

The Great Tribulation – *Article #39*

Mt 24:21 "For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again."

Beginning with Mt 24:15, Jesus speaks about unique signs that will occur during the end-time period. This is the time often called the "tribulation" ([Rev 7:14](#); cf. "great distress" in Mt 24:21 - the phrase in Greek is the same). The signs that occur will be warnings that the end of this present age is very near ([Mt 24:15-29](#)). These signs will lead up to and signal Christ's physical return to earth after the tribulation ([Mt 24:30-31](#); cf. [Rev 19:11-20:4](#)). At Christ's return, he will destroy the forces of the antichrist and evil, and he will establish an earthly reign of peace for the last thousand years of time as we know it (see chart of [THE LAST DAYS OF HISTORY](#)).

The first major sign that signals the beginning of the great tribulation is "the abomination that causes desolation" ([Mt 24:15](#)).

This phrase refers to a specific observable event that tells God's faithful followers (who are alive during the great tribulation) that Christ's literal return to earth will happen very shortly. (Christ's followers during the tribulation are those who accept Christ after he has already taken the faithful people of his churches from the world; see article on [THE RAPTURE](#)). This visible sign or event refers primarily to the future desecration (i.e., act of defilement, corruption, abuse) of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem by the antichrist (see [Da 9:27](#), note; [1Jn 2:18](#); see article on [THE AGE OF THE ANTICHRIST](#)). The antichrist, or man of lawlessness, will set up an image of himself in God's temple, declaring himself to be "God" ([2Th 2:3-4](#); [Rev 13:14-15](#)). The following are important facts about this event that will be the turning point for all that continues to happen.

(1) The "abomination that causes desolation" will mark the beginning of the final stage of the tribulation, which ends in Christ's return to earth to defeat the forces of the antichrist and bring judgment and destruction on the ungodly at the battle of Armageddon ([Mt 24:21, 29-30](#); [Da 9:27](#); [Rev 19:11-21](#)).

(2) By noting the time of this event ("So when you see..." in [Mt 24:15](#)), Christ's followers during the tribulation can know with great certainty when the tribulation will end and Christ will come to reign on earth (see [Mt 24:33](#), note). The time span between this event and the end is given four times in the Bible as three and a half

years, or 1,260 days (see [Da 9:25-27](#); [Rev 11:1-2](#); [12:6](#); [13:5-7](#); see [Da 9:25-27](#), note).

(3) Because those who are waiting for Christ's coming will be filled with such eagerness and expectancy ([Mt 24:33](#)), they must be aware that any report that Christ has returned will be untrue ([Mt 24:23-27](#)). There will be no doubt when Christ comes because the "coming of the Son of Man" at the end of the tribulation will be visible and known to all who are in the world ([Mt 24:27-30](#)).

Another sign that the great tribulation has begun will be the appearance of false prophets—messengers of Satan—who will perform "great signs and miracles" ([Mt 24:24](#)).

(1) Jesus strongly warns his followers to be especially alert and on guard against deception. Many people who claim to be "Christian" prophets, teachers and preachers will really be hypocrites and liars—even though they appear to perform miracles, healings and other signs. They will seem to have success in their ministries. But these false prophets will present a changed and twisted message, unlike the truth found in God's Word (see [Mt 7:22](#), note; [Gal 1:9](#), note; see article on [THE AGE OF THE ANTICHRIST](#)).

(2) The Bible urges Christians to continually "test the spirits" that guide and empower all teachers, leaders and preachers to see how their messages, ministries and lives match up with the teachings, principles and standards of God's eternal Word (see [1Jn 4:1](#), note; see article on [FALSE TEACHERS](#)). God allows deception (misrepresenting the truth), accompanied by miracles, to test believers and to reveal the depth and quality of their love for him and their loyalty to the truth of his Word (see [Dt 13:3](#)). **This period of deception will be extremely difficult.** Jesus states in [Mt 24:24](#) that during the last days religious deceit will be so widespread and presented with such craftiness that it will be difficult even for "the elect" (i.e., committed Christians) to wisely judge and determine truth from lies (see [1Ti 4:16](#), note; [Jas 1:21](#), note; see article on [ELECTION AND PREDESTINATION](#)).

