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The Troubler of ISRAEL

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by Charles Cooper

Elijah,

the prince of Old Testament prophets, placed Samaria (ten northern tribes) under a forty-two month drought (James 5:17). Immediately following the prophecy of the drought, God instructs Elijah to leave the land of Israel. Ahab, the king of Samaria, whom the Bible says, "...did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him," attempts to find Elijah. All efforts to find Elijah fail because God protects him with miraculous interventions. After three plus years, God instructs Elijah to present himself before Ahab. It is at this meeting that King Ahab utters those immortal words, "Is this you, you troubler of Israel (1 Kings 18:16-19)?" As is so typical of the Bible, Ahab's question is ironic. His accusation against Elijah is really an indictment against himself. For Ahab was the "troubler" of Israel.

Jeremiah 30:7 also speaks of a "troubler of Israel." This passage is perhaps the most often quoted text by pretribulationists to defend their supposition that Daniel's Seventieth Week pertains to Israel and not the church. Jeremiah writes, "Alas! For that day is great, there is none like it; and it is the time of Jacob's trouble, but he will be saved from it." Does this prophecy automatically exclude the church from the "tribulation?" Who is he that is the eschatological troubler of Israel? Whose wrath will Jacob be saved

from? These and other questions require a careful look at Jeremiah 30:7 and its context.

Pretribulationists are quick to offer their opinions concerning the meaning and significance of Jeremiah 30:7. However, few offer exegetical details to support their claims. What is offered is a litany of less than cogent arguments without explicit scriptural basis. The fundamental flaw in the thinking of pretribulationists is their insistence that Daniel's Seventieth Week is (1) Jewish in focus and (2) seven years of tribulation (God's wrath in varying degrees). Both points are supported with arguments of scriptural silence instead of explicit scriptural statements.

Dr. Paul Benware is a former professor of Bible at Moody Bible Institute. His comments are typical of those who argue that the Seventieth Week of Daniel is Jewish in focus. He writes,

In the Scripture passages that deal with the tribulation period no specific reference to the church of Jesus Christ is found. The Tribulation passages in both the Old and New Testaments refer to Israel and to Gentiles and to people who are saved, but they do not refer to the church. The word for "church" (ekklesia) is not used, and specific

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terms used of the church, such as “the body of Christ” are not found in these passages.... Daniel 9:24-27 is one of the most important passages on the Tribulation (the “seventieth week of Daniel”). It explicitly says that these years involve Daniel’s people and Daniel’s city—Israel and Jerusalem. That was true of the first sixty-nine weeks (483 years), and consistency would require that it will also be true of the seventieth week (last seven years) as well. Nowhere in that key passage is the church seen or hinted at.¹

To the untrained eye, Benware’s logic might seem flawless, but let’s examine his arguments more closely. It is the height of sophistry to argue that the term *church* or *body of Christ* does not appear in any passage in the Old Testament that deals with the “tribulation.” When, in fact, the term *church* or *body of Christ* does not appear in the Old Testament at all. To argue that the term *church* or *body of Christ* must appear in a prophetic passage in order for that passage to have direct application for New Testament believers is a fallacy. This is a clear example of arguing from silence, which is no argument at all. By this definition, no prophetic passage in the whole of the Old Testament would apply to New Testament believers given that not once does the term *church* or *body of Christ* appear in the Old Testament. Yet, this is clearly not the case! The correct hermeneutical principle is this: an Old Testament prophetic direct reference (like Joel 2:28-32) does not necessarily mean that that is its only referent. Only the Lord knows the fullest intent of His Word. God determines the referent not a theological system.

Case in point, Peter indicated that Joel 2:28-32 prophetically inaugurated the “last days” which include both the beginning of the “church age” and its consummation during the eschatological Day of the Lord. There is no explicit terminological relationship between the church and Joel 2:28-32. Yet, the apostle Peter (Acts 2:16) makes the case for direct fulfillment. It is true that Daniel 9:24 specifically refers to the Jews

and Jerusalem. However, the question of application is not *determined* by Daniel 9:24. Rather, the New Testament must be consulted. Since the church is not mentioned in the Old Testament at all, but certain passages in the Old Testament directly apply to the church, we are dependent on the New Testament for clarification. The Lord Jesus applied Daniel 9:24-27 to New Testament believers in Matthew 24:15, Revelation 6 and 13. The apostle Paul applied Daniel 9:27 to the Thessalonians in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12. The Old Testament limited its application to the Jews and Jerusalem. The New Testament expanded it to include the church.

Therefore, whether an Old Testament prophetic passage does or does not apply to New Testament believers cannot be determined from the Old Testament. Rather, God must reveal that information to us through His apostles or prophets. What appears to be a flawless argument is in reality a straw man, set up to be easily shot down so as to give the impression that the opposing position is weak.

