^o No fellowship with individual Christians, no matter how prized, will be worth such a fundamental compromise. And no individual Christians who are determined to remain in such a fatally polluted fellowship are worthy of continued association. All one can expect from failing to part company with organized Christian religion during the Tribulation is heartbreak, compromise, and extreme spiritual danger. For many the prospect of shunning and ostracism will no doubt be hard to bear, but in truth it will be a badge of honor and a true service to Jesus Christ.

(12) Therefore Jesus too, in order that He might sanctify the people through His own blood (i.e., His death on the cross), suffered outside the gate (i.e., separated from fellowship). (13) So then let us go out to Him outside of the camp (i.e., likewise choosing God over the world), bearing His reproach. (14) For we do not have here [on earth] a city which [is meant to be] lasting; rather we are eagerly looking forward to the city that is destined [to come] (i.e., the New Jerusalem).

Hebrews 13:12-14

8. Do Not Join or Cooperate with Antichrist's False Religion: Far worse than failure to separate from lukewarm Christian groups caught up in the wave of enthusiasm for antichrist during the Tribulation's first half will be the formal joining of the beast's false religion during the Tribulation's second half. Even if this happens by default, that is, by continuing

membership in a church or denomination which formally attaches itself to the beast's religion, the danger of being party to such an arrangement will be as close to spiritually fatal as possible short of outright apostasy. At this point in the Tribulation, antichrist will openly and officially proclaim himself to be Christ, taking his seat in God's temple in Jerusalem, and will then begin the Great Persecution of believers worldwide. It is certainly understandable on a worldly level that some will want to deflect attention from themselves by continuing fellowship and by seeming to go along with the apostate course their church or denomination has set. However, while there may be some debate as to whether it will really be possible to continue membership in an organization which blasphemously accepts the beast as Jesus Christ and yet at the same time maintain a genuine faith in the true Savior (through the exercise of strenuous mental reservation), there is no doubt whatsoever about the fact that such a course of action will at the very least be incredibly dangerous, risking spiritual security for a very precarious sort of physical security. Such an approach will not only constitute a very poor bargain, but even if someone inclined to avoid persecution through such dishonest association might theoretically hang onto to their faith initially, the compromised spiritual position this policy will put them in coupled with the diminution of courage such a false posture must necessarily engender will make it very difficult not to accept the mark of the beast when the time comes.

Even before that point of no return arrives, it is likely that antichrist and his false prophet will make use of their worldwide religion in particular to identify and help to "process" true believers who are unwilling to compromise in this way. This sort of thing has happened before (in the Roman Catholic persecutions of Protestants during the Reformation and in the rounding up of Europe's Jews by the Nazis, for example), and it is utterly foolish to believe that anyone will be able to continue in membership in a church which has not only been coopted but actually incorporated into antichrist's "universal church" without facing just such grim moral choices. If a person is in effect hiding out in some such organization, what are the chances that when their turn comes to betray another believer that at that point they will miraculously find the spiritual courage to say no? Will it not rather be overwhelmingly tempting for such individuals to rationalize their actions as protecting those who are "kept safe" through their betrayal of others (and even scandalously justifying such betrayal as "not wishing to tell a lie" even as they are living one!).¹¹

The above assumes that all believers will fully understand all of these matters ahead of time (and that only the exceptionally cowardly will fall into this trap). However, given the fact that we live in the lukewarm Church era of Laodicea, that assumption is of course not valid. The current level of spiritual immaturity within the Church guarantees that this problem of potential compromise by association will be compounded exponentially for those who enter the Tribulation unprepared. So while in many respects the problems and dangers facing unprepared believers during the Tribulation will be precisely the same as they are today, the circumstances then will lead to a much increased magnitude of danger and with a much reduced period of germination before spiritual disaster results.

Anticipating these same perils in his final address to the Ephesian elders, the apostle Paul sets out for us the mind-set we should adopt when facing these pressures of attack which emanate both from without and within the church-visible of that day (Acts 20:27-35):

1) Genuine teachers of the gospel proclaim the whole truth of scripture:

"For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God."
Acts 20:27 NIV (cf. v.20)

2) As legitimate servants of Christ, genuine teachers of the gospel are concerned about the congregation's true spiritual welfare:

"Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood."
Acts 20:28 NIV

3) Even genuine Christian groups will suffer severe infiltration attacks by Satan's servants:

"I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock."
Acts 20:29 NIV

4) Apostates will arise to corrupt and mislead even genuine Christian groups by distorting the truth of the Word:

"Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them."

Acts 20:30 NIV

5) Alertness to these dangers is thus essential and is the proper response to the voluminous scriptural warnings on this subject:

"So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears."

Acts 20:31 NIV

6) The only true defense against these things is spiritual edification accomplished through hearing, understanding, believing and applying the Word of God:

"Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

Acts 20:32 NIV

7) Since genuine teachers of the gospel set an incorruptible example in all things, false teachers (and by application their false teachings) may be easily recognized by their falling short of the true standard (in case anyone is in doubt about which is which):

(33) "I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. (34) You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. (35) In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' "

Acts 20:33-35 NIV

There is an important sense in which these words of Paul not only apply to us now but especially also to the experiences of the Tribulation. In warning against distorted truth and in emphasizing the importance of telling the whole truth, the apostle brings to mind the three popular false doctrines so prevalent in the church-visible of our own day, each of which will predispose those who wrongfully accept them towards falling into this trap of assimilation and compromise with the beast's religion during the Tribulation (these are all covered in greater detail in the next point):

- False belief in a pre-Tribulation resurrection (i.e., "the rapture"): Many Christians will find themselves completely ignorant about the Tribulation once it begins due in no small part to the supposition that they would not have to face it. Not only will the realization that they have been wrong about such a deeply cherished false belief tend to shake their faith generally when it proves not to be true, but this particular false doctrine breeds complacency and worldliness through the false sense of security it provides and is contributing here and now to spiritual immaturity and the foolish notion that lack of spiritual preparation is somehow not dangerous because at least the Tribulation will not have to be endured.
- False belief in a state of unconditional eternal security (i.e., "once saved, always saved"): This erroneous belief, dangerous enough during good times, will prove doubly malicious during the Tribulation. Apropos of our current point, those who imagine that they will be saved no matter what they do are likely to see compromising with the beast's religion as at least not risking their eternal future – and may even foolishly assume that this applies also to taking the mark of the beast, despite the very clear warnings of scripture.
- False belief in spiritual security through institutional membership (i.e., "salvation through works"): If it is assumed that everyone who maintains fellowship within a Christian church or denomination is automatically protected, the tendency will then be to continue that fellowship at the very point when separation will be necessary for true spiritual safety. Whether membership or tithing or water-baptism or any other tangible ritual, rite or procedure is wrongly invested with magical significance, the net effect is to make the faith of the believer in question more dependent upon those fleshly works than upon the Rock of our salvation, Jesus Christ, and then to make him or her all the more vulnerable to a fatal compromise when the moment of decision comes.

If the above three false doctrines effectively crystalize the problems facing Christians in our era of lukewarmness on the cusp of the Tribulation, the solution to them is equally easy to summarize, along with the basis for the proper mind-set of spiritual courage in contrast to the spiritual cowardice which any cooperation with antichrist's religion exemplifies. As with all things in the Christian life, the truth, its belief, application and

ministration, is the answer for all who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ, the very Word of God. Once spiritual maturity, progress and production have been incorporated into the believer's walk with Jesus, the proper mind-set to counter-balance the pressures we face now and will most certainly have to endure in a much more concentrated and intense form in the future is one of attentively walking with Him – and especially, when the Tribulation begins, of waiting patiently for Him.

Thy kingdom come!
Matthew 6:10a KJV

(7) Therefore you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you ***await the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ***. (8) God will also make you to stand firm without reproach until the end on that day of our Lord Jesus Christ (i.e., the 2nd Advent).

1st Corinthians 1:7-8

Marana Tha! ["Return to us, O thou our Lord!"]

1st Corinthians 16:22

(9b) They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, (10) and ***to wait for his Son*** from heaven (i.e., the 2nd Advent), whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

1st Thessalonians 1:9b-10 NIV

(6) God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you (7) and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen ***when the Lord Jesus is revealed*** from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels (i.e., the 2nd Advent).

2nd Thessalonians 1:6-7 NIV

[W]e who are ***awaiting the blessed hope***, namely the epiphany of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (i.e., when we too will be resurrected in glory when He appears at the 2nd Advent).

Titus 2:13

But your faith, when proven genuine in the crucible of life, will result in praise, glory and honor for you at the revelation of Jesus Christ (i.e., the 2nd Advent).

1st Peter 1:7

All believers should therefore be perfecting the art of waiting for Jesus now (e.g., 1Cor.1:7; Phil.3:20; 1Thes.1:10; Tit.2:13; Heb.9:28; cf. Mk.15:43; Lk.2:25; 2:38; 12:36; 23:51; Acts 24:15; Rom.5:1-5; 8:23-25; Gal.5:5; Jas.5:7-8; 2Pet.3:12-14; Jude 1:21), the better to avoid getting caught up in the excitement of antichrist's new religion on the one hand and the better to endure the loss of former fellowship and socializing as we become pariahs to those who compromise with the beast on the other. Jesus has us by the hand now. Are we witnessing to men and angels as we should? If not, what can we expect when the pressure is really on? Focusing our attention on the Lord and anticipating His timely return now will thus allow us to overcome the world in our hearts more effectively then, regardless of what the world may be doing to our physical bodies (Is.16:4b; 35:1-2; 2Pet.3:10-12)

Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up.
Psalm 71:20 NIV

But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me. Do not gloat over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise. Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light.
Micah 7:7-8 NIV

9. Do Not Take the Mark of the Beast: The worst of all possible violations of the particular instructions to Christians during the Tribulation will be to take the mark of the beast.

(9) And yet a third angel followed them, saying in a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives [his] mark upon his forehead or upon his hand, (10) he himself will also drink from the wine of God's wrath which has been mixed undiluted in the cup of His anger. And [that person] will be tormented in fire and sulfur before angels, [and] saints, and before the Lamb. (11) And the smoke of their torment will go up forever and ever, and they have no rest day or night, those who worship the beast and his image and whoever takes the mark of his name."

Revelation 14:9-11

Nothing could be more clear. But for believers who have failed to heed the prior eight points and find themselves deeply immersed in the compromise of antichrist's false religion, crossing over this irrevocable dead-line will perhaps not seem as horrendous and unthinkable as it surely is. The real

problem here will be a complete concentration on the visible world instead of on the invisible things to come, the proper focus of every true Christian's heart. Only by continuing to walk closely with Him who is invisible, our dear Lord Jesus (Heb.11:27), will tribulational believers be able to endure the separation from prior close associations along with the shunning and verbal abuse that will no doubt come the way of all who are determined to choose for the truth during the Tribulation's first half. Likewise, once antichrist's religion comes to dominate the world during the Great Tribulation, it will only be by putting Jesus first and concentrating on the blessings to come that true Christians will be able to cope with the severe economic penalties that fall to the lot of those who refuse to take the mark – let alone the Great Persecution which follows. Our true citizenship is not here on earth but in heaven (Phil.3:20). It is there that we have stored up our treasures (Matt.6:19-20); it is there that the Lord is guarding the deposit we have made with Him (2Tim.1:12; cf. Eph.1:14; 2Tim.1:14); and it is from there that we aspire to inherit the prize of salvation in resurrection and reward at His glorious return (1Pet.1:7-8; cf. Tit.2:13; 1Jn.3:2-3). In contrast, everything the world esteems is in actuality less than trivial.

