

First Generation AFTER the End: What Was the Great Tribulation

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BEFORE CONTINUING OUR STUDIES of the *First Generation AFTER the End*, we need to revisit the Great Tribulation. There is difference of opinion within Preterism regarding the historical **identity** of the *Great Tribulation* (GT) and how it is **sequenced** in relation to the other end-time events.

For instance, some preterists define the **GT** as referring **only to the wrath** that was poured out on the Jews in the Destruction of Jerusalem, while others define it as including both **persecution** of the saints and **wrath-outpouring** on the Jews.

We might wonder whether these different definitions of the **GT** really matter, but if we mis-identify and mis-sequence the **GT**, then we will also mis-sequence some of the other end-time events that are related to it.

For instance, here is one scenario:

- If the **GT** is defined as the **persecution on the church**,
- And the Parousia began “immediately after” the **GT** was “cut short,”
- And the **wrath** was poured out during the Parousia,
- This is the proper sequence: GT persecution → Parousia → Wrath out-pouring

But notice what happens if the GT is re-defined:

- If the **GT** is defined as **wrath-outpouring only**,
- And the **GT** was “cut short” at the destruction of Jerusalem,
- Then the wrath was poured out before the Parousia began.
- This sequence is flawed: GT wrath poured out → Parousia → Wrath already poured out

Since one of the main purposes of the Parousia was to **pour out the wrath** on the Jews, then sequencing the Parousia “immediately after” the destruction of Jerusalem would imply that *Christ came to pour out the wrath AFTER the wrath had already been poured out!* That simply will not work.

Wrath DURING the Parousia – NOT Before It

It would not have been much of a relief, rescue, or salvation for those saints if they had to suffer through both the Neronic persecution and the wrath-outpouring without getting the promised relief and rescue until AFTER the wrath was poured out. That would have been “too little and too late” to be of any significant benefit.

Instead, Apostle Paul taught that the saints were **destined for tribulation** (1 Thess 3:3), but **NOT for the wrath** (1 Thess 5:9). And he promised that at the Parousia they would be *rescued* from the coming wrath **BEFORE it was poured out** on their persecutors (1Thess. 1:10). Paul makes that sequence even more explicit in 2 Thess 1:6-8 where he said that the *relief, rescue, and retribution* [wrath] would come DURING the Parousia — NOT before it.

Two Phases of the Great Tribulation

In my article (*Sequencing the Tribulation*) in the Spring 2021 issue of *Fulfilled!* Magazine, we examined three key texts in Matthew 24 which mention “tribulation” (verses 9, 21-22, 29) and concluded that there were **two phases** to the Great Tribulation:

- (1) The Neronic persecution of Christians (AD 64-66)
- (2) The wrath-outpouring upon the Jews (AD 66-70)

Thus, *immediately after* the Neronic persecution was “cut short” by the outbreak of the Zealot rebellion (May 66), Christ came with His angels to *rescue* the saints before He poured out His wrath on their persecutors (AD 66-70). This shows that the Neronic persecution was the first phase of the GT and properly *sequences* it in relation to the Parousia and other end-time events.

Furthermore, it is worthy of note that **Kurt Simmons** agrees that there were at least two phases to the GT, and that the first phase included the Neronic persecution [*Consummation of the Ages* (2003), pp. 166-169; and *Revelation Explained* (2010), p. 23].

Identity of the GT is Disputed

In his *Second Negative* (points 26-31) in our debate about the first-century Rapture, Don K. Preston asserted: “Stevens offers us WHAT MAY WELL BE A FIRST IN HISTORY! ... He claims that the **Neronian persecution** ... was the **Great Tribulation** (*Second Affirmative*, pts. 20-21). THIS IS A HISTORICALLY UNPRECEDENTED CLAIM. ... There is NO EVIDENCE to support [it].” [ALL CAPS are his. Boldface added.]

That is like Thomas Ice asserting that there is *not a shred of evidence* to support Gary DeMar’s preterist view. But then, DeMar and Gumerlock wrote a book which provided boatloads of evidence, and Thomas Ice had to eat some crow!

Below, we will see that **Jesus** was the “FIRST IN HISTORY” to connect the Neronian persecution to the GT, and there were others afterward who made the same connection. Let’s look at some of that “EVIDENCE.”