Benware also succumbs to the pretribulation habit of describing the entire Seventieth Week of Daniel as “the tribulation period.” There is no explicit scriptural basis for this claim. Daniel 9:27 states that “a stop to sacrifices and grain offering” will occur at the mid-point of Daniel’s Seventieth Week. The Lord Jesus teaches in Matthew 24:15 that “tribulation” begins with “the abomination of desolation,” which Scripture teaches will occur at the mid-point of Daniel’s Seventieth week (Dan. 9:27; 12:11; Matt. 24:9, 15 and 2 Thess. 2:3-4). Jesus indicates that those living in Jerusalem should not fear the wars, famines and earthquakes in the days that immediately precede the “abomination of desolation” (Matt. 24:4-8). Tribulation should only be connected with the second three and a half-year period of Daniel’s Seventieth Week (Matt. 24:9, 15).

Benware’s logic is flawed concerning one other issue stated above. He points out that since Daniel 9:24-26 explicitly involves Daniel’s people and Daniel’s city—Israel and Jerusalem—it is only logical that what was “true of the first sixty-nine weeks (483 years),” consistency requires that it will also

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be true of the seventieth week (last seven years). However, pretribulationists fail to appreciate the uniqueness of Daniel’s Seventieth Week. The seventieth week does not immediately follow the first sixty-nine weeks. It is separated from the first sixty-nine by two thousand plus years. Two unexampled (unique) periods of persecution will occur during it (a point to be discussed later). With Daniel’s Seventieth Week, human history as we know it will be consummated. Daniel’s Seventieth Week will end Gentile dominion over the Jews and Jerusalem (Luke 21:24). At the end of the first sixty-nine weeks, Messiah was put to death. At the end of the seventieth week, Messiah will reign over the earth. At the end of the sixty-ninth week, Israel went into a period of partial blindness (Romans 11:25-27). At the end of the seventieth week, Israel will enter eternal blessings. While Daniel limited the seventieth week to Israel and Jerusalem, John extended it to the world. He said, “authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him (Antichrist) (Rev. 13:7),” during the great tribulation. The Seventieth Week of Daniel will not be a problem for Israel alone, but indeed, the whole world.

At the core of this problem is the insistence of pretribulationists that Jeremiah’s phrase “the time of Jacob’s trouble,” Daniel’s phrase “a time of distress,” and the Lord’s phrase, “a great tribulation,” covers the same period as Daniel’s entire Seventieth Week. Thus, the three phrases are equal. This conclusion cannot be maintained in the face of

an exegetical evaluation of Jeremiah 30:7. We shall demonstrate that while “a time of distress,” and “a great tribulation” is equal. The time of Jacob’s trouble is a separate and distinct period all together.

Exposition of Jeremiah 30:7

“Jeremiah [the weeping prophet] is unusual among the Hebrew prophets because of the extent to which he revealed his personal feelings.”² More than any other prophetic writer, Jeremiah bemoans the judgment of his people and the destruction of Jerusalem. Yet, he understood the need for judgment because of the idolatry and apostasy of Judah. In Jeremiah 1-29, God threatens judgment against Judah because they would not repent. In these early chapters, Judah falsely assumes that God will protect them because He would never allow His holy city, Jerusalem, to fall into enemy hands. This arrogant presumption on the part of Judah is condemned and judgment promised.

What a sweet relief Jeremiah must have felt to finally deliver words of comfort to the faithful remnant in Judah. Jeremiah 30-33 is about God’s promised restoration. These four chapters have been called “the book of consolation” because it gives expression to hopes for the future rather than judgment which characterizes earlier chapters.³ Chapters 30-31 are poetical in nature and offer consolatory hope for both Judah (two

southern tribes) and Israel (ten northern tribes).

Chapter 30 is wholly committed to the restoration of both Judah and Israel. Verses one through three of Jeremiah 30 set forth the critical theme: Israel and Judah will be restored to their land in the coming days. Notice,

The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Write all the words which I have spoken to you in a book.’ ‘For, behold, days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will restore the fortunes of My people Israel and Judah.’ The Lord says, ‘I will also bring them back to the land that I gave to their forefathers, and they shall possess it.’

This promise of restoration naturally fosters several questions. When will this promised restoration occur? How will this promised restoration occur? Both of these questions are answered in the second major paragraph of Jeremiah 30.

Jeremiah writes,

Now these are the words which the LORD spoke concerning Israel and concerning Judah, for thus says the LORD, ‘I have heard a sound of terror, of dread, and there is no peace. Ask now, and see, if a male can give birth. Why do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in childbirth? And why have all faces turned pale? Alas! for that day is great, there is none like it; and it is the time of Jacob’s distress, but he will be saved from it. ‘And it shall come about on that day,’ declares the LORD of hosts, ‘that I will break his yoke from off their neck, and will tear off their bonds; and strangers shall no longer make them their slaves. But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up for them. And fear not, O Jacob My servant,’ declares the LORD, ‘and do not be dismayed, O Israel; for behold, I will save you from afar, and your off-

spring from the land of their captivity. And Jacob shall return, and shall be quiet and at ease, and no one shall make him afraid. For I am with you,’ declares the LORD, ‘to save you; for I will destroy completely all the nations where I have scattered you, only I will not destroy you completely. But I will chasten you justly, and will by no means leave you unpunished.’