The peoples exhaust themselves for nothing, the nations' labor is only fuel for the flames.

Jeremiah 51:58b NIV

It is a faithful saying: "Only one life, it will soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last". Everything we do in Jesus' Name will find a reward, but the things of this world are more temporary than we can presently imagine. That some of our brothers and sisters will, for the sake of "a little pottage" enjoyed over the course of a few short years at most, risk and, in the case of those who take the mark, sacrifice eons upon eons of eternal bliss without end is a staggeringly horrible thing to contemplate, and only serves to show how dangerous it will be to lose our Christian focus as we negotiate that difficult wilderness to come. Only by sanctifying Jesus in our hearts and by refusing to worship the devil's substitute will we make it safely across the desert of the Tribulation to meet our Lord in Zion (Is.8:13; 1Pet.3:15).

(5) Happy is everyone whose strength is in You. Their hearts are set on the highways [of pilgrimage to Zion]. (6) As they pass through the [dry] valley of Bachah (i.e., the wilderness of life), they make it a place of springs. Even the early rains enwrap it with [their] blessings. (7) They go from strength

to strength, until they appear before God in Zion.

Psalm 84:5-7

(5) Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. (6) He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.

Psalm 126:5-6 NIV

While those who persevere in Jesus will see their tears turned to joy at His return, there will most certainly be a different result for those who turn back to Egypt in their hearts and accommodate with the world by taking the mark of the beast:

(35) So do not throw away this conviction of yours – it leads to a great reward. (36) You need to keep persevering so that you may carry off in victory what has been promised – after you have accomplished God's will. (37) For yet a little while, how short, how [short the wait], and He who is coming shall come, nor will He delay. (38) "Then shall my righteous one live by his faith, but if he shrinks back, My heart takes no pleasure in him (Hab.2:3-4)."

Hebrews 10:35-38

Before He endured the various trials of His three and half year public ministry – a time precisely equal to the length of the Great Tribulation (and deliberately so) – our Lord Jesus was first subjected to thirty years of intense preparation, crowned by the forty days of testing in the wilderness. To the extent that we are willing to accept it, we too are being prepared for what lies ahead. We too can learn now how to have joy in the midst of personal tribulation (Jas.1:3), and how to have peace in the midst of turmoil and testing (Jn.16:33). Rather than preparing for what is soon to come, however, the great majority of believers in our era of Laodicea are only making themselves vulnerable to the pressures of that future day, and it is that very vulnerability engendered through spiritual apathy which explains how so many erstwhile Christians will succumb to coercion and take the mark of the beast. Being completely unprepared spiritually speaking, many of our brothers and sisters on that day will find the pressures too great to bear, precisely because their hearts will be focused on those pressures instead of on the Lord.

(20) And he who was sown on the rocky places, this is the one who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy. (21) He has no roots [to his

faith], however, but lasts only a short time. So when tribulation or persecution occurs on account of the Word, he is immediately tripped up (i.e., he apostatizes).

Matthew 13:20-21

As mentioned above, while there are many reasons for the reign of apathy in our current era of Laodicea, there are three widespread fallacies which are presently contributing mightily to the spiritual complacency which characterizes the church visible of our present day:

The Tribulation is of no concern because of the "rapture" – but what if the Church does go through the Tribulation? And it will.

Apostasy is of no concern because of "absolute eternal security" – but what if genuine Christians can lose their salvation through complete loss of faith? And many will.

Spiritual immaturity is of no concern because of the safety provided by "belonging" to a Christian church – but what if all organized Christian groups join the beast? And they will.

Christians who are not only ignorant of eschatology but who have failed to heed the biblical warnings bound up with the Tribulation because they thought these did not apply to them (on account of the false doctrine of "rapture"), who have not only failed to take measures to build up their faith through spiritual growth but are actually in denial about the possibility of their faith being threatened at all (on account of the false doctrine of "once saved, always saved"), and who have neglected the entire process of spiritual growth (on account of the false doctrine of "safety through membership"), will find their entire security system threatened at every point once the Tribulation begins. Instead of a "rapture", they will find themselves in the middle of the Tribulation. Instead of enjoying "unconditional eternal security", they will find themselves in the middle of a great contest of faith. And instead of being able to take shelter in a particular church or group, they will find these very organizations compromising with and eventually joining without reservation the beast and his religion. In short, for the average believer in Laodicea, that day of testing will find them completely unprepared and terribly vulnerable on every front. Under the circumstances, the surprising thing is not that a third of the Church will apostatize and take the mark, but that two thirds will not, with fully one third preferring death and martyrdom to spiritual

compromise. It is a measure of the magnitude of God's grace and the power of His Word that so many whose prospects for spiritual survival may look very dim to us now will indeed rise to the occasion and honor our Lord by persevering and, in very many cases, giving up their lives for Him. It certainly behooves those of us who have not succumbed to these false teachings so prevalent in our time to do all that we can to prepare ourselves now in order to be of use to our Lord in helping our brothers and sisters meet the challenges ahead once reality sets in and sweeps away the present complacency of Laodicea.

(14) But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened." (15) But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

1st Peter 3:14-15a

10. Do Not Fear Persecution and Martyrdom: As believers in Jesus Christ, although we are not of this world, we remain in it in order to serve our Lord by witnessing to the power of His truth through our response to it (Jn.15:19; 17:14-16; 18:36). For all who take their discipleship to Jesus seriously, those who are truly looking forward to an eternal reward and viewing this present world from that heavenly perspective, the emotional and physical troubles the evil one hurls at us should be easier to bear, at least to the extent that our deep faith in the Lord continually reminds us that death is nothing to fear, since death will only end those sufferings and bring us face to face with the Lord we love so much.

(31) So what shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? (32) He who did not spare His own Son, but handed Him over for our sake, how will He not also graciously give us everything [we need] along with [that gift of] Him? (33) Who will [dare to] bring charges against God's elect? God is the One who is pronouncing [us] justified. (34) Who is he that condemns [us]? Christ Jesus is the One who died [condemned in our place], and the One, moreover, who was raised from the dead [for us], who is [seated] at the right hand of God, who is also making petitions on our behalf. (35) What will separate us from Christ's love? Tribulation? Or privation? Or persecution? Or hunger? Or destitution? Or danger? Or violence? (36) As it is written, "For your sake we are being put to death all day long. We were accounted as sheep for slaughter". (37) But in all such things we are decisively victorious through Him who loved us [enough to do what He did for us]. (38) For I am persuaded that **neither death** nor life,

neither angelic nor human authorities, neither things present nor things to come, neither heavenly powers, (39) be they the highest [of the elect] or the lowest [of the fallen], nor any other created thing [on this earth] will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:31-39

For to me, to live is Christ, and ***to die is gain.***

Philippians 1:21

(14) Therefore since these children (i.e., of v.13) have a common heritage of flesh and blood, [Christ] too partook of these same [common elements] in a very similar fashion (i.e., not identical only in that He was virgin born and so without sin), in order that through His death He might put an end to the one possessing the power of death, that is, the devil, (15) and might reconcile those who were subject to being slaves their whole lives long ***by their fear of death.***

Hebrews 2:14-15

Knowing these things, remembering that we are sealed and protected by the Holy Spirit (2Cor.1:21-22; Eph.1:13-14; 4:30), and in sure and certain confidence that, no matter how severe, we will never be tested beyond what we are genuinely capable of enduring (regardless of what our eyes and ears may tell us: 1Cor.10:13), it will be possible for mature, prepared believers to endure the persecution, imprisonment, torture, and even martyrdom – if so wills the Will of God – in a way that honors the Lord who gave up everything on our behalf, not only preserving the eternal rewards upon which we have set a value beyond that of anything this temporary world may offer but actually guaranteeing them and maximizing them by our willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice for Jesus Christ – for He sacrificed His all for us.

[Jesus] went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done."

Matthew 26:42 KJV

This last point, if fully digested and properly implemented, will resolve most if not all of the prior points. Being prepared to suffer death for Jesus' Name is the stuff of deep spiritual maturity. So let us one and all who see the storm clouds rising dedicate ourselves to doing whatever is necessary now to possess abundantly then the requisite depth and resiliency of faith needed to honor our Lord in this way should it be necessary to do so, and

thereby to witness to the rest of Church in hopes of their perseverance through the encouragement of our example, whatever it be God's purpose for us to endure in those difficult days to come.

(13) Then Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid! Take your positions and watch the deliverance of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will not see ever again forever. (14) The Lord will fight for you, but you must keep quiet."
Exodus 14:13-14

(12b) You shall not fear that which makes them afraid nor tremble at it.
(13) It is the Lord of Hosts whom you shall sanctify [in your hearts this way], and He is the One who shall be your fear, and He is the One at whom you shall tremble.
Isaiah 8:12b-13

(12) "I, even I, am he who comforts you. Who are you that you fear mortal men, the sons of men, who are but grass, (13) that you forget the Lord your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth, that you live in constant terror every day because of the wrath of the oppressor, who is bent on destruction? For where is the wrath of the oppressor? (14) The cowering prisoners will soon be set free; they will not die in their dungeon, nor will they lack bread."
Isaiah 51:12-14 NIV

(21) Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: (22) Because of the Lord's great love (lit., "mercies") we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. (23) They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. (24) I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."
Lamentations 3:21-24 NIV

(24) Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wants to follow Me, let him [first] abandon his own aspirations, [then] pick up his cross and follow Me. (25) For whoever makes it his purpose to preserve his life will end up losing it, but whoever forfeits his life for My sake will find that he has preserved it."
Matthew 16:24-25

(12) But, [what is] even more [grievous] than these things (i.e., the events of vv.8-11), they will lay hands upon them, betraying them into [the hands of] their [religious] assemblies and prisons, haling them before kings and

governors for the sake of my Name. (13) For this will result for you in an act of witnessing [for Me]. (14) So set it [firmly] in your hearts not to prepare ahead of time to make a defense. (15) For I will give you a mouth and wisdom which none of your enemies will be able to oppose or refute. (16) And you will be betrayed even by parents and siblings and friends. And they will put some of you to death, (17) and you will be hated by everyone because of my Name. (18) But not even a hair on your head will perish. (19) Through the perseverance [of your faith] you will preserve your [eternal] lives.

Luke 21:12-19 (cf. Matt.24:13; Mk.13:13)

(40) Then [the council] called the apostles back in. After they had them beaten, they released them, commanding them not to speak in the name of Jesus. (41) So they went forth from the council rejoicing, because they had been deemed worthy to suffer dishonor on behalf of His name.

Acts 5:40-41

"Have no fear of what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison to test you, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Demonstrate faithfulness unto death, and I will give you the crown of life."

Revelation 2:10

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on so that they may rest from their labors", says the Spirit. "For their deeds follow with them."