Two References to the Great Tribulation

Matthew 24:21 is not the only text which mentions the Great Tribulation. The other reference is **Revelation 7:14**. And since both texts are in a context of *intense persecution*, and neither is described as being exclusively wrath-outpouring, it necessarily implies that the GT included both persecution on the Church and wrath out-pouring on the Jews.

Revelation 7:14 uses the phrase “THE great tribulation” (with the definite article) referring to the martyrdom of “a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues.” This included Gentile Christians from all over the Roman world — NOT just Jewish Christians in Judea. And that perfectly fits the **Neronian persecution**.

That is why many commentaries see both Revelation 7:14 and Matthew 24:21 as referring to the same GT. For example, **J. S. Russell** not only sees both texts as alluding to the same GT, but also describes it as being a time of unparalleled persecution “*like that which took place under Nero*” [*The Parousia*, p. 372] –

The religion of Jesus of Nazareth was a proscribed and persecuted faith over the whole Roman Empire before the outbreak of the Jewish war ... Accordingly, the redeemed in the vision, the ‘white-robed multitude,’ are said to **come out of great tribulation** [Rev. 7:14]: an expression which gives us a clue to the determination of the *time* and the *persons* here referred to. Our Lord, when predicting the season of unparalleled affliction that was to **precede** the catastrophe of Jerusalem and Judea, says, ‘**Then shall be great tribulation** [*thlipsis megale*], such as was not since the beginning of the world,’ etc. (Matt 24:21). Now in the statement in [Rev 7:14], ‘These are they that came out of great tribulation,’ there is an **unquestionable allusion to our Lord’s words**. The proper rendering, as Alford points out, is – ‘These are they that came out of **THE great tribulation** [*ek tes thlipseos tes megales*], the definite article being most emphatic, and THE tribulation plainly in allusion to the prediction in **Matt 24:21** [J. S. Russell, *The Parousia* (1878), pp. 405-406; bold emphasis and brackets added].

Both References Came from Jesus!

The vision of the Great Tribulation in Revelation 7:14 was part of the *sixth seal* (Rev 6:12–7:17) which was revealed by the Lamb (**Jesus Himself**). Thus, it seems impossible to believe that Jesus could be talking about a totally different GT here in Revelation 7:14 than the one He mentioned in His Olivet Discourse (Matt 24:21).

So, this time of unparalleled persecution which produced such a great multitude of martyrs (Rev 7:14) had to be the same GT which Jesus originally predicted in His Olivet Discourse (Matt 24:21-22), which He said would be “cut short for the sake of the elect” so that some of those saints would remain alive until the Parousia. If that persecution had continued unabated, “*none of the elect would have survived*” (Matt 24:22, paraphrase). So, this description of the GT perfectly fits the **Neronic persecution** which was “cut short” by the outbreak of the Zealot rebellion (May 12th, AD 66).

Thus, if there is any doubt about what Jesus meant when He referred to the GT in Matthew 24:21, it is totally clarified when compared to Revelation 7:14. The less clear (Matt 24:21) is elucidated by the more clear (Rev 7:14). And since Revelation 7:14 clearly depicts the Neronic persecution, it necessarily implies that Matthew 24:21 also alludes to it. And that means Jesus was the “FIRST IN HISTORY” to connect the Neronic persecution to the GT!

Both John and Paul Would Agree

Moreover, since **Apostle John** was present on the Mount of Olives thirty-two years earlier when Jesus spoke the Olivet Discourse, he would certainly remember (under inspiration) Jesus' statements about the GT (Matt 24:21). Thus, if the Holy Spirit speaking through John was referring to a totally different GT, we would have expected John to clarify that distinction. But since there is no such clarification, it necessarily implies (and demands) that they are the same GT.

And this aligns perfectly with **Apostle Paul** who explained that the saints were “destined to suffer tribulation” (1 Thess 3:3) but were NOT destined to go through the wrath (1 Thess 5:9). Instead, they would be *relieved* of their persecution (i.e., “cut short”) and *rescued from the wrath* BEFORE it was poured out (1 Thess 1:10; 5:9; 2 Thess 1:6-8). ✝

For more evidence that the Neronic persecution was included in the Great Tribulation, see my [March 2013 historical podcasts](#),¹ my 2014 [Final Decade](#) book (pages 150-175),² and my *First Affirmative* in the debate with Don Preston.

1. <https://www.buzzsprout.com/11633>
2. <https://www.preterist.org/products/2371/>