This paragraph has three thought units: verses 4-7, 8-9, and 10-11. Jeremiah 30:4-7 tells the reader when God’s promised restoration would come to Israel and Judah. Jeremiah 30:8-11 answers the second question posited above. That is, how God’s promised restoration will come to Israel and Judah. We shall take a very detailed look at Jeremiah 30:4-7.

Jeremiah first gives a summary statement of chapters 30-31 (ver. 4). The prophet announces a cry of terror, panic, and no peace (ver. 5). *Terror*, *panic* and *no peace* are trademark characteristics of God’s work among the wicked (Deut 2:25; 11:25; 1 Sam 14:15; Isa 19:16). At once, the reader asks, “what is the cause of this terror and panic?” A situation so bad that every man, “from convulsive pains, hold their hands on their loins, so as to support their bowels, in which they feel the pangs, and which makes every countenance pale” (ver. 6).⁴ Verse 7 declares the cause. It is the eschatological Day of the Lord. The last and greatest Day of the Lord the world will ever experience.

That day is the critical indicator that the eschatological Day of the Lord is in focus. “That day” and similar expressions are found frequently in the Old Testament for the Day of the Lord.⁵ Richard H. Hiers in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* agrees. He states, “Often, expression[s] like “that day” refer to the future time when God... would act in judgment against foreign nations, Israel, Judah, or the Jewish people...”⁶ That the eschatological Day of the Lord is indicated here has wide consensus. Charles L. Feinberg states, “In light of the immediate context and what follows, the preferable position is to assume that the reference (that day) is to the Day of the Lord.”⁷ John M. Bracke states, “the initial

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poem of these chapters begins with a portrayal of the day of the Lord.”⁸

Jeremiah himself defines “that day.” First, he indicates that “there is none like it.” Secondly, he states, “it is the time of Jacob’s distress.” Both sentences are unique. However, one should not succumb to the old saying “familiarity breeds contempt.” Anthony Tomasino illustrates this trap. He posits,

In [Jeremiah] 30:7, the “time of the distress of Jacob” will be more awful than any day preceding it, but it will result in a time of eschatological bliss, when Israel will be saved and a new David will reign over them (30:9). This same prophet refers to the eschatological judgment at the (lit.) “time of visitation (by the Lord)” (8:12; 10:15; 46:21; 49:8; 50:27; 51:18). Dan 12:1 expresses a similar idea about the eschatological oppression, stating that it will be a “time of distress” greater than any preceding or following, but it will result in the salvation and glorification of the righteous in Israel.⁹

Following the notion of similarity, Charles L. Feinberg would add Matthew 24:21 as a corollary text to support Tomasino’s conclusion. Matthew 24:21 states, “for then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall.”

Feinberg, Tomasino and many pretribulationists seize on the description of Jeremiah’s “time of Jacob’s trouble,” Daniel’s “time of distress,” and Matthew’s “great tribulation.” Each event is described as unexampled (unique) in human history. They deduce that this “unexampledness” can mean only one thing. Jeremiah’s event, Daniel’s event and Matthew’s event must be the same event. Notice the certainty expressed in the statement of G. Campbell Morgan. He states, “Exposition is scarcely needed here. There cannot be two periods of *unexampled tribulation*, and Jeremiah and Jesus, in Matthew, therefore speak of the same period (italics added).”¹⁰ However, the trait of commonality—unexampledness—does not warrant, in and of itself, sameness. We shall demonstrate

that Jeremiah 30:7 does not equate with Daniel 12:1 and Matthew 24:21.

The *time of Jacob’s trouble* is clearly identified as the eschatological Day of the Lord. Scripture indicates that the eschatological Day of the Lord is God’s punishment of the whole world and not just Israel. Isaiah states, “Behold, the day of the Lord is coming... Thus I will punish the world for its evil... (Isa. 13:9a, 11a).” The fact that God’s final punishment of Jacob is identified as the eschatological Day of the Lord universalizes the scope of God’s wrath.

However, there is no explicit scriptural foundation for placing “the time of distress,” (Dan. 12:1) and “a great tribulation,” (Matt. 24:21), which are equal, within the context of the eschatological Day of the Lord. God, alone, is the direct cause and executor of His Day-of-the-Lord-wrath! Of the 29 explicit *Day of the Lord* passages in the Old Testament, the prophets repeatedly report the Lord to have said, “It (the Day of the Lord) will come as destruction from the Almighty,” (Isa. 13:6b, Joel 1:15). The Lord also states, “I will punish the world,” (Isa. 13:11, Zep. 1:8), and “I will bring distress on men,” (Zep. 1:17). In the Revelation, the trumpets and bowls are clearly God’s execution of His wrath against the world.