Revelation 14:13

III. Paradigms for the Tribulation

Every Christian life, at least in the case of those who are truly walking with Jesus, is to some degree a pattern and a template of the Tribulation. Personal tribulation comes into the lives of all mature believers at one time or another, and it is often the case that just as a closer walk with Jesus and a more effective witness for Him in ministering to His Church goes hand in hand with increasing spirituality, so satanic opposition grows as we do as well. Peter, Paul and John, the three most effective apostles, certainly exemplify this principle of growth in the effectiveness of their ministries being matched throughout their lives by a concomitant opposition to them from the evil one, with the result that all three had to endure ever greater

persecution in His service and eventually end their lives in martyrdom. Therefore while the challenges to be faced by the tribulational generation will be severe and in some ways unique, they will not be entirely unprecedented. There are a number of patterns or paradigms which scripture provides of the community of faith enduring hardship in tribulation which are, by divine design, illustrative of the coming Tribulation, and so well worth our effort in examining.

1. The Analogy of Noah and the Great Flood:

(26) "Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. (27) People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all.

Luke 17:26-27 NIV (cf. Mat 24:37-42)

As these verses show, the parallel between the Great Flood and the Great Tribulation is biblically asserted – by the Lord Himself. In Genesis chapters 6-8, Noah is warned of the coming flood and is given very specific actions to follow in order to be delivered along with his family. Surprisingly, for all of us (those with any experience of human nature, that is), Noah followed the Lord's instructions *precisely*.

By faith, Noah, when divinely informed about things which were not yet visible, in reverent piety constructed an ark for the deliverance of his family, through which [same] faith [by responding to God] he condemned the world and became heir to the righteousness which is [awarded] according to faith.

Hebrews 11:7

As will be the case during the Tribulation, the Lord's intention to judge the world of that time stemmed from its excessive corruption (compare Gen.6:11-13 with Rev.9:20-21). Unlike the other human beings of his generation, Noah kept himself and his family separate from his corrupt and (literally) physically degenerate contemporaries (cf. 2Pet.2:5-9),¹² and one of the key challenges for believers now in the lead up to the Tribulation and even more so once it begins will be the necessity of staying clear of the influence of spiritual degeneration, especially when it becomes institutionalized in antichrist's world religion. For as in Noah's day, we may consider these last few years before the Tribulation begins a period of preparation. By all estimates, Noah had less than a hundred years to build

the massive ark, and possibly far less time than that (cf. Gen.5:32; 6:3; 6:18; 7:6). Our life spans are obviously much shorter than those of Noah's generation, and to prepare for our own Great Flood, we have, at time of writing, less than two decades remaining.¹³ Nor should we underestimate the magnitude of the task of making ourselves spiritually ready to endure the most difficult seven years in human history: Noah's ark was a physical one, constructed not without spiritual help; our "ark" is a spiritual one, but it will require the deployment of considerable effort on our part to make it seaworthy before the cataclysm arrives (i.e., by engaging aggressively in the process of spiritual growth, application, and ministry).

(19) It was also by means of the Spirit that [Christ] visited the [angelic] spirits in prison (i.e., in Tartarus in the Abyss), and proclaimed [His victory]. (20) [These are the angels who] were disobedient in the days of Noah at the time when God patiently waited (i.e., delayed judgment) while the ark was being built. [Having entered] into this ark [as a sort of baptism "into it"], a [precious] few, specifically, eight people, were brought safe through the water.

1st Peter 3:19-20

The physical ark protected Noah and his family once the flood arrived. Analogously, tribulational survival will require of believers the entering in to a spiritually safe place, one sound and secure enough to bring us safely through the raging waters of the Tribulation. This can only mean our steadfastness in abiding in Jesus Christ – just as the physical ark which brought Noah and his family through the flood was a type of Christ.¹⁴

(21) And it is [this true] baptism [of the Spirit] which saves you (lit. as an "antitype" or analogy to the ark's bringing of "salvation through the water": just as they were saved by being "baptized" into the ark, we are saved by being baptized by the Spirit into Christ). Not any [literal] washing away of filth from your flesh, but an appeal to God for a clean conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (i.e., repentance and faith which result in Spirit baptism, union with Christ, and resultant salvation).

1st Peter 3:21

Just as the remnant of antediluvian believers was brought safe through the trial of the flood by being "in the ark", so also believers during the Tribulation must remain "in Christ" in order to survive spiritually. As Noah and his family did, we enter through the one Door, being baptized into Christ by the Spirit at the point of salvation through faith. Many during the

Tribulation will fall away from Christ during the Great Apostasy. To be brought through safely, we must abide **in** Christ. Martyrdom in the case of all believers whose lives are taken during the Great Persecution is not an exception. Martyrdom, in addition to being an exceptional way to honor our Lord Jesus Christ (a way chosen by Him, not us) will be a great deliverance in that it will guarantee that believers so affected will have come through that great trial with their faith (and rewards) intact.¹⁵ But while believers are rescued out of trouble, either as martyrs or at the living resurrection when Christ returns, just as the unbelievers of Noah's day were swept away in the judgment of the flood, in similar fashion the unbelievers of that future day will likewise be subject to God's seven 2nd Advent judgments – if they have not already succumbed to the seven warning judgments (i.e., the trumpet judgments) or the seven punitive judgments (i.e., the bowl judgments).¹⁶

(5) [These tribulations which you are enduring] are evidence of the righteous judgment of God in His [judging] you to be worthy of His kingdom on behalf of which you are also suffering. (6) Since indeed it is just for God to repay with tribulation those who are subjecting you to tribulation, (7) and to give you who are being distressed relief along with us at the revelation of our Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful angels, (8) wreaking vengeance in a flame of fire upon those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

2nd Thessalonians 1:5-8

Readers meditating on this comparison between Noah and the tribulational believers will easily be able to bring many other parallels to mind. For example: the parallel between the promise to Noah in Genesis 6:18 and the gospel through which we are in Christ; between the Nephilim destroyed in the flood and the Nephilim antichrist and his ten kings destroyed at the 2nd Advent; between the literal flood and the "flood" of antichrist's armies at Armageddon (cf. Dan.9:26; 11:22 in the Hebrew); between the supernatural provisions to Noah of the animals "coming" to him (Gen.7:9) or God Himself shutting the believers in and the many deliverances prophesied to keep believers safe during the Tribulation such as the sealing of the 144,000; between the peace and safety of the ark and the safe haven in the wilderness for all who flee Israel at the Tribulation's mid-point; between the specific command from God to come out of the ark only when it is safe (Gen.8:16) and our mandate from Jesus not to believe premature false reports of His return (Matt.24:26; for His return will be as unmistakable as

lightning: Matt.24:27); between the olive branch, the sign of deliverance from the flood, and the return of the Branch, our Lord Jesus; between the rainbow God sets in the sky after the flood and the rainbow-glory of the Messiah who rules personally in manifest divine glory during the Millennium. The main things to keep in mind when considering this parallel between the Great Flood and the coming Tribulation, however, are Noah's faith in God and God's faithfulness to Noah. In spite of all visual evidence to the contrary, preparing for the coming trouble by doing precisely what God told him to do was the safe path, and Noah's following through by continuing to act in faith up to and all the way through the crisis was the means the Lord used to bring about his deliverance. Similarly, we believers today need to continue day by day to grow and prepare spiritually, resolving in our heart of hearts to stay true to the Lord Jesus when those days of trouble come, no matter what may betide.

(5) [God] did not spare the antediluvian world, but kept safe Noah, as a proclaimer of righteousness, and the seven with him when He brought the flood upon the ungodly inhabitants of the world . . . (9) For the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment.

2nd Peter 2:5 and 2:9

2. The Analogy the Exodus: The example of the Exodus is both the closest and best documented biblical parallel to the coming Tribulation. As with the case of Noah, scripture itself invites us to see the Exodus as just such an analogy, stating that the comparison is directly applicable to us "who live at the culmination of the ages" (1Cor.10:11). We have already seen how that the Pharaoh of the Exodus is a representative type of antichrist, and that in many respects the experience of the children of Israel in escaping from Egypt and Pharaoh's efforts to destroy them forms a close parallel to the future experiences of believers who will pass through the Tribulation, with antichrist in the role of Pharaoh, and the journey out of Egypt into the "promised land" being analogous to the passage through all the trials and troubles that will befall believers of that future day during those most difficult seven years.¹⁷ Not only is the utter arrogance and implacable hostility of Pharaoh unparalleled except in the case of the beast (cf. Ex.9:16 with Dan.8:23; 11:21), but just as "beast" in Revelation refers both to antichrist and his empire (cf. Rev.13:1-8 with Dan.7:1-11; 7:19-25; Rev.17:3), so in the case of Pharaoh the Bible identifies the evil emperor with his evil

empire in an inextricable way (Job 9:13, 26:12-13; Ps.87:4; 89:9-10; Is.30:7; 51:9-10).

(13) It was you who split open the sea by your power; you broke the heads of the monster in the waters. (14) It was you who crushed the heads of Leviathan and gave him as food to the creatures of the desert.

Psalm 74:13-14 NIV

Both Pharaoh and the beast seek to destroy the people of God (Ex.14; Rev.12:17), and in doing so subject them to harsh economic sanctions (Ex.5:7-13; Rev.13:16-17), measures which are designed to undermine their faithfulness to God (Ex.5:17; Rev.13:15). And in both cases unprecedented divine plagues follow as the Lord responds to the oppression of His chosen people (Ex.7-11; Rev.8-9 and Rev.16). Other close parallels in the progression of the Exodus and the Tribulation respectively include:

- Mass apostasy in the face of pressure and persecution in both cases (Num.13-20; 2Thes.2:3), stemming from false religion (Ezek.20:7-8; Rev.13:15; cf. 1Cor.10:14).
- The effort needed in both cases to maintain faith under such pressures (Ex.5:22-23; 6:9; 6:12; Lk.21:26), and to keep the light of faith from being extinguished (as in the smoldering wick of Is.42:3 and Matt.12:20, parallel to the fire pot of Gen.15:17 related specifically to the Exodus in context: Gen.15:13-14; cf. also the lamps of the ten virgins: Matt.25:1-12).
- The intensification of the trial as Pharaoh and antichrist continually ramp up their opposition to God's people in response to the divine message delivered by Moses himself in both instances (Ex.7-11; Matt.17:3-4; Rev.11:3-11).
- The plagues of the Exodus and the plagues of the Tribulation both being divine responses to the devil and his prince as well as the means of deliverance for God's people (Ex.7-11; Rev.8-9 and Rev.16).
- The many similarities between the rapid departure from Egypt and the rapid departure from Babylon in the last months of the Tribulation (in CT 5; see previous footnote), with divine provision being instrumental at every step of each deliverance (Ex.23:20; Rev.18:4).

