

Preparation for the Tribulation
Matthew 17:10—21

With Jesus, for the most part, being rejected by Israel and the leaders of Israel seeking to kill Him, Jesus begins to turn away from reaching out to Israel and focuses on training His disciples on what they need to know to survive the Tribulation. The Tribulation, according to Daniel's prophecy, was to commence shortly after Jesus was put to death. Week 69 was coming to a close and week 70, the Tribulation, would begin with the signing of a seven-year peace treaty with Israel's enemies (the "many" of Daniel 9:27). The Tribulation could only begin after Jesus had ascended unto heaven after His resurrection (Luke 19:11—15) and would stay there until the restitution of all things at the end of the Tribulation (Acts 3:21). When the Bridegroom (Jesus) is taken from the Disciples it will be a time of fasting, which is the Tribulation (Matthew 9:15). According to the Jewish calendar the Feast of Trumpets (which points to the Tribulation. See Joel 2:1—2; Zephaniah 1:14—16) begins 163 days after Passover so the Tribulation should have begun about four months after Christ ascended into heaven. I believe God's offer of the Kingdom was extended one year by the Father as shown in the parable of Luke 13:6—9. The events we see from this point on in Matthew show Jesus preparing the Little Flock of believing Israel for the soon-to-come Tribulation.

Elijah must come (verses 10—13)

As Jesus and Peter, James and John were coming down from the mountain where the Transfiguration took place, they asked Him why the scribes say that Elijah must come before the Kingdom is set up. They were thinking about what they had just seen on the mountaintop and this was a logical question because they had just visited with Moses and Elijah. This is one thing the scribes actually got right. They understood this from Malachi 4:5. There were a number of people who thought that Jesus might even be the prophet Elijah (Matthew 16:14) adding to the expectation that the promised Kingdom would be set up in a short time (Luke 19:11—15).

Notice how Jesus answers them in verse 11 by saying that Elijah would indeed come first, before the Kingdom is set up, and he will be God's instrument to restore all things. Elijah will come first and through his ministry restitution will take place. By comparing Malachi 4:6 with Luke 1:17 the fathers are righteous while the children are disobedient. Restitution includes changing the hearts of the children back to the righteousness of their fathers. I believe this restitution is what will happen during the Tribulation and completed at the end of the Tribulation when God supernaturally changes Israel's heart. God is using the Tribulation to punish the sins of unbelievers, bind Satan in the abyss and shift the control of government from man to God. This is why it is called the Day of the Lord, in contrast to the day of man (1 Thessalonians 5:2—3; Isaiah 2:11). This present day of man was instituted right after the flood (Genesis 9:2) and continues until the beginning of the Tribulation.

Peter preached in Acts 3 that this time of refreshing (the Kingdom) would come if Israel were to repent and turn back to God. Some Bible versions wrongly translate that Israel will be forgiven when the times of refreshing come in but the Greek word in verse 19 means they will be converted so that the times of refreshing can be ushered in. So the order of events is the Jesus Christ will ascend into heaven, Elijah (or a person God raises up in the spirit and power of Elijah) will come during the time of the Tribulation and preach a message of repentance to Israel so that restoration will come (just as Peter did in Acts 3). When Israel believes, as they will at the very end of the Tribulation period (Romans 11:26), the times of refreshing, the Kingdom, will be established on the earth. At this time the Disciples will be ruling with Christ from Jerusalem and all of Israel will be given places of authority over all the nations of the earth. They will be a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6), a holy priesthood (1 Peter 2:5), intercessing between God

and the Gentiles. Since each Israelite in the Kingdom will be given the role of priest, they needed to be prepared for that function. This included Christ healing them because no priest could have a defect (Leviticus 21:16—23) and water baptism for purification (Exodus 30:17—21; Leviticus 8:1—6).

In verse 12 Jesus states that Elijah had already come in the person of John the Baptist but instead of accepting his message of repentance they killed him. If Israel had accepted John's message and had repented then he would have fulfilled the prophecy of Malachi 4:6 and the times of refreshing could have come in right after the Tribulation. However, Israel rejected John the Baptist and refused to repent so that another person in the spirit and power of Elijah will show up during the Tribulation as one of the two witnesses of Revelation 11. This person will also be rejected and be put to death.

The Church, the Body of Christ in this present Age of Grace, is not looking toward the Day of the Lord nor will we be a part of the wrath that God will be pouring out on this world of sin. We instead will be looking forward to the Day of Christ (Philippians 1:6—10; 2:14—16) and is why believers are now in the Kingdom of Christ (Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 1:13; 2 Timothy 4:1). We will not experience the wrath of God that will be poured out on Israel and the world during the Tribulation (Isaiah 13:9—13; Jeremiah 32:37; Ezekiel 38:18—23; Revelation 6:15—17; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9).

The demon-possessed boy (verses 14—21; Mark 9:14—28)

As they came off the mountain they met up with a crowd. A man came out of the crowd to Jesus saying his son is tormented by a demon and the Disciples were not able to cast it out. As soon as Jesus rebuked the demon, it came out of the boy and he was cured.

This is another lesson for the Disciples before they are overtaken by the Tribulation. It has already been established that Satan was a dangerous force to be reckoned with but will be a foe seven times stronger in the Tribulation. We know this from Matthew 12:43—45. Jesus had been going through Israel casting out demons, cleaning the house of Israel to prepare her for the acceptance of her Messiah. However, when Israel rejects her Messiah it allows Satan to come in seven times stronger than before so that Israel will be in worse shape than before. This story shows how strong Satan is and how helpless the Disciples will be if they don't rely on God for their strength.

The reason they were not able to cast out this demon is given in verse 20. Jesus said their faith was too little. To understand why their faith was too little we need to turn back to Matthew 16:21—23. Peter and presumably the rest of the Disciples did not accept by faith what Jesus said about Him going to Jerusalem and being put to death. Rejecting what God said demonstrated their lack of faith. If their faith were strong they would accept all He was telling them even if they couldn't understand it. The focus of their faith needed to be completely on Christ. Their faith was not based on working up enough belief from within themselves but it was about knowing that Jesus Christ was able to supply them with their every need in all situations. Verse 20 states that they needed only very little faith. The important thing was not how much faith they had but upon what (or whom) they made as the object of their faith. He was teaching them to be fully dependant on Him.

Jesus continues to tell the Disciples that if they transfer their trust fully to Christ that if they command mountains to move that they will move. I don't believe that this was just a casual remark or a remark of hyperbole but is something that will actually be possible during the Tribulation (Revelation 6:14). They already understood they had the ability to pray fire down from heaven (Luke 9:54) so it would not be a stretch for them to do these things against their enemies during the Tribulation (Ezekiel 38:22; Revelation 20:9).

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