However, in the passages, which explicitly describe “the great tribulation,” there is no explicit indication that God is directly attributed to be its agent or executioner. Daniel 9:27 explicitly indicates that the three-and-a-half years of desolation is attributable to man (Antichrist) who is empowered by Satan directly (2 Thess. 2:9 and Rev. 13:2). Daniel 12:1 indicates that the *time of distress* follows Michael’s (God’s agent) actions.¹¹ Revelation 12:12 states that Satan comes down to earth, having great wrath, recognizing that he has a *short time*. Revelation 12:13-17 makes it clear that Satan’s *short time* is three-and-a-half years. Revelation 13 makes it clear that Antichrist executes the wrath of Satan against the saints (Rev. 13:7). Thus, the “tribulation” is Satan’s wrath, not God’s wrath.¹²

Therefore, *the time of Jacob’s trouble* and a *time of distress/a great tribulation* are two entirely different periods. Both are unexampled, but different. *The time of Jacob’s*



trouble (Jer. 30:7) is God’s wrath against Israel and Judah for their many centuries of rebellion. Israel and Judah are the central focus of Jeremiah 30, but many other passages extend the impact of the eschatological Day of the Lord to the whole world. God’s wrath, as seen in the trumpet and bowls of Revelation 8-9; 11:15-18; 16 and 19, is clearly the worst expression of God’s wrath the world will ever experience—*there is none like it*.

A *time of distress/a great tribulation* (Dan. 12:1 and Matt. 24:21) is Satan’s wrath against God’s elect. Revelation 13:7 states, “it (the power to persecute) was given (by Satan with God’s sovereign permission) to him (Antichrist) to make war with the saints and to overcome them...” Revelation 13:8 states that the non-elect will worship Antichrist. Therefore, the only people left are those who will not worship Antichrist—the elect. They will experience the worst persecution of God’s elect the world has ever seen—*such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall* (Matt. 24:21).

There will be two unexampled times: Satan’s wrath against the righteous (a time of distress/a great tribulation) and God’s wrath against Israel/Judah and the wicked (the Day of the Lord/the time of Jacob’s trouble). The question is then: does this conclusion have explicit biblical proof?

First, Jesus separates His wrath and Satan/ Antichrist’s wrath. Matthew 24:29

states, “But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.” From the context, one can easily discern that the Lord is answering the disciples’ question, “what will be the sign of your coming?” Jesus indicates that His return follows the “tribulation” of those days. The “tribulation of those days” is none other than the wrath of Satan/Antichrist against God’s elect (Matt. 24:22-24). This event will be cut short by the initiation of the eschatological Day of the Lord (Matt. 24:22, 24 and 29). The sign of the Old Testament’s eschatological Day of the Lord is the same sign as the sign of the Lord’s coming. Thus, the Lord’s return initiates His wrath against the wicked as well as relief for the elect. Joel 2:31 explicitly states, “The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.”

Second, Daniel is clear that the *time of distress* begins at the midpoint of Daniel’s Seventieth Week. Few would argue that the “great tribulation” begins at the midpoint of Daniel’s Seventieth Week. However, the precise beginning of the eschatological Day of the Lord does not enjoy consensus among pretribulationists. D. E. Hiebert, a pretribulationist, states that “the day of the Lord is inaugurated with the rapture of the church as described in [1 Thessalonians] 4:13-18,

covers the time of the great tribulation, and involves His return to earth and the establishment of His messianic reign.”¹³ Paul D. Feinberg, another pretribulationist, differs with Hiebert. He writes, “I think that [Robert] Gundry is probably right in arguing that the Day of the Lord does not begin with the Tribulation, although I would start the Day of the Lord about the middle of the [Daniel’s Seventieth] week...”¹⁴ A third pretribulationist, R. L. Mayhue differs with both Hiebert and Feinberg. He states, “that DOL [Day of the Lord] will occur only at the end of the tribulation period, not throughout its duration...”

Perhaps, pretribulationists should heed Mayhue’s request. He writes,

In my view, the traditional dispensational definition of DOL beginning at the pretribulation rapture and extending throughout the millennium or beginning with Christ’s second coming and extending through the millennium needs to be modified.¹⁵

The prewrath position takes the view that the eschatological Day of the Lord occurs “at the end of the [great] tribulation period, [and] not throughout its duration.”¹⁶ However, a distinction taught by prewrath proponents is this: the great tribulation of Satan/Antichrist against God’s elect will be cut short. The remainder of Daniel’s Seventieth Week and Antichrist time of rule will consist of the wrath of God. Jesus explicitly stated as much. He taught, “for the sake of the elect, those days [of persecution] shall be cut short (Matt. 24:22b).” Now if Jesus knew that Daniel’s abomination of desolation was still future, he also knew that Daniel indicated that this period would last three-and-a-half years. Therefore, the three-and-a-half years will be cut short. How short? No one knows, but definitely shorter than three-and-a-half years!¹⁷

The prewrath position recognizes several corollary issues because of this “modified” view of the Day of the Lord. We shall address only one issue in this article. First, if the Day of the Lord follows the great tribulation by Satan/Antichrist, then is any aspect of the great tribulation the wrath of

God? Or put another way, is the wrath of God limited to the Day of the Lord? The answer: yes!