- The cloud which covers and protects the children of Israel being analogous to the sealing of the 144,000 (and the special protection of believers during this time as we have seen; Ex.14:19-20; 1Cor.10:2; Rev.7:3-8).
- The time and place where Pharaoh and the beast respectively plan to destroy utterly the people of God becoming instead the time and place of their own destruction (i.e., the Red Sea and Armageddon respectively: Ex.14; Rev.19).
- The supernatural darkness at the Red Sea and the supernatural darkness just before the 2nd Advent being in both cases the divine means of giving respite to the people of God just before total deliverance (Ex.14:20; Zech.1:6-7).
- The literal sea miraculously crossed by the Israelites (Ex.14; cf. Ps.78:53; 106:9-11) parallel to the "sea of trouble" which is the Tribulation (Zech.10:11; cf. Rev.21:1; and the sea is the point of origin for antichrist: Rev.13:1).
- Pharaoh is destroyed by the Lord through being drowned in the Red Sea (Ex.14:18; 14:28; Ps.136:15), while antichrist is thrown directly into the Lake of Fire at our Lord's return (Rev.19:20).
- The wilderness on the other side of the sea being analogous the place of purging of Israel restored to the land after the Tribulation (Num.13; Ezek.20:35).¹⁸
- The entrance into the land being analogous to the entrance of the redeemed into the Millennial Kingdom of Christ.
- The exceptional glory won by the Lord at the Exodus being analogous to the even greater glory won by Him at Armageddon (Dan.9:15; Rev.19:1).

One of the passages which connects the Exodus with the end times most directly also assures us of God's deliverance through the difficult time to come even as He delivered that generation of Israel through their analogous time of trouble:

(11) All these things happened to them ***as an example to us, and were written to warn us*** – we who live at the culmination of the ages. (12) So let him who thinks he stands firm beware lest he fall. (13) You have not suffered any testing beyond normal human [experience]. And God is

faithful. He will not allow you to be tested beyond your capacity, but, along with the test, He will grant you the way out, so that you can bear up under it (i.e., even if you have to face the Tribulation).

1st Corinthians 10:11-13

And if it be our lot to be martyred, that too is a deliverance through the sea of the Great Tribulation. This truth can be seen from the following passage in Revelation which directly connects the last plagues of God's wrath in vindicating His tribulational martyrs to His prior deliverance of the children of Israel: in both cases the "song of Moses" celebrates the victory of our Lord (Ex.15; cf. 2Tim.4:17-18; Rev.2:10:b):

(2) And I saw [something] like a sea of glass, [but this time it was] mixed with fire, and those who were [in the process of] winning the victory over the beast and his image and over the number of his name were standing on the sea of glass holding lyres of the Lord God, (3) and they were singing the song of Moses the servant of God, even the song of the Lamb.

Revelation 15:2-3a

3. The Analogy of the Life of Christ: Every Christian is called to follow in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus (e.g., Lk.9:59; 14:27; Jn.12:26; 1Cor.11:1; 1Pet.2:21), and to share in His sufferings (1Pet.4:12-13; cf. Mk.10:38-39; Acts 5:41; Rom.8:17; 2Cor.1:5; Phil.1:29-30; 3:10; Col.1:24). No greater life of tribulation, opposition and suffering was ever lived than the one our Lord lived for us – and then He faced the cross and judgment for all of our sins.¹⁹ Jesus' life thus provides a fitting parallel both in terms of the extensive preparation He went through before His public ministry and in the three and one half years of witnessing to God's truth in proclaiming the Kingdom before He went to the cross. Those three and a half years are of course identical in time to the period of the Great Tribulation and will end for many in martyrdom.

(18) "I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." (19) Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

John 21:18-19 NIV

The pattern set by our Lord for endurance of persecution, and persistence through ridicule, apathy, resistance, and potential martyrdom is one every

believer should take to heart. Jesus looked to the deliverance and the reward on the other side even though His life, His ordeal, and the judgment of spiritual death on the cross were inestimably more difficult than the worst that will be faced by any of us His followers even in the depth of the Great Tribulation, so that His example is the one we should keep preeminently in mind.

(1) Since then we too [like the believers of chapter 11] have such a large audience of witnesses surrounding us [both men and angels], let us put off every hindrance – especially whatever sins habitually affect us – and run with endurance the race set before us, (2) turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith (cf. "Alpha and Omega"), who, ***for the joy set before Him, endured the shame of the cross***, treating it with despite, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God. (3) Keep in mind all the terrible opposition He endured against Himself at the hands of sinful men, so as not to grow sick at heart and give up.

Hebrews 12:1-3

4. Other Analogies to Traversing the Tribulation: Since the devil makes it his business to persecute believers who are genuinely committed to following the Lord, it would be difficult to find a single great believer of the Bible whose life does not in some way follow the pattern of personal tribulation modeling *the* Tribulation followed by dramatic divine deliverance (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, certainly do, just to take the first four generations of Israel as an example). Some notably precise parallels worthy of mentioning here (in a list in no way meant to be exhaustive) are:

- The Analogy of Lot Escaping from Sodom: In the gospel of Luke, our Lord specifically links the deliverance of Lot from Sodom to the resurrection at His return just before the destruction of Armageddon (Lk.17:28-37). Lot was severely tested during the not inconsiderable time he was there (2Pet.2:5-9), but "righteous Lot" did not lose his faith, and in the end was miraculously delivered from the destruction that befell Sodom.
- The Analogy of David in the Wilderness: David's tribulations in hiding from Saul for what must have been roughly seven years (i.e., according to 2Sam.5:4, he was 30 when he became king and had served as a commander of Saul's army for a number of years as an adult before being forced to flee) are illustrative both of the trouble we may face in

the Tribulation but also of the spiritual resources needed to endure them. It may well be the case that those of us who refuse to worship the beast will likewise be forced into hiding, and it well behooves us to take the same solace in the Lord and place the same confidence in His deliverance we see David exhibiting, especially as is made clear in the Psalms.

- The Analogy of Elijah's Time in Hiding: Elijah's ordeal we know lasted precisely three and a half years, the same length as the Great Tribulation (Lk.4:25; Jas.5:16-18). We also know that at that time too only a small remnant remained faithful to the Lord (i.e., the 7,000 of 1Kng.19:18). Throughout that time of testing, although he had made no special preparations himself, God provided for him in miraculous fashion, sending the ravens to feed him (1Kng.17:4-6). We can also learn from Elijah's unfortunate reaction to Jezebel's threats – directly after a momentous spiritual victory – the need to put our lives entirely in the Lord's hands during that coming trial and be ready to accept martyrdom with courage if so wills the Will of God.
- The Analogy of the Assyrian Invasion of Judah: We have previously seen (in part 3B of this series) how that the King of Assyria is a prophetic type of antichrist. Likewise the Assyrian invasion of Judah in ca. 701 B.C. is clearly analogous to the beast's Armageddon campaign, and the "Day of the Lord Paradigm" is often used in scriptural descriptions of it (especially in Isaiah: e.g., Is.13:6-13).²⁰ For those of us who have fled Babylon for Israel and are awaiting the Lord's return in the waning days of the Great Tribulation, the utter and miraculous destruction of the Assyrian army at that time will be important to keep in mind as the seemingly irresistible forces of antichrist gather to destroy Jerusalem.
- The Analogy of Daniel and his Three Friends: The story of God's repeated, miraculous deliverances of these four great believers who find themselves in the midst of a pagan and completely hostile country is a veritable "play book" for believers of that challenging time ahead. Just as was the case for Daniel and his friends, so for us there will no doubt be many decision points where compromise with evil or martyrdom will be the only options. We must develop the mind-set now not to fear the latter, determined under no circumstances to admit the former, and remembering at all times that the Lord is capable of delivering us even in impossible situations – even if we find ourselves cast into the fiery furnace or the lions' den (Dan.3:28; 6:23).

IV. Preparing for Tribulation

(1) Since then we too [like the believers of chapter 11] have such a large audience of witnesses surrounding us [both men and angels], let us put off every hindrance – especially whatever sins habitually affect us – and run with endurance the race set before us, (2) turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith (cf. "Alpha and Omega"), who, for the joy set before Him, endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despise, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God. (3) Keep in mind all the terrible opposition He endured against Himself at the hands of sinful men, so as not to grow sick at heart and give up.

Hebrews 12:1-3

When all is said and done, the best and really the only way to prepare for the coming Tribulation is to continue to do what we ought to have been doing all along: growing spiritually through taking in and believing the truth of the Word of God, applying that truth to our lives in our Christian walk and especially in successful negotiation of the testing that comes our way meant to refine our faith, and helping our fellow believers grow and progress as well through judicious and godly exercise of the gifts and ministries we have been given, all of which are designed for the edification of the Body of Christ. As we have seen many times, these three facets of the productive Christian life are layered rather than sequential, and in terms of testing in particular the Lord allows us to face ever greater opposition as we grow ever closer to Him.

(3) May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ be praised, who has in His great mercy caused us to be reborn to a hope which lives through Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead, (4) and to an inheritance which will never be destroyed, defiled, or dimmed, but which is being guarded in heaven for us, (5) who are ourselves also being kept safe by God's power and our faith in Him to an ultimate deliverance ready to be unveiled at the end of time. (6) In anticipation of this ultimate deliverance, your joy overflows, though ***at present it may be your lot to suffer for a time through various trials*** (7) to the end that your faith may be shown to be genuine. This validation of your faith is far more valuable than gold, for gold, though it too is assayed by fire, ultimately perishes. But your faith, when proven genuine in the crucible of life, will result in praise, glory and honor for you at the glorious return of Jesus Christ. (8) Though you have never laid eyes on Him, yet you love Him. And though you cannot see Him

at this present time, yet you have faith in Him. For this reason you rejoice with an inexpressible joy that bespeaks the glorious future to come, (9) when you shall carry off in victory the ultimate prize – the [eternal] deliverance of your lives – which is the very purpose and objective of this faith of yours.

1st Peter 1:3-9

As mentioned several times already, all Christians are called to "share the sufferings of Christ" (Rom.8:17; 2Cor.1:5; Phil.1:29-30; 3:10; Col.1:24; 1Pet.4:12-13; cf. Mk.10:38-39; Acts 5:41; 2Cor.4:10-11; Gal.6:17; 1Thes.1:6; 2Thes.1:4-5; 2Tim.3:12), and as the passage above makes clear the endurance of such trials and personal tribulations is in fact a necessary part of the Christian growth-process. If the experience of genuine Christians who are truly making a difference for Jesus and His Church seems somewhat more rare today than has historically been the case, that is because the Lord does not place the burden of undeserved suffering (as opposed to divine discipline) upon immature believers who are ill-equipped to handle it (1Cor.10:11; cf. Matt.11:29-30). In our lukewarm era of Laodicea where spiritual immaturity is the rule, the instances of believers actually sharing Christ's sufferings in enduring personal tribulations wherein they glorify God by winning the victory through faith are sadly few and far between. Not only are the immature protected from what they cannot handle but it is also certainly true that the devil saves his best attacks for those who are actually making spiritual progress and genuinely contributing to the advance of God's plan (as the examples of Job and Paul make clear, just to name two of the most salient cases).

(18) Though the world hates you, know that it came to hate Me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own. (19) Now because you are not [a part] of the world, but I chose you out of the world, for this reason the world hates you. (20) Remember this principle I taught you: A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.