(3) Those among God's people who do not truly love the truth will be deceived. They will be given no further opportunity to believe and accept the truth of the real Christ after the antichrist comes (see [2Th 2:11](#), note).

Finally, the great tribulation will be a specific period of horrible suffering and distress for all the people in the world.

The following are Biblical facts about this terrifying time, when the antichrist will assume world control and God will release his severe end-time judgments on the earth:

- (1) It will be worldwide (see [Rev 3:10, note](#)).
- (2) It will be the worst time of suffering and distress ever to occur in the history of humanity ([Da 12:1](#); [Mt 24:21](#)).
- (3) It will be a terrible time of persecution for the Jews ([Jer 30:5-7](#)).
- (4) The period will be under the control of the "man of lawlessness" (i.e., antichrist; cf. [Da 9:27](#); [Rev 13:12](#); see article on [THE AGE OF THE ANTICHRIST](#)).
- (5) Those in Christ's churches who have been faithfully following him before this time begins are promised deliverance and "escape" from the tribulation (see [Lk 21:36, note](#); [1Th 5:8-10](#); [Rev 3:10, note](#); see article on [THE RAPTURE](#)).
- (6) During this time, there will be both Jews and Gentiles (i.e., people other than Jews) who believe in Jesus Christ and are spiritually saved ([Dt 4:30-31](#); [Hos 5:15](#); [Rev 7:9-17](#); [14:6-7](#)). But those who come to trust Christ after the tribulation begins will have to endure what is to come.
- (7) It will be a time of great suffering and dreadful persecution for all who continue to be faithful to God ([Rev 12:17](#); [13:15](#)).
- (8) It will be a time of God's wrath (i.e., justified anger, vengeance) and judgment upon the ungodly throughout the earth ([1Th 5:1-11](#); [Rev 6:16-17](#)).
- (9) Jesus' statement that those days will be shortened ([Mt 24:22](#)) does not mean that the period will be less than the predicted three and a half years, or 1,260 days. It does seem to bring attention to the fact that the period will be so awful that if it were not limited to a shorter period of time, no one would survive; that is, the whole human race would be destroyed.
- (10) The great tribulation will end with Jesus Christ's glorious return to earth with his bride (i.e., the church, those who had already been in heaven with him, [Rev 19:7-8, 14](#)) to rescue those who come to know Jesus during the tribulation and who survive up to that point. When he comes, Christ will destroy the forces of the antichrist who have gathered against his people of Israel at the battle of Armageddon ([Rev 16:16](#)) and bring final judgment on all the wicked ([Eze 20:34-38](#); [Mt 24:29-31](#); [Lk 19:11-27](#); [Rev 19:11-21](#)).

(11) We must not confuse this coming of Christ at the end of the great tribulation with Jesus' reference to his sudden and unexpected descent from heaven in [Mt 24:42, 44](#) (see notes on those verses, which reveal that this coming refers to the rapture of the church that will occur prior to Christ's final return at the end of the tribulation). Christ's unexpected, pre-tribulation coming to take his church from the world may be referred to as the "first stage" of Christ's second coming. His physical return to earth at the end of the great tribulation would be the "second stage" of Christ's second coming.

(12) The major Bible passage describing the entire seven-year tribulation is found in [Rev 6-18](#).

The entire tribulation period will last seven years. During that time, the antichrist will rise to political power. However, he will not be fully revealed or assume world control until the last three and a half years (see [Da 9:25-27](#); [Rev 13:5-7](#)). This latter portion is typically referred to as the great tribulation because of the unique events described above (see chart on [THE LAST DAYS OF HISTORY](#)).