God’s eschatological wrath is indeed limited to the Day of the Lord. In both passages of the New Testament that specifically deal with this (Matthew 24 and Revelation 6), God’s wrath is clearly shown to follow the great tribulation. Jesus explicitly states this fact in Matthew 24:29, which says, “But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened,” etc. This is the first and only direct indication in Matthew 24 that God’s wrath is involved in the events of the end times. The Day of the Lord clearly follows the persecution by Satan/Antichrist.

The wrath of God can be shown to follow the persecution of God’s elect by Satan/Antichrist from a careful analysis of Revelation 6 as well. The fifth seal states,

And when He broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; (Rev. 6:9)

and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” (Rev. 6:10)

And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, should be completed also. (Rev. 6:11)

Who are these martyrs? These believers were recently killed on earth because of their faith. The phrase “those who dwell on the earth” is consistently used throughout the Revelation to refer to the living earth-dwellers during the end times that support Satan/Antichrist and oppose God and His elect. This is a very important point. The murderers of the faithful are still alive on the



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earth at the time the question is asked in heaven. Second, when do the martyrs ask this question? The martyrs' question follows an unexampled season of death on the earth as indicated in the fourth seal.

The particular concern of the martyrs is God's timing of His planned judgment and vengeance on the living-earth dwellers. The martyrs indicate that God has not acted against the living earth-dwellers yet. The particular phrase that expresses God's present conduct toward the living earth-dwellers is variously translated. David E. Aune in his commentary on Revelation says, "how long will it be until you judge and avenge..."¹⁸ J. Massyngberde Ford says, "how long before you render judgment and deliver our lives..."¹⁹ Robert Mounce says, "how long... dost thou not judge and avenge..."²⁰

A literal translation of the Greek reveals that there is not a verb *to refrain from*, *to be*, *to render*, or *to do* used in this verse. Rather, translators are attempting to communicate the sense of the Greek. The point is this: God has not in the past nor has He²¹ to the time of the martyrs' question punished the living earth-dwellers for their crime. God instructs the martyrs that His justice will be delayed until the complete number of believers to be killed is finished (Rev. 6:11). Then He will punish the living earth-dwellers.

That this is the case is additionally supported by the direct indication that the wrath of God follows in the sixth seal. Revelation 6:12-14 indicates that the same sign that Jesus indicated would follow the great tribulation follows the fifth seal martyrs' question—a sign, which the wicked see, understand and respond to appropriately (Rev. 6:15-16). The wicked indicate that the cosmic disturbances point to the imminent outbreak of the wrath of God.

In a recent article by Dr. Robert L. Thomas, he attempts to refute this aspect of the prewrath position, arguing that the response of the wicked indicted in Revelation 6:14-15 demands that the wrath of God must have been experienced prior to the sixth seal. Otherwise, the wicked would have no idea that the cosmic disturbances indicate the imminent pouring out of the

wrath of God. Dr. Thomas writes,

A burning question persists for those who believe that God's wrath will begin with the seventh seal: How can an unbelieving world, whose cries are recorded in 6:16-17, know that the wrath of God is about to fall on them at the time represented by the sixth seal? The day of God's wrath will catch them by surprise, as a thief catches his victims at night (3:3; 16:15; cf. 1 Thess. 5:2-3). The wrath to which these earth dwellers refer must be something that has already begun, and now for the first time they recognize it while experiencing the afflictions of the sixth seal.²²

This is "a burning question," but only for pretribulationists who refuse to accept explicit biblical evidence. As with so much of the pretrib position, Thomas's statement is based upon an assumption. He assumes that since the wicked are ignorant about *when* God's wrath will come that they are also ignorant about *what* God's wrath is.

It will not take a brain-surgeon to figure out that when the whole universe goes pitch black (no sun, no moon, and no stars shining) followed by "the sign of the Son of Man" appearing in the sky and then Jesus appears with angels of fire, that earth and her people will know that they have a problem. Just the magnitude of the event alone will be enough to convince the wicked that God's wrath is imminent.

First, in Revelation 6:15-16 John indicates there will be "a great earthquake..." Five earthquakes are mentioned in the Revelation.²³ Three of them are said to be *megas*. It is one thing to have a localized earthquake, but these are mega-earthquakes. These mega-earthquakes will shake the entire earth (Isa. 13:13). The result: "men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world (Luke 21:26)." Notice, "the things which *are coming* upon the world" (italics added), and not "things which [have been] coming upon the world."

Secondly, John indicates "the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair..." Matthew says "the sun will be darkened (Matt.

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24:29)." Peter quotes Joel 2:31 in Acts 2:20 that "the sun shall be turned into darkness." The point is that our solar system will have no physical light source. The result: "men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world (Luke 21:26)."