John 15:18-20

(8) Stay sober and stay awake [on guard]. Our adversary the devil roams about like a roaring lion, looking for someone he can devour. (9) Resist him, strong in your faith, remembering that your fellow believers in this world are undergoing the exact same sort of suffering [that you are].

1st Peter 5:8-9

In spite of the poor track record of our era of Laodicea thus far, there is some indication that the last generation of this time of lukewarmness will be among the greatest. After all, the era of Laodicea is destined to flow directly into the coming Tribulation. There is therefore little doubt but that it will be those who are preparing now who will constitute the foundation for equipping and encouraging the saints of that fast approaching day to resist the beast, come what may. One third of the Church, it is true, will fall away into apostasy, reaping to the full their present lack of preparation and lackadaisical attitude, but the remainder of those future believers will be split equally between those who give up their lives for Christ in martyrdom and those who endure the entire Tribulation and rise up while yet alive to meet the Lord in the air (1Thes.4:17). Therefore the mission that falls to the lot of believers today who are bucking the trend of Laodicea is greater than that of personal spiritual growth, progress and production – as vitally important as these things are. The mission for present day advancing believers here on the cusp of the Tribulation is also one of intensive spiritual preparation in order to be able to endure what is to come *and thereby* to be ready to help others who were not prudent enough to do so ahead of time come up to speed in as short a time as possible once the realization of the Tribulation's arrival sets in.

In short, it should not be surprising if there seems to be an unprecedented disparity today between the lives of ease many of our brethren seem to be living and the disproportionate share of trouble that is befalling those who truly seem to be the salt of the earth: God is preparing a cadre for rectifying the deficiencies in His Church once events produce sufficient motivation for a proper response.

We have had occasion to note many times in the past that making material preparations for the Tribulation is a fool's errand because we cannot anticipate the precise course of events or the details of the crises with which we will have to cope during those distressing times ahead. This issue is of such importance, however, that it is fitting to repeat and emphasize it: better truth stored in the heart than canned goods in the cellar once that day arrives. Stockpiling and the like is also a waste of our time, energy and resources now which are better spent in pursuing the perfection of our Christian walk and making every effort to maximize personal spiritual readiness. Perhaps the most serious problems with a survivalist approach are that 1) it predisposes those so involved against the very real possibility (50/50 for those who stay faithful and refuse to apostatize) that the Lord

has marked us out for martyrdom; and perhaps even more importantly 2) it contributes to entirely the wrong mind-set: such preparations by their very nature incline toward selfishness and *self*-preservation. Those of us who are truly following Jesus now should instead make it part of our life's purpose to prepare not only to be spiritually able to endure what is to come but also to be ready to help our less prudent brothers and sisters in Christ through the storm ahead as well. As we have seen in the past, the Tribulation, not to mention its final half, the Great Tribulation, will not be the best time for our lukewarm brethren to embark upon a crash-course in spiritual growth, but that is exactly the situation perhaps the majority will find themselves in, and it is doubtful if many of these unprepared believers will be able to make it safe through the Tribulation without a large amount of help from those of us who have made adequate spiritual preparations ahead of time.²¹

For these reasons we can expect the "boot camp" experiences the Lord puts us through in preparation for those trying times ahead to be intense. The first generation of the cross which was also the foundational one of the Church Age was the "greatest generation" of Christians thus far, and for the most part these exceptional believers had to fight it out in the wilderness for the better part of their lives. The experiences of Mary, Joseph, John's parents, Anna, Simeon, the shepherds, and of course John the baptist, the apostles, and the other early church heroes contrast markedly with what we find in the next and most of the following eras of the Church. If Laodicea is going to rise up and rival that prior great generation – as seemingly it must do for the exceptional witness prophesied by the tribulational believers who do persevere to come to pass – not only will an intense purging be necessary but also an equally intensive push towards growth when once Laodicea finally awakes. To accomplish this will require the ready assistance of all who have adequately prepared themselves before the fact for service to Christ's Body. What this means in practical terms, dear Christian, is that even though your gifts may seem under-used, under-valued, and unappreciated at present, you should nevertheless make every effort to persevere in your good approach, because the day is fast approaching when these gifts will be employed in a very necessary way. What this means in personal terms, dear friends, is that the hardships, ostracism, trouble, testing and tribulations of the present day are not only not accidental but are also very much needful to temper your edge to just the right sharpness in order to be of service to Jesus Christ in that most trying time to come.

Endure hardship with me like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.
2nd Timothy 2:3 (cf. 1Tim.1:18; 6:12a; Deut.8:15-16)

I have fought the good fight. I have completed my course. I have kept the faith.

2nd Timothy 4:7

We are soldiers of the Lord Jesus, and we are being carefully and deliberately trained by Him to stand in the gap on the day of battle soon to come, when we will be called upon to encourage our weaker brethren, giving them an example to follow that they may not faint in their faith.

Then those who have insight will shine like the shining forth of the dawn – even those who led the many to righteousness – like stars forever and ever.
Daniel 12:3

And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

2nd Timothy 2:2 NIV

To meet this challenge will require prior preparation of an unusual sort. Rather than despairing at our present troubles, therefore, we must come to regard them as necessary for our Lord's purposes, and resolve to make the most of them in hope of being as useful to Him as possible in the crisis to come.

"As long as it is day, we must do the work of Him who sent Me. Night is coming, when no one can work."

John 19:4 NIV (cf. Is.55:6)

Redeem your time, for the days are evil.

Ephesians 5:16

Let us resolve, therefore, to make the most of the time we have and the circumstances with which we are presented, considering the troubles and the trials of the present not only necessary for our spiritual growth but actually welcoming them – in a complete reversal of the "normal" worldly approach – as opportunities to prepare so as to be as useful as possible to the Lord and to His Body the Church our fellow believers when that time of great tribulation arrives.

(2) Brothers, when you are being beset with all manner of trials, take pains to be joyful. (3) For you should keep in mind that this testing of your faith develops perseverance. (4) So let your perseverance develop fully, that you may become fully mature and entitled to a full reward, having been found lacking in no respect.

James 1:2-4

(3) And not only this, but let us glory in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces patience, (4) and patience produces proven character, and proven character produces hope – (5) and this hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us.

Romans 5:3-5

For I do not consider these present hardships in any way comparable to the glory destined to be revealed for us.

Romans 8:18

(17) For this present light affliction of ours is working out for us an eternal weight of glory beyond any possible estimation. (18) [Let us] not [then be] having [any] regard for what can be seen, but [instead] for what cannot be seen. For the things which can be seen are ephemeral. But the things which cannot be seen are eternal.

2nd Corinthians 4:17-18

We should therefore take pains now to practice and to perfect patience and perseverance as the Lord trains us for the trials to come, in addition to everything we have discussed so far always remembering also (among many other principles of truth) these twelve points:

1. The fiery trial is inevitable, but the furnace of testing is the place of the most intimate fellowship with our dear Lord Jesus (Dan.3:25), and the lions' den is where we are called upon to trust in Him most intensely (Dan.6:22-23).

(12) Beloved, don't be amazed at the fiery ordeal of testing you are now undergoing, as if something out of the ordinary were happening to you. (13) But to the degree that you are [truly] participating in Christ's sufferings, be joyful about it, so that at His glorious revelation, you may also rejoice with great gladness.

1st Peter 4:12-13

It is often necessary to endure great suffering in order to appreciate and experience the intensity of the comfort and encouragement God provides to those so afflicted (Ps.23:4; 94:19; 119:50; Is.51:12; 61:1-2; Acts 9:31; 2Cor.13:11; Phil.2:1-2; 2Thes.2:16-17).

(3) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of compassion and all encouragement, (4) the One who encourages us in all our tribulation so that we in turn may be able to encourage those in all types of tribulation by means of the very encouragement which we ourselves received from God. (5) Because as our sufferings for Christ multiplied in service to you, so through Christ did the encouragement we received multiply to the same degree. (6) So if we are experiencing tribulation, it is to provide you with encouragement and salvation. And if we are being encouraged, it is for the sake of the encouragement you have received, which is now at work in your successful endurance of the same sufferings which we also experienced. (7) And so our hope for you is a solid one, since we know that as you have become partakers of suffering, in the same way will you also become partakers of encouragement.
2nd Corinthians 1:3-7

It is in the midst of fight that we see Jesus the most clearly.

(7) I will bless [with praise] the Lord who gives me counsel. Indeed, even at night my emotions will instruct me [in His praises]. (8) I have kept the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be moved.
Psalm 16:7-8

(24) By faith, Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, (25) and chose instead to suffer maltreatment with the people of God rather than to enjoy the transitory pleasures of sin, (26) because he considered the reproach [suffered on behalf] of Christ greater riches than [all the] treasure vaults of Egypt. For he was looking to his reward. (27) By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king. For he grew strong by seeing the One who cannot be seen (i.e., by keeping his mind's eye on the invisible Lord Jesus Christ).
Hebrews 11:24-27

(8) Though you have never laid eyes on Him, yet you love Him. And though you cannot see Him at this present time, yet you have faith in Him. For this reason you rejoice with an inexpressible joy that bespeaks the glorious

future to come, (9) when you shall carry off in victory the ultimate prize – the [eternal] deliverance of your lives – which is the very purpose and objective of this faith of yours.

1st Peter 1:8-9

2. This world we behold is passing away, and we have a sure and certain future ahead in the world to come, one which is beyond comparison for good in every way. We have a better city, the New Jerusalem, whose planner and builder is God Himself (Heb.11:10; Rev.21-22). We have a better citizenship, one which is heavenly and eternal and entails extraordinary privileges which cannot yet be known or fully appreciated (Phil.3:20). We have a better inheritance, one which can never dim or be lost or stolen or defiled (Matt.16:19-20; 1Pet.1:4; Heb.11:40). We have a better body, one which is indestructible and fit in every way for life eternal (1Cor.15:35-50; Phil.3:21; 1Jn.3:2). And we most certainly have a better Ruler, a better Husband, a better Friend, a better Lord and Master, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, with whom we shall enjoy sweet fellowship forever and ever. These are the things with which we ought to be occupying ourselves instead of becoming fixated on the worries of this world (Matt.6:25-34).

(1) Therefore since you have been resurrected [positionally] with Christ, keep seeking after the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (2) Keep thinking on the things above, and not the things on the earth.

Colossians 3:1-2

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.

Philippians 4:8 NIV

3. We have the ability and the responsibility to encourage ourselves and each other in the Lord when the pressures of this life seem unendurable.

Moreover David was greatly distressed because the people spoke of stoning him, for all the people were embittered, each one because of his sons and his daughters. But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.

1st Samuel 30:6 NASB

(3) Strengthen the hands that are weak. Bolster the knees that are giving way. (4) Say to those with anxious hearts, "Be strong! Don't be afraid! Behold! Your God will come, as an Avenger. [Your] God will come, as a Rewarder. He will come, and He will deliver you".

Isaiah 35:3-4

And they will say on that day, "Behold! This is our God! We waited in hope for Him to deliver us. This is our Lord. We waited in hope for Him. Let us rejoice and be glad in His deliverance!"

