

The Great Tribulation, Part 1

Scripture: Daniel 12:1–3

Code: 27-30

INTRODUCTION

A. The Importance of Hope

Next to faith and love the greatest reality in the world is hope (1 Cor. 13:13). Faith, hope, and love are the three most important elements in life because man cannot live without them.

Daniel 12 begins with a message of hope. Hope is what makes life meaningful. Without light at the end of a tunnel a man will despair. He must be able to anticipate great things in the future or he will find himself unable to enjoy life now.

Hope is especially important to those who suffer. God knows that for a man to endure present stress he must have hope in a better future. That's why throughout the Bible God presents mankind a great and eternal hope for the future. It's a hope beyond all others, one that gives our present life full meaning.

Hope is what we find at the end of the book of Daniel. In preceding chapters the prophet received revelation of the disastrous future history of Israel. They reveal that the Gentile world powers of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome would dominate Israel. And they were correct: Israel has been savagely abused and slaughtered throughout its history. But on a note of hope Daniel ends with the promise that Israel's oppression will end when their Messiah returns.

B. The Intensity of the Coming Holocaust

The heart of Daniel's message is found in Daniel 11:35: the main purpose of Israel's chastening is "to test them, and to purge, and to make them white." God has given His people over to persecution until they are purified and respond properly to Him. But had God ended with a bleak message of suffering there would have been no light at the end of the tunnel. Therefore in the first three verses of chapter 12 God gave Israel the light of hope. Though Israel's future would be a dark one for thousands of years--the people would refuse to respond to God, reject their own Messiah, and accept Satan's counterfeit (the Antichrist) in His place--at the end there is hope.

Daniel 12 introduces the hope that follows the terrible events predicted in Daniel 11:36-45. During that period the Antichrist will be the consummate oppressor of Israel. He will cause the greatest suffering the Jewish people have ever endured, slaughtering more their own than Hitler ever did. But when that persecution is at its worst during the Great Tribulation, hope will dawn. Though "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7) will be dominated by the Antichrist and he will cause the massive war that will end in Armageddon, once he desecrates the Temple and attempts to slaughter the entire nation of Israel, the events at the opening of chapter 12 will unfold.

The last half of the tribulation will be marked by the wars of the Antichrist. He will fight against armies from the north, south, and east of Israel, and will win great victories. By those victories he will establish his absolute power over the earth. At the height of his power he will commit an abominable deed in the Temple by establishing himself as the only God. In spite of those terrible future events the angel told Daniel that when things were at their worse it would nearly be time for things to become their best. The darkest hour would come just before the dawn.

LESSON

I. A SPECIAL DISTRESS (v. 1b)

"At that time . . . there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time. "

A. The History of Israel's Suffering

The angel revealed to Daniel the coming of a time of unprecedented distress. In the past Israel suffered under the Babylonians, Medo-Persians, Greeks, and Romans. They suffered after the Roman era at the hands of Crusaders and various European leaders, culminating with Adolph Hitler. They have suffered since that time. All that suffering has served as God's disciplining rod. Their sufferings are designed to purge their rebellion and rejection, leading them to turn back to God in faith. But the worst suffering is yet to come.

B. The Height of Israel's Suffering

The phrase "a time of trouble, such as never was" is a Hebrew idiomatic expression that means the time of trouble referred to will be the worst ever (cf. Ex. 9:18, 24). Things aren't going to get better for Israel--they'll get worse. Similar affirmations are found elsewhere in Scripture.

1. Matthew 24:7-22--Jesus said concerning the tribulation and the activities of the Antichrist, "Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. . . . When ye, therefore, shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place (whosoever readeth, let him understand) , then let them who are in Judea flee into the mountains; let him who is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house; neither let him who is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto those who are with child, and to those who nurse children in those days! But pray that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day; for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved. "

Jesus warning reiterated the revelation Daniel heard: there would be a future time of unprecedented trouble for God's people Israel.

2. Revelation 6-18--The book of Revelation describes the incredible final events of human history. Chapters 6-18 present the details of the last three-and-a-half years of Daniel's seventieth week (Dan. 9:24-27) --the Great Tribulation. The apostle John saw in a vision several terrifying elements belonging to that period: war (6:3-4) , famine (6:5-6) , the death of 25 percent of the world's population (6:7-8) , the collapse of the heavenly bodies (6:12-14) , the destruction of one-third of land and sea--together with what they contained--(8:7-9) , the pollution of one-third of earth's fresh water and the death of those who drink from it (8:10-11) , the destruction of one-third of the sun, moon, and stars (8:12) , the release of hell's demons to overrun the earth (9:1-11) , the slaughter initiated by the beast and his false prophet during their vile administration (13:7, 15) , the affliction of painful body sores (16:2) , the death of all remaining creatures in the sea (16:3) , further pollution of fresh water (16:4) , scorching sunlight (16:9) , and darkness (16:10). More demons and judgments of wrath will afflict the living until Christ's return as described in Revelation 19. In addition God will allow the Antichrist to oppress Israel in a final act of purging. The tribulation will be an incredible time of suffering when God's judgments occur simultaneously with Satan's persecutions in historical apex of misery. It will be especially difficult for the people of Israel.

3. Jeremiah 30:4-7--"These are the words that the Lord spoke concerning Israel and concerning Judah. For thus saith the Lord, We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask now, and see whether a man doth travail with child? Why do I see every man with his hands on his loins, like a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness? Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it; it is even the time of Jacob's trouble. " During the tribulation mankind will experience agony like the excruciating pain of childbirth.