Thirdly, John indicates "the whole moon became like blood." *Like* indicates a simile—a figure of speech of comparison. Matthew tells us what this figure of speech means: "the moon will not give its light." If the sun goes dark, the moon automatically ceases to give light because it only reflects the light of the sun. The result: "men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world (Luke 21:26)."

Fourthly, John indicates "the stars of the sky fell to the earth..." This is a physical impossibility so we know this is a figure of speech as well. As with the sun and the moon, the stars will simply give no light (Isa. 13:10). The result: "men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world (Luke 21:26)."

Fifthly, John indicates "the sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up." The particular Greek word used here can mean "to disappear" or "to split apart." The idea seems to be that a space is created in the heavens that allows direct sight from earth to God's throne. The result: "men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world (Luke 21:26)."

The sixth and final component of John's cataclysmic disturbances involves the moun-

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tains and islands of the world. John states “every mountain and island were moved out of their places.” Some have incorrectly associated this event with the seventh bowl judgment of Revelation 16:20 where John indicates that the mountains and islands fled away or disappeared. However, Revelation 6:14b merely indicate that the mountains and islands “moved out of their places.” A geographical re-distribution of the earth’s surface will certainly be impressive. The result: “men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world (Luke 21:26).”

While we must admit that we have met some wicked people who were stupid, we must say that the overwhelming majority of wicked people are not stupid. No person in their right mind could possibly think that the five events depicted above could be anything but the work of God. As Nicodemus said, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him (John 3:2).” The wicked may not believe, but they are certainly not stupid. The wicked can recognize the deeds of God.

Jesus teaches in Matthew 24:30 that immediately after darkness grips the universe, “the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky.” If the five events of Revelation 6:12-14 was not enough for the wicked to know what’s up, the appearance of the sign of the Son of Man certainly will clear up any confusion. What exactly is the sign of the Son of Man? John F. Walvoord states, “The sign of the Son of man predicted in Matthew 24:30 is apparently the glory of the Lord which will appear in the heavens as

Christ returns.”²⁴ Meredith G. Kline argues that

His advent is to be an epiphany in radiant clouds amid the holy angels of God’s throne, attended by a great noise and cosmic cataclysm... Now, “the sign of the Son of Man in heaven” (vs. 30a) is nothing other than this epiphany itself... The Son of Man in heaven is himself the sign, the name-banner, of the Son of Man.²⁵

The early church father, Chrysostom, indicated that he thought “the sign of the Son of Man” was “the cross being brighter than the sun, since this last will be darkened...”²⁶ Scripture does not explicitly identify the “sign of the Son of Man.”

One cannot be dogmatic about what the *sign* or *banner* is, but who or what the sign or banner represents will be unmistakable. For we are told that immediately following the sign, “all the tribes of the earth will mourn” (Matt. 24:30). This is not the mourning that accompanies repentance, but the mourning that accompanies despair. The particular Greek word used in this verse means “to beat one’s breast as an act of mourning.”²⁷

Matthew indicates that in association with mourning tribes, the Lord Jesus will be seen coming on the clouds with power and glory. It is clear that these are the events that inform the wicked upon the earth that the wrath of God is imminent. Events so unmistakable, due to their magnitude, that all men will know it is the Lord’s handiwork.

One final point about the knowledge of the wicked during Daniel’s Seventieth Week is necessary. Dr. Thomas is seemingly unaware that the earth will have the prophetic ministry of two great prophets prior to the Lord’s return. Revelation 11:3 indicates that God’s two witnesses “will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, in sackcloth.” It is impossible to believe that these prophets will not be “worrying” the world of its imminent doom. The message of the two witnesses is indicated by their dress—sackcloth. In fact,

the garments of the two witnesses provide the only clue to the nature of

their message, for nothing whatever is said about the content of their prophetic testimony. Though it is often claimed that their message was a call to *repentance*... the text is strangely silent on that point... the two witnesses are concerned not with securing the repentance of the world but rather with acting as God’s agents in judging the world; killing, and tormenting the opposition are not normal tactics of evangelists...”²⁸

Therefore, we conclude that the answer to Dr. Thomas’ “burning question” is simple. The cosmic disturbances are more than adequate to educate the wicked concerning the arrival of God’s imminent wrath. The reaction indicated in Revelation 6:15-16 of the wicked supports this conclusion.

Conclusion

Jeremiah 30:7 predicts *the time of Jacob’s trouble*. It is equal to the unexampled Day of the Lord judgment against the wicked, which will include the final punishment of Judah and Israel prior to their full restoration. This period will follow the unexampled period of persecution against the righteous (a time of distress/a great tribulation). This sequence is taught in both Matthew 24 and Revelation 6. Therefore, *the time of Jacob’s trouble* is not the same as *the time of distress/a great tribulation*. Consequently, pretribulationists incorrectly argue that the church is excluded from Daniel’s Seventieth Week because they incorrectly equate *the time of Jacob’s trouble* with the great tribulation. The correct reason the church is excluded from *the time of Jacob’s trouble* is that *the time of Jacob’s trouble* is the eschatological Day of the Lord. A period of time the Lord promised the church that it would not experience (1 Thess. 1:10 and 5:9).