Isaiah 25:9

(12) Make sure, brothers, that none of you develop an evil heart of unbelief (i.e., lack of faith) by turning away (lit. "apostatizing") from the living God. (13) Rather keep encouraging each other every day as long as we still call it "today" (i.e. as long as we still remain in this world), lest any of you be hardened [in heart] by the deception of sin.

Hebrews 3:12-13

Since the Lord is our Rock and our Refuge, let us resolve to face whatever may come with a fortitude and courage that befits people of faith.

"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you".

Deuteronomy 31:6 NIV (cf. Josh.1:6-7)

"The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."
Deuteronomy 33:27a NIV

"The Lord is my Rock, my fortress and my deliverer; (3) my God is my Rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation. He is my stronghold, my refuge and my savior – from violent men you save me".

2nd Samuel 22:2-3 NIV

(1b) Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. (2) Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

Psalms 90:1b-2 NIV

Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong.

1st Corinthians 16:13 NIV

4. We also have the ability and the responsibility to stand fast with determination and without compromise in the face of seemingly irresistible pressures, remembering that our salvation and eternal reward depends upon the steadfastness of our faith manifest in self-control, self-discipline, and perseverance (Rom.5:3-4; Gal.5:22-23; Col.2:5; 2Thes.1:4; 1Tim.4:8; 2Tim.1:7; Tit.1:8-9; Jas.1:2-4; 5:10-11; 2Pet.1:5-8; Rev.2:19; cf. Acts 24:25).

(24) Don't you know that all the runners in the stadium run the race, but that only one receives the prize? Run in such a way so as to achieve what you are after. (25) And again, everyone involved in competition exercises **self-control** in all respects. Those athletes go through such things so that they may receive a perishable crown of victory, but we do it to receive an imperishable one. (26) So as I run this race of ours, I'm heading straight for the finish line; and as I box this bout of ours, I'm making every punch count. (27) I'm "pummeling my body", one might say, bringing myself under **strict control** so that, after having preached [the gospel] to others, I might not myself be disqualified [from receiving the prize we all seek].

1st Corinthians 9:25-27

(3) May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ be praised, who has in His great mercy caused us to be reborn to a hope which lives through Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead, (4) and to an inheritance which will never be destroyed, defiled, or dimmed, but which is being guarded in heaven for us, (5) who are ourselves also being **kept safe** by God's power **and by our faith in Him** to an ultimate deliverance ready to be unveiled at the end of time.

1st Peter 1:3-5

(35) So do not throw away this conviction of yours – it leads to a great reward. (36) You need to **keep persevering** so that you may carry off in victory what has been promised – after you have accomplished God's will. (37) For yet a little while, how short, how [short the wait], and He who is coming shall come, nor will He delay. (38) "Then shall my righteous one live by his faith, but if he shrinks back, My heart takes no pleasure in him (Hab.2:3-4)." (39) Now we are not possessed of cowardly apostasy which leads to destruction, but **we have faith** which leads to [eternal] life.

Hebrews 10:35-39

5. We need to remember always – but especially in times of tribulation – that Jesus is our example, the One we serve and follow. He was willing to die for us, and did so. In emulation of Him, we need to be ready to endure

whatever He calls upon us to endure, even if we are chosen to honor Him through martyrdom.

If anyone wants to follow Me, let him [first] deny himself, then pick up his cross and follow Me.

Matthew 16:24

(1) Since then we too [like the believers of chapter 11] have such a large audience of witnesses surrounding us [both men and angels], let us put off every hindrance – especially whatever sins habitually affect us – and run with endurance the race set before us, (2) turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith (cf. "Alpha and Omega"), who, for the joy set before Him, endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despise, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God. (3) Keep in mind all the terrible opposition He endured against Himself at the hands of sinful men, so as not to grow sick at heart and give up.

Hebrews 12:1-3

(19) This is pleasing [in God's sight], [namely] if for conscience' sake someone bears up under afflictions when unjustly [subjected to] suffering. (20) But what sort of glory [is yours] if you endure punishment for having sinned? But if you endure suffering for doing what is good, this is pleasing to God. (21) It is to this [sharing in the sufferings of Christ] that you have been called, for Christ also died on your behalf, leaving you an example so that you might follow in His footsteps. (22) He committed no sin, nor was any guile found in His mouth. (23) He did not return slander when He was slandered, did not threaten when He suffered, but entrusted Himself to the One who judges righteously.

1st Peter 2:21-23

6. If we are following Jesus as we should, there is no obstacle we cannot overcome in following Him. Even though we face a raging sea of tribulation, we can have confidence that our Lord will see us safely through. In spite of the storm, the wind, the rain, the waves, the noise, the darkness, the lightning, in Jesus we can walk in peace and calm and joy and confidence, if only we have "a little faith" and are ready to live or to die for the Lord, confident that whatever He chooses will be for our ultimate good.

(1b) God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. (2) Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, (3) though its waters roar and foam and the

mountains quake with their surging. Selah
Psalm 46:1b-3 NIV

(10) For you, O God, tested us; you refined us like silver. (11) You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs. (12) You let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but you brought us to a place of abundance.

Psalm 66:10-12 NIV

He divided the sea and led them through; he made the water stand firm like a wall.

Psalm 78:13 NIV

(25) During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. (26) When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. (27) But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." (28) "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." (29) "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. (30) But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" (31) Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" (32) And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down.

Matthew 14:25-32 NIV

(21) Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. (22) If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."

Matthew 21:21-22 NIV

And God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tested beyond your capacity, but, along with the test, He will grant you the way out, so that you can bear up under it (i.e., even if you have to face the Tribulation).

1st Corinthians 10:13b

7. If we are serving Jesus as we should, there is no burden we cannot bear, because He is the One who is empowering us and carrying the weight.

But those who wait on the Lord Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.

Isaiah 40:31 NKJV

(28) "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. (29) Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (30) For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Matthew 11:28-30 NIV

For this present light affliction of ours is working out for us an eternal weight of glory beyond any possible estimation.

2nd Corinthians 4:17

8. In all things we may be called upon to suffer and endure and bear and overcome in those dark days ahead, we may be absolutely certain that God's grace will be sufficient to see us through.

(21) This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. (22) It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. (23) They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.

Lamentations 3:21-23 KJV

(9) But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. (10) That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

2nd Corinthians 12:9-10 NIV

(12) I know how to handle humiliation; I also know how to handle prosperity. I have learned by experience in each and every way how to handle being abundantly provided for and being impoverished, being in prosperity and being in a state of deprivation. (13) I have the strength to endure all [extremes] in the One who empowers me to do so.

Philippians 4:12-13

9. Our guide and encouragement in this fight must remain at all times the truth of the Word of God as we apply it in faith, illuminated and empowered by the Holy Spirit (Zech.7:12).

Thy Word [is] a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.
Psalm 119:95 KJV

"Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit" says the Lord of Hosts.
Zechariah 4:6

(9) But as it is written: "What the eye has not seen and the ear has not heard, and [what] has not entered the heart of man, [these are the very] things which God has prepared for those who love Him". (10) And God has revealed [these very things] to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches out everything, even the deep things of God. (11) For who knows the things of a man except the spirit of man which is in him? In the same way too no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. (12) And we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, in order that we might know the things graciously given to us by God. (13) And these are the very things we are speaking about, not in words taught by human wisdom, but with words of the Spirit, communicating spiritual information to spiritual people. (14) Now the unspiritual man does not receive the [deeper] things of the Spirit of God. For they are foolishness to him and he is not able to understand them because they are appreciated [only] through spiritual means. (15) But the spiritual man does appreciate them all, though he himself is not appreciated [in this regard] by anyone. (16) For [as it says] "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Who will instruct Him?" But we do have the very thinking (lit., "mind") of Christ (i.e., His truth taught by the Spirit).

1st Corinthians 2:9-16

And [in this spiritual warfare] put on the helmet of salvation and gird on the sword of the Spirit – which is the Word of truth.

Ephesians 6:17

For the Word of God is living and powerful; it is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even to the point of being able to divide the spirit from its earthly life and the marrow from its bones; [for] it (i.e., the Word when resident in our conscience by faith) acts as a judge of our heart's intentions and emotions.

Hebrews 4:12

Yet I consider the prophetically inspired Word (i.e. the Bible) even more reliable (i.e., than witnessing the transfiguration of vv.16-18). You too would do well to pay the closest attention to it (i.e., scripture), just as to a

lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the Morning Star rises (i.e., the Second Advent).

2nd Peter 1:19

10. We are not alone. God is in control. His plan was complete in every respect before He even created the world, including making every provision for us individually and at every step of the way, whether these provisions be seen or unseen (Ps.121; Is.37:26).

(15) When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" the servant asked. (16) "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." (17) And Elisha prayed, "O Lord, open his eyes so he may see." Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

2nd Kings 6:15-17 NIV

(28) And we know that, for those who love God, He works everything together for good – [that is to say,] for those who have been called according to His plan. (29) For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined (i.e., foreordained) to share the likeness of His Son, so that He might be the Firstborn over many brothers [and sisters]. (30) And those whom He predestined (i.e., foreordained), these He also called [to salvation], and those whom He called, He also justified (i.e., made righteous through faith in Christ), and those whom He justified, these He also glorified (i.e., our future resurrection and eternal life). (31) So what shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? (32) He who did not spare His own Son, but handed Him over for our sake, how will He not also graciously give us everything [we need] along with [that gift of] Him? (33) Who will [dare to] bring charges against God's elect? God is the One who is pronouncing [us] justified. (34) Who is he that condemns [us]? Christ Jesus is the One who died [condemned in our place], and the One, moreover, who was raised from the dead [for us], who is [seated] at the right hand of God, who is also making petitions on our behalf. (35) What will separate us from Christ's love? Tribulation? Or privation? Or persecution? Or hunger? Or destitution? Or danger? Or violence? (36) As it is written, "For your sake we are being put to death all day long. We were accounted as sheep for slaughter". (37) But in all such things we are decisively victorious through Him who loved us [enough to do what He did for us]. (38) For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, neither angelic

nor human authorities, neither things present nor things to come, neither heavenly powers, (39) be they the highest [of the elect] or the lowest [of the fallen], nor any other created thing [on this earth] will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:28-39

11. The Lord will deliver us through all of our troubles, both now and then.

"Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me."

Psalm 50:15 NIV

(14) "Because he loves me," says the Lord, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. (15) He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. (16) With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation."

Psalm 91:14-16 NIV

(23) Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. (24) You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. (25) Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. (26) My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Psalm 73:23-26 NIV

(1) God is our refuge and strength. [He is] our help in [times of] tribulation, [and] very quick to be found. (2) Therefore we shall not fear when the earth totters, when the mountains quake in the heart of the seas, (3) [when] its waters roar and foam, when the mountains shake on account of its swells.

Psalm 46:1-2

The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

2nd Timothy 4:18 NIV

12. And if so wills the Will of God for this deliverance to take the form of martyrdom, we have the comfort of knowing that this was always His Will for us, that this departure glorifies our Lord Jesus and guarantees our reward, and that by this means we have indeed been delivered from trouble.

(1) The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. (2) Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death.

Isaiah 57:1-2 NIV

Precious in the sight of the LORD Is the death of His godly ones.

Psalms 116:15 NASB

For this is God, our God forever and ever. He will be our guide, even unto death.