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3. J.A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah, NICOT* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 551.
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 6. *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Day of the Lord," by Richard H. Hiers, 2:79.
 7. C.L. Feinberg, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982) 204.
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 9. Anthony Tomasino, *The International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, (eds W. A. VanGemeren et al.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997) 3:563-567.
 10. E.C. Deibler, "The Relation of the Church to the Kingdom," Part 2, *BSac* 97 (July 40) 356.
 11. Daniel 12:1 states that "Michael, the great prince who stands over the sons of the your (Daniel) people, will arise." Following this event, the time of distress occurs.
 12. Revelation 12:1-6 indicates that the woman (the righteous remnant of Israel) will be protected by God from the wrath of Antichrist for the three and a half-year tribulation. This argues against labeling the "great tribulation" as the wrath of God. Jesus is reported to have indicated that those living in Jerusalem just prior to the beginning of the "abomination of desolation" should flee once the temple is desecrated. One is hard pressed to explain why God would need to send the woman into the wilderness as protection from His wrath.
 13. D. E. Hiebert, *The Thessalonian Epistles*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 211.
 14. R. R. Reiter, et al, *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 61.
 15. R. L. Mayhue, "The Prophet's Watchword: Day of the Lord," *GTT* 6 (Fall, 85), 246.
 16. I would recommend that the reader pay close attention to Dr. Mayhue's article—"The Prophet's Watchword: Day of the Lord," referenced above. Mayhue adopts two future eschatological days of the Lord, a position worthy of study.
 17. Satan's persecution of God's elect will be cut short, not Satan's time to rule.
 18. D. E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 52B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 406.
 19. J. M. Ford, *Revelation*, (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 96.
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 21. Both verbs in the martyrs' question are present, active and indicative. *Extending-from-past present* is the particular category of usage. The action began in the past and continues in the present. For a detailed discussion, see Daniel B. Wallace's *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics*, (Grand Rapid: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 519.
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The Precious Privileges of Our Ministry

by Charles Cooper

By the time you read this article, I will have completed twenty-seven years in the preaching ministry. Notwithstanding many wonderful opportunities over the years, few can really compare with a recent trip that I had made to India.

We receive invitations from all over the world and we assume that the people who invite us are people who want to be taught a biblically consistent approach to the Lord's return. Naturally, we often know very little about the people inviting us. It's usually a journey of faith.

We received just such a request from Mr. Hispreaching Son Shylla in Shillong, Meghalaya India. With a first name like Hispreaching, one can sense the hopes of a mother and father at their child's birth. Mr. Shylla had been invited to a meeting at a local church to hear a lecture on the signs of the times. To the participants who arrived first, a small pamphlet was given bearing the title: *The Signs of the Times*. Due to circumstances beyond his control, Mr. Shylla arrived late and lost his opportunity to receive a copy of the pamphlet. Disappointed, he related the story to a friend of his. His friend, having recently received a copy of Robert Van Kampen's book *The Sign* and hoping to appease his friend, purchased a copy for Mr. Shylla. After reading it, Mr. Shylla's life changed irreparably.

Mr. Shylla is a very distinguished career politician in Northeast India. At the time he read Van Kampen's book, he was Speaker of the House for the State of Meghalaya in India. In a re-election year and uncontested, Mr. Shylla chose to step out of politics, something utterly unthinkable in India. He had the chart in the back of Van Kampen's book reproduced on a giant canvass and began traveling around his state teaching the prewrath position. He found our web-site, contacted the ministry, developed, setup, and organized two of the finest conferences I have ever attended. Well over 3, 000 people sat in 40 plus degrees to hear teachings con-



cerning the Lord's return. End of story, right? Wrong!

In his excitement about the prewrath position, Mr. Shylla shared what he had learned with any and everyone willing to listen. His copy of *The Sign* traveled with him and finally fell apart.

But this story is really about one gentleman in particular, Mr. Armstrong Syiem—a member of the royal family of Shillong, an acting chief of one of the Khasi states of Northeast India, and a very successful businessman. His wife had been a believer for many years, but he had never given the cause of Christ a second thought. Until a life long friend, Mr. H. S. Shylla recommended that he read *The Sign*.

At his friend's request, Mr. Syiem read *The Sign*. A well-placed presentation of the Gospel caught Armstrong by surprise. A wife's prayers were finally answered—her husband came to know the Lord. Not only a husband, but five children also trusted Messiah as their personal sin-bearer. Shortly after I agreed to go to India to teach the finer points of the prewrath position, Mr. Shylla asked me if I would be willing to baptize his life long friend, Mr. Syiem and his children. Excitedly, I agreed. Having baptized many new converts, I naturally thought I would step into a beautiful baptistry with heated water and pipe organ music in the background. Boy, was I wrong.

On December 13, 2000, I stepped into a natural pool formed from a mountain spring three hundred yards from a man-made damn to baptize eight recent converts. The water was below fifty degrees. The air temperature a little better than fifty degrees. My dress for

With my hosts and attendees in India.



the occasion was a cotton shirt and pants, no shoes and a lot of faith. We had the good fortune to find broken branches from the trees, which made a great fire. Seven thousand miles from home and heat, eight baptismal candidates and I along with about 15 others witnessed the faithfulness of God fulfilled in the life of a faithful wife and mother who had prayed twenty years for the salvation of her husband and family. The Lord is faithful.

It is not only a joy to teach others concerning the Lord's return, but to see converts to Christ in the process is "icing on the cake." This is but one of hundreds of stories about how God has used Robert Van Kampen's book, *The Sign* to make a difference in people's lives around the world.

Orlando – A New Home for Ministry

The Sign Ministries is moving to Orlando, Florida. The rationale for moving is quite simple—location, location and location.

The sponsor of The Sign Ministries is Sola Scriptura, a parent company set up by Robert Van Kampen to accomplish his vision for the cause of Christ. In purpose, Sola Scriptura is devoted to the affirmation of the authenticity, accuracy, and authority of God's word—the Bible.

The last project Robert Van Kampen worked on before his death was a museum for his Bible collection. The Van Kampen Collection, as it is known, contains the only private collection of ancient manuscripts and original versions of the Bible to be recognized by national historic societies. Cuneiform tablets, 13th-century illuminated manuscripts and perhaps the Latin Bible Martin Luther used to translate the Bible into German are but a few of the many outstanding pieces that make up the Van Kampen Collection.

Instead of building the museum in Western Michigan, as Robert Van Kampen originally intended, the family brilliantly decided to build the museum in Orlando, Florida. It was a matter of location. While Western Michigan has experienced a significant increase in yearly tourism, nothing can compare with the potential ministry opportunities that Orlando, Florida affords. Boasting not only a large tourist population from all over America, Orlando also offers an international presence as well. This allows for a maximum number of individuals to take advantage of the Van Kampen Collection.

Coupled with the Holy Land Experience at Zion's Hope, the Scriptorium (which will house the Van Kampen Collection) will further accomplish Robert Van Kampen's vision to have believers see firsthand evidence for the authenticity, accuracy, and authority of God's word—the Bible. On display will be first edition copies of English Bibles, Luther's and Gutenberg's Bibles, and much more.

With so much to offer those who visit Orlando yearly, Sola Scriptura's investment

for the cause of Jesus Christ afforded The Sign Ministries a great opportunity. Again, it is a matter of location. First and foremost, a substantial number of individuals will be exposed to the prewrath position in conjunction with other Bible-based opportunities. Second, the move will allow The Sign Ministries to publicly identify its mission with the fulfillment of the purpose of Sola Scriptura. The timing of the Lord's return is not a separate and unrelated issue to the affirmation of the authenticity, accuracy, and authority of God's word—the Bible. Rather, because we fully recognize the nature of God's word, we strongly advocate a face value interpretation of the Bible. In so doing, we show forth the authenticity, accuracy and authority of the Bible. Therefore, we aid in the accomplishment of the purpose of Sola Scriptura.

Thirdly, housing the ministries together saves money on operational costs. Fourthly, the staff of the ministry can now offer a vacation package with our yearly conferences that will be second to none. Not only will conferees receive outstanding teachings on the subject of end times, but they will also have the opportunity to take in the attractions of the city of Orlando. Fifthly, it will provide on-going, shared ministry opportunities with Zion's Hope and other Orlando-based ministries. And finally, the move positions The Sign Ministries for long-term viability in the mainstream of evangelicalism. Orlando is fast becoming a major center for Christian ministry relocations.

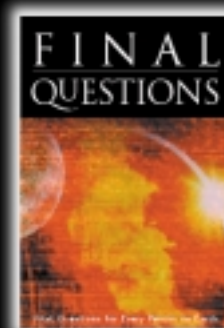
The relocation of The Sign Ministries should be completed by the end of this year. We anticipate no significant interruption in the on-going day-to-day operations of the ministry. However, we continually desire your prayers that God would be pleased with our efforts and give us wide acceptance among those who love His appearance.



Scenes from the Holy Land Experience in Orlando, Florida: a musical drama on the steps of the Temple recreates Jesus being brought as an infant; a woman explains the significance of the marketplace well; and a Roman soldier makes it his business to keep the peace.

QUESTIONS?

Get answers to tough end-times questions.



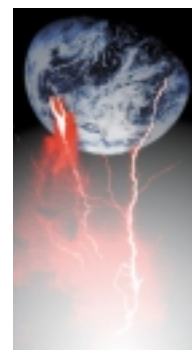
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Call 1-800-627-5134 to order

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A Ministry of Sola Scriptura
P.O. Box 113
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