Psalms 48:14

This is the rest, this is the peace our Lord has called us to, that we may have peace and confidence through faith in Him, even though we stand in the eye of the Tribulation's storm. Let us make every effort to enter into this peace and rest now, so that we may be well-practiced at negotiating the tempests of life before the whirlwind of the Tribulation hits full on (Deut.33:27; Is.30:15; 57:19; Heb.3:19 - 4:3; cf. Ps.62:1; 116:7; Is.8:6-7; 28:12; Jer.6:16; Eph.2:14-22).

(9) So there does remain a "Sabbath day's rest" for the people of God. (10) For he who has entered into [God's] rest has himself ceased from his works just as God did from His own. (11) Let us therefore be eager to enter into that [continual and spiritual] rest, lest anyone fall [from grace] following the same pattern of disobedience [as the Exodus generation did].

Hebrews 4:9-11

And the peace of God which surpasses every thought will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:7

Peace I leave for you; peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you.

John 14:27

You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.

Isaiah 26:3 NIV

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

Colossians 3:15 NIV

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

John 16:33 NIV

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.

2nd Thessalonians 3:16 NIV

For true believers in Jesus Christ, even at the best of times life is often an itch that cannot be scratched. We are destined to be opposed by the evil one at every good step we make, and need to learn to live with the uncomfortable nature of the world by setting our hearts on the Lord and on the things which cannot be seen (Col.3:1). Above is where our Lord is, and above is where our treasure is too. Learning to keep our inner eye on those truths, learning to esteem Him and our eternal future more than this life and this world, requires the development of a tenacious pattern of thinking not easily swamped by the vicissitudes of life. In other words, living with this kind of true peace requires spiritual maturity. For this reason, the testing we are receiving now before the Tribulation begins is actually a gracious blessing from our Lord designed to prepare us for all the trouble yet to come. And so it will – if we allow patience to work its perfecting ways (Jas.1:2-4), making the most of the day by day opportunities we are being given to trust our Lord and not our eyes and ears. Day by day we pray the prayer our Lord gave us to pray. We pray for provision. And He does take care of us on every "today". We pray for forgiveness. And He has delivered us on that "yesterday" when He died for us. We pray for deliverance. And He will rescue us from all of our present troubles and bring us through whatever is to come – of that we may be absolutely certain. The only real question is whether or not we will believe the truth resiliently enough actually to **be** absolutely certain and sure in exercising and applying faith once the trial of trials begins. The time to prepare is now.

(25) For this reason I tell you [to] stop worrying about your life, that is, [worrying about] what you will [have to] eat. And stop [worrying] about your body, that is, [worrying about] what you will [have to] wear. Isn't your life more [meaningful] than food? And isn't your body more [meaningful] than clothing? (26) Look at the birds of the sky – they neither sow, nor

reap, nor gather into granaries. And [yet] your heavenly Father feeds them. You are more important than they are, aren't you? (27) Now which of you can add a foot and a half to his height by worrying? (28) Why then do you worry about clothing? Consider well the wild lilies – how [it is] that they grow, though neither toiling nor spinning. (29) But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his glory used to clothe himself like one of these. (30) And if God dresses the wild plants in such a way – here today but thrown into the oven tomorrow – will He not all the more do so for you, O you of little faith? (31) So don't worry, saying "What shall we [have to] eat?" or "What shall we [have to] drink?" or "What shall we [have to] wear?" (32) After all, these are the things that the gentiles are frantically pursuing. Now your heavenly Father knows you need all these things. (33) Therefore **seek first the Kingdom** and its righteousness, and then all these things will be given to you in addition. (34) So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself: there is [already] sufficient evil in any given day [without you adding to it ahead of time].

Matthew 6:25-34

Thy **Kingdom** come!

Matthew 6:10 KJV (cf. Lk.11:2)

V. The Kingdom of God

Apropos of section IV above, spiritual preparation for crisis is in its essence the development as one's basic mind-set the putting to death in our hearts of the visible world as something rotten and temporary, while living instead for the world to come which is eternal and wonderful in every way. All of the principles considered above may be resolved into loving the Lord and our eternity with Him to the exclusion of any serious emotional attachment to the physical world our eyes behold. Seeing Him who is invisible and blinding ourselves to the visible world is the preeminent way we Christians "seek the Kingdom as our first priority" (Matt.6:33).

(18) "Though the world hates you, know that it came to hate Me first. (19) If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own. Now because you are not [a part] of the world, but I chose you out of the world, for this reason the world hates you."

John 15:19

"I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world."

John 17:14

(15) Do not be a lover of this world, nor of what is in this world. If anyone is a lover of this world, a [genuine] love for the Father is not in him. (16) For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. (17) The world and its lust are passing away, but whoever does God's will is [going] to stay [alive with God] forever.

1st John 2:15-17

Once this fundamental shift in orientation has occupied our entire heart, the Kingdom, our eternity with the King in His eternal capital city where we will enjoy forever the rewards earned by serving Him properly in this short life, will truly be the purpose of our efforts for Jesus here on earth and the goal of all we are striving for "by means of the body" (2Cor.5:10). Properly understood, the Kingdom, the realm of the King, is our all in all. It represents everything for which we as Christians legitimately strive, and for which we endure all that we endure.

(45) "Again, the **kingdom of heaven** is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. (46) When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."

Matthew 13:45-46 NIV

"Be happy, even though you are poor, for yours is the **Kingdom of God.**"
Luke 6:20b

Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born again, he is not able to see the **Kingdom of God**".

John 3:3

(12) Giving thanks to the Father who has rendered you sufficient to receive your share in the inheritance of the saints in the light [of eternity], [the very One] (13) who rescued us from the power of darkness and delivered us into the **Kingdom** of His beloved Son.

Colossians 1:12-13

(4) So we ourselves [also] are boasting to the churches of God about your endurance and your faith in the persecutions and in the tribulations which

you are [presently] enduring. (5) These are [all actually] evidence of the righteous judgment of God in His [judging] you to be worthy of His **Kingdom** on behalf of which you are also suffering.

2nd Thessalonians 1:4-5

Since, therefore, we have received a **Kingdom** which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude so that through it we may serve God in a pleasing way with reverence and fear.

Hebrews 12:28

(10) So strive all that much more then, brothers, to make your calling and election secure through these good works. By devoting yourselves to these things (i.e., virtue, growth and the Christian production which springs from faith) you shall never be tripped up along your way. (11) For it is by such means that your path into the eternal **Kingdom** of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be smoothly and generously paved.

2nd Peter 1:10-11

I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and **Kingdom** and perseverance in Jesus was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

Revelation 1:9

The Kingdom of God (also called in scripture the Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew's gospel as in the first passage above) is mentioned nearly a hundred times by name in the New Testament in addition to numerous other passages which clearly refer to it (and it is certainly anticipated if not mentioned precisely by name in all Old Testament Messianic prophecy). While books have been written on the subject,²² and while the usage of these terms may seem in some respect diverse, all scriptural reference to the coming Kingdom have one essential idea at their core, namely, the fact that for believers it is the Kingdom to come which constitutes our true and eternal habitation (rather than this temporary world with all its trials and tribulations).

Jesus answered [Pilate], "My Kingdom is not of this world. If my Kingdom were of this world, my servants would be fighting on my behalf so that I might not be handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my Kingdom is not from here".

John 18:36

Therefore for all believers at all times – but never more so than for believers during the Tribulation – the Kingdom must become more than an idea: it must become the fundamental mind-set we adopt, the essential objective for which we strive, in order to cope with the tribulations of life, and especially to cope with the Great Tribulation (Dan.9:27).

(8) By faith, Abraham, when He was called [by God], obeyed and went forth into the place he was destined to receive as an inheritance. He went forth, moreover, in ignorance of where [exactly] he was heading. (9) By faith, he sojourned as an alien in the land he had been promised, dwelling in tents with Jacob and Isaac, coheirs of [this same] promise. (10) For he was waiting for the foundation of **that city** (i.e., the New Jerusalem, capital of the Kingdom) whose architect and builder is God.

Hebrews 11:8-10

According to His will and in keeping with the basic principle of His plan to "work all things together for [the absolute divine] good" (Rom.8:28), God may or may not deliver us in the way we desire from the troubles we are presently experiencing. As we have seen above and repeatedly elsewhere in this series, not only is suffering for Jesus Christ an essential part of the mature believer's burden necessary for spiritual growth, but during the Great Tribulation half of those who persevere will be called upon to honor our Lord Jesus in martyrdom. But whatever it be our lot to suffer in this life, as believers who have a full share in Jesus Christ we also have a full share in His coming Kingdom, an inheritance which cannot be lost or defiled, one which is secure and waiting in heaven for us to claim it (1Pet.1:4). So it is that the Kingdom, the eternal destination of the Plan of God for all of us who have been saved through the blood of Jesus Christ the King, is really the ultimate embodiment and fulfillment of that plan as the place where we who have chosen to follow the Lord will enjoy our eternity and all of our eternal rewards face to face with Him forevermore (1Thes.2:12). As those who love Jesus Christ more than life itself, therefore, our true and proper focus is not to be on this world or the things of this world but on the next world and the things to come. Our true and proper focus is to be the coming Kingdom of the Son of God – wherein we shall share His earthly rule in glorious resurrection – and on the coming Kingdom of the Father and our eternal place in New Jerusalem.

(19) Do not store up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and corrosion eat them away and where thieves dig through and steal them.

(20) But store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth

nor corrosion eat them away and where thieves neither dig through nor steal them. (21) For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
Matthew 6:19-21

(20) For our [true] citizenship has a heavenly existence, and it is from there that we expectantly await our Savior, Lord Jesus Christ, (21) who will transform this humble body of ours into one that matches His glorious body through His powerful ability to subordinate everything to Himself.
Philippians 3:20-21

(1) Therefore since you have been resurrected [positionally] with Christ, keep seeking after the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (2) Keep thinking on the things above, and not the things on the earth.
Colossians 3:1-2

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the Heavenly Jerusalem.
Hebrews 12:22a

Jesus is our King, the Son of the Great King Eternal, our heavenly Father. When we think about the King – as we ought to strive to do continually (e.g., Heb.11:24-27; 12:1-3; cf. Col.3:1-4; Phil.4:8) – it is right and proper that we also direct our thoughts to His Kingdom, and to the blessings we will enjoy when we partake of it fully in resurrection on that great day to come.

[Let us] not [be] having [any] regard for what can be seen, but [instead] for what cannot be seen. For the things which can be seen are ephemeral. But the things which cannot be seen are eternal.
2nd Corinthians 4:18

Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ through whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.
Galatians 6:14

[W]e who are awaiting the blessed hope, namely the epiphany of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (i.e., when we too will be resurrected in glory when He appears).
Titus 2:13

A believer on the cusp of the Tribulation could do worse than developing a deliberate pattern of thinking about the glorious Kingdom we await, making it a habit to meditate on the following points:

- Jesus Christ, the coming Messiah, is the One who is our King (Heb.7:1-3; Rev.17:14; 19:16; cf. Matt.21:5; Mk.15:2).
- We are His soldiers here on earth (Jn.18:36; 1Cor.9:7; Phil.2:25; 2Tim.2:3-4; Philem.1:2).
- We are engaged in spiritual combat on His behalf and on behalf of His Kingdom (Matt.11:12; 2Cor.10:4; Eph.6:10-17; 1Tim.1:18).
- We are awaiting the return of our victorious King and the commencement of His glorious Kingdom (Rev.11:15; 12:10).
- We are anticipating being rewarded for our service to Him through sharing in the plunder He has won (Is.53:12; Lk.11:21-22; Eph.7:4-10).

Everything we have, are, and will suffer for Jesus Christ will be worth it – and that truth will become brilliantly clear when we behold His majestic return on that inexpressibly sublime day to come. May we all prove worthy in the trial ahead.

[These tribulations which you are enduring] are evidence of the righteous judgment of God in His [judging] you to be worthy of His Kingdom on behalf of which you are also suffering.

2nd Thessalonians 1:5

A Warning From Christ:

In the parable of the widow and the judge, Jesus teaches his disciples that it is worthwhile to "pray at all times" (Lk.18:1-8). For, as He explains, even the unjust, unwilling judge yielded to the widow's persistence in the end. We are to understand, then, that God, who is just, will not long delay in bringing aid to His elect as they persist in prayer. Our Lord concludes this parable with a remark which may seem somewhat curious at first glance, but which in fact is rife with significance for the Church at this moment in history as we stand at the threshold of the end times. He closes the parable with this rather disturbing remark: "But when the Son of Man comes, will

He find faith on the earth?" Jesus' question should give pause to those who are a bit too sanguine about the Church's prospects as we draw ever closer to the prophetic events which are to usher in the final phase of history. For the question suggests that the issue is in some doubt, that if faith does endure the catastrophic period destined to precede our Lord's return, it will be a very near thing. The intensive, persistent prayer given as a motive for the parable may very well be a necessity rather than a luxury for those who are to face the challenge of surviving that future time while preserving their faith intact.

Luke's mention of another, supporting point to the parable of the widow and the judge gives us the basis for Jesus' concern which led to His probing question in the first place. He tells us that Jesus' purpose in telling this parable was not only to teach the disciples that they must pray at all times, but also that they must "not lose heart" (Lk.18:1)." The "loss of heart" or despair mentioned in verse one may seem at first to apply only to the issue of persistent prayer, but Jesus' question makes it clear that He was concerned that many believers, perhaps the majority of believers, would be so severely tested by the trials to come at the end of the age that their faith would buckle under the pressure of those events and that a wholesale "loss of faith" might result.

Clearly, our Lord's words are inspired and prophetic. As believers who consider all scripture sacred and invaluable for our instruction, we cannot help but be filled with a certain amount of trepidation at the thought that our faith might possibly come under testing of such a severe degree. Moreover, that our faith and everything of a spiritual nature which we have accomplished in this life, even our salvation might be at risk should we find ourselves living through the terrible times to come is a sobering thought indeed. We cannot afford to ignore the very real possibility that it may be our generation to which Jesus' question may finally apply. It may well be that some of us shall find ourselves face to face with the ultimate challenge to faith destined to be presented by future events. It may well be that some of us may fail that challenge. That is a risk which no believer can afford to run. It is certainly not a risk which any believer should face in ignorance.

In an age when Christianity seems to have gained such impressive advance all around the world, when millions of people all over the globe freely identify themselves as Christians, the need for concern may seem less than pressing. But let everyone who takes the scriptures seriously take a moment to consider Luke 18:8. For our Lord Jesus Christ is clearly

indicating that in fact by the time of his return, faith will be a rare commodity on earth.

But when the Son of Man returns, will He find faith on the earth?
Luke 18:8b

The cause of this frightening reversal between the present day state of affairs and the dark situation implied in Christ's question to His disciples is certainly the tremendous pressure and persecution destined to be released upon believers in the final period of history before our Lord's return, namely, the Great Tribulation. The grim foreshadowing of the challenge to faith posed by the Tribulation as introduced by our Lord's question in Luke chapter eighteen is not confined to that passage. For it is during this future period that "the love of many will grow cold"

(Matt.24:12), that a great "falling away" from the faith is predicted (2Thes.2:3), and that "many will defect from the faith" (1Tim.4:1).²³ It is during that final conflagration that faith will face its most severe test of all. Christ's question is more than just a question. It is a warning which no believer can afford to ignore.

"The days are near when every vision will be fulfilled".
Ezekiel 12:23b NIV

(27) "Son of man, the house of Israel is saying, 'The vision he sees is for many years from now, and he prophesies about the distant future.' (28) "Therefore say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: None of my words will be delayed any longer; whatever I say will be fulfilled, declares the Sovereign Lord.' "
Ezekiel 12:27-28 NIV

(3) Keep this foremost in your mind: in the end times cynics will ridicule [the truth], acting out of their own selfish lusts (4) and saying, "Where is that 'return' He promised? Everything is the same now as it was since the beginning of the world, since the time our forefathers passed on." (5) But it escapes their notice in asserting this, namely, that there were heavens long ago too, and an earth, which was [re-]established (Gen.1:2ff.) out from under water (i.e., the "waters below") and through [the midst of] water (i.e., the "waters above") by the Word of God – (6) [and that it was also] through these two [sets of waters] that the world of that time (i.e., in Noah's day) was deluged by water [from above and below] and destroyed. (7) Now the

present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire by that same Word (of God), preserved for the day of judgment and the destruction of godless men (i.e., at the end of history). (8) Let not this one fact escape your attention then, beloved, namely that one day is like a thousand years in the Lord's eyes, and a thousand years like one day (i.e., the final "day" will span a millennium). (9) The Lord is not delaying in the fulfillment of His promise (as some think); rather He is exercising patience for your sake, being unwilling for anyone to perish, but desiring all instead to come to repentance. (10) For the Day of the Lord will come like a thief, a day in (i.e., over the course of) which the heavens will depart with a roar (i.e., at the end of the Millennium), the very elements will ignite and dissolve, and the earth and everything which has been done upon it will be laid bare [for the Lord's inspection] (i.e., the last judgment). (11) Since all these things are destined to disintegrate in this way, [consider] what sort of [Christians] we ought to be, [devoted to] holy and godly conduct, (12) as we wait with eager expectation and apprehension the advent of the Day of God (i.e., the 2nd Advent). For on that day (i.e., at the end of it) the heavens will burst into flame and dissolve, and the elements will catch fire and melt. (13) But we are awaiting new heavens and a new earth just as He promised – [a world] where [only] righteousness dwells.

2nd Peter 3:3-13

For those whom that day finds ready and spiritually prepared, the Tribulation stands to be our finest hour. We have confidence in the Shepherd who will lead us through it, providing for our material needs, providing for our spiritual needs with the water of truth, and leading us on the righteous road to Zion. Though it be our lot to travel that road through darkness and storm, through the very shadow of death, we need have no fear because He will preserve and protect us. Even in the kingdom of the beast, Jesus will provide for us, and bountifully so, empowering us with His Spirit, and blessing us with the most intense spiritual experiences wherewith we stand to win untold eternal blessings, an overflowing cup of them. And until that day when we see our dear Lord Jesus face to face we know that He will never withhold His blessing and His mercy from us, having made a place for us in the New Jerusalem forever – one which comports to the service and sacrifice we offer up to Him, come what may.

(1b) The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. (2) He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, (3) he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. (4) Even

though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. (5) You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. (6) Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.
Psalm 23:1b-6 NIV

And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

Romans 13:11 NIV

And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

1John 2:28 NKJV

"Behold, He is coming quickly. Happy is he who guards the words of the prophecy of this book [in his heart]."

Revelation 22:7

Notes:

[1.](#) Cf. Matt.8:12, where the "*outer* darkness" refers to this same separation from God (Greek ἐξώτερον, of the same root as the ἔξω of the text here).

[2.](#) See [Coming Tribulation: Part 3A](#), section II, "The Great Apostasy".

[3.](#) E.g., this is the real force of our Lord's statements about the need for alertness on account of the fact that the *precise* "day and hour" of His return is unknown (Matt.24:42; 24:44; 25:13; Mk.13:35; Lk.12:40).

[4.](#) See part 5 of this series, section II.4, "Flee Babylon!".

[5.](#) See [Coming Tribulation: Part 1](#), section III, "General Character of the Tribulation".

[6.](#) See [Coming Tribulation: Part 4](#), section VII, "The Great Persecution".

[7.](#) Many of the Psalms (and other prophetic passages) which believers have long quoted as encouragement in times of distress and persecution find their complete fulfillment in those days of testing which precede our Lord's return (e.g., Ps.2; 24; 46; 47; 48; 50:1-4; 53:6 et passim; 76; 79; 106).

[8.](#) See Coming Tribulation: Part 5, section II.4, "Flee Babylon".

[9.](#) See Coming Tribulation: Part 3A, section II.3.c.1, "The persuasiveness of tribulational false teaching".

[10.](#) See Coming Tribulation: Part 3A, section II.3, "The Causes of the Great Apostasy".

[11.](#) While there are certainly examples in scripture of believers dissembling in a righteous way in order to protect others (e.g., Rahab's hiding of the Israelite spies; cf. James' characterization of this lie as righteousness: Jas.2:25), adopting a posture of falsehood out of a desire for personal safety will be at the very least a questionable course during the Tribulation, and one which will be absolutely reprehensible and indefensible if it leads to the harming of other believers.

[12.](#) See part 4 of the Satanic Rebellion series, section III.1 "Satan's antediluvian attack on the purity of the human line (the Nephilim)".

[13.](#) See part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, section II.9 "Specific Chronology of the Seven Days of Human History".

[14.](#) As a comparison between the two parts of the passage quoted here (i.e., 1st Peter 3:19-20 with 1st Peter 3:21) indicates, and as many biblical commentators have noted in the past. See especially M.F. Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament, and Arthur Pink's Gleanings in Genesis (both *in loc.*).

[15.](#) It is in this sense that we should understand out Lord's words at Luke 21:18 about "not a hair of our heads" being harmed: while this will be literally true in many cases, martyrdom will constitute a complete spiritual deliverance comparable to this corresponding physical deliverance. Compare also Paul's similar confidence in deliverance in 2nd Timothy 4:18: "The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom" (NIV), which deliverance most likely also took place by way of martyrdom (cf. Rev.2:10:b).

16. See Coming Tribulation: Part 6, section I, "The Second Advent Judgments".

17. See Coming Tribulation: Part 3B, section I.3.b, "Pharaoh", and Coming Tribulation: Part 5, in section II.4, "The Exodus parallel".

18. See Coming Tribulation: Part 6, section I.6, "The Regathering and Purging of Israel".

19. For the details, the reader is encouraged to see part 4A of Bible Basics: Soteriology, section I.5, "The Life of Christ".

20. See Coming Tribulation: Part 1, section IV.1.b, "The Day of the Lord Paradigm".

21. Coming Tribulation: Part 3A, section II.3.b, "The dearth of Bible teaching during the Tribulation".

22. Notably, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Chicago: 1968), by A.J. McClain.

23. See part 3A of this series, section II, "The Great Apostasy".

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