4. Zechariah 13:8-9--"It shall come to pass that in all the land, saith the Lord, two parts in it shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left in it. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will test them as gold is tested; they shall call on my name, and I

will hear them. I will say, It is my people; and they shall say, The Lord is my God. " During the tribulation two-thirds of the Jewish people will die, but the other third will be redeemed. Israel's rebelliousness will be purged away and they will believe in Christ.

Israel's future contains a time of distress without a historical equal. It's known as the time of Jacob's trouble, the seventieth week of Daniel, or the Great Tribulation. Yet during that time Israel will receive unique assistance.

II. A SPECIAL DEFENDER (v. 1a)

"At that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince who standeth for the children of thy people. " Israel will not be completely destroyed because the archangel Michael will undertake their defense. He may be the most powerful of all angelic creatures. Throughout Israel's history his responsibility has been to defend God's people. In both the Old and New Testaments he is described as the leader of the holy angels.

Jude 9 tells us that Michael fought with Satan over the body of Moses. His care for God's people extends to not permitting the desecration of their dead bodies. Daniel 10 says that when demons tried to stop an angel from delivering his message to Daniel, the angel called to Michael for help. He told Daniel, "Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me. . . . There is none that holdeth with me in these things, but Michael, your prince" (vv. 13, 21). Since God assigned Michael the task of caring for Israel, it's not surprising for him to appear in their greatest distress. At the time of the most furious persecution and oppression, Michael will come to the rescue.

Michael will rescue God's people by directly countering Satan's activities. During the tribulation Satan will release hell's forces against Israel. His intent will be the complete destruction of the nation--a goal he tried to accomplish previously so that the Messiah would be prevented from coming to establish His kingdom. Revelation 12 describes how in the end times a great battle will occur as all the demons of hell pursue the nation of Israel.

A. He Protected the Messiah

"There appeared a great wonder in heaven--a woman [Israel] clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars" (Rev. 12:1). That pictures the twelve tribes of Israel in prophetic imagery. "She, being with child, cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered. . . . And she brought forth a male child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne" (vv. 2-5). That describes the birth of Christ (the Messiah) and His ascension into heaven. Then "the woman fled into the wilderness" (v. 6). Israel fled because "there appeared another wonder in heaven; and, behold, a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven and did cast them to the earth; and the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to be delivered, to devour her child as soon as it was born" (vv. 3-4). Satan is described as a dragon that embodies all Gentile governments in the final form of the Roman Empire. When he rebelled against God he apparently took one-third of the angels with him--they became demons. Although his force is not as large as God's, it's not numbers that count, but power.

Righteous power always overcomes evil power. Satan unsuccessfully tried to prevent the birth of the Messiah. After the child was born he worked through Herod in an attempt to "devour" that child. Throughout Jesus' life Satan tried to kill Him. When Christ ascended to God's throne Satan attacked Christ's followers. During the tribulation Satan, the demons, and the beast (the Antichrist) will attack Israel again. But Israel will flee "into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days" (v. 6).

B. He Will Protect Israel

During the tribulation's second three-and-a-half years God will protect Israel by the power of Michael. The demons will desire to overrun the earth and destroy Israel, but Michael and the holy angels will war against them in heaven: "There was war in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the

dragon, and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not, neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil and Satan, who deceiveth the whole world; he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him" (vv. 7-9). I believe the demons will lose some of their supernatural power at that point: "I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ; for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, who accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! For the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time" (vv. 10-12).

Satan's plan to ruin Israel will be thwarted. In the short time that he has left he will apparently overrun the earth with evil. But he will be unsuccessful in his attempt to destroy Israel because he will have already lost the battle: "When the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman [Israel] who brought forth the male child. And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time [three-and-a-half years], from the face of the serpent. And the serpent cast out of his mouth water like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth" (vv. 13-16). The opening of the earth may be a repeat of what happened to Korah, Dathan, and Abiram in the Old Testament (Num. 16:31-33). In this case it will be the beast and all his army who will be swallowed up.

Satan will then intensify his efforts to destroy the Jewish remnant: "The dragon was angry with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, who keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (v. 17). Though persecution will continue after Satan's defeat by Michael, the turning point toward victory for Israel will be Michael's victory over the devil. That's because Satan will then no longer be "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2) after he is cast to the earth. Though the major battle will be won, he will continue to seek Israel's destruction for a short time. But Michael, their special defender, will protect them for the second half of the tribulation. It is significant that the angelic messenger in Daniel 10 revealed Michael's power over Satan and his responsibility to protect Israel. That gave Daniel confidence--he knew Michael would be present at the time of Israel's greatest need.

III. A SPECIAL DELIVERANCE (v. 1c)

"At that time thy people shall be delivered. "

Romans 11:26 declares, "All Israel shall be saved; as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer" (cf. Isa. 59:20). "Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it, it is even the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it. . . . For I am with thee, saith the Lord, to save thee. . . . For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds" (Jer. 30:7-17). At the time Israel is delivered they will also be redeemed.

What part of Israel will be saved? In the end times apostates and rebels will be purged out of Israel. Only those remaining will be protected. Zechariah 13:8 says two-thirds of Israel will die. The one-third left constitutes the godly remnant to whom the promise of redemption belongs. The end of Daniel 12:1 verifies that fact: the delivered are "every one that shall be found written in the book. " The promise of deliverance and salvation is for those who believe.

The book of Revelation explains how the remnant of Israel will come to believe in Jesus Christ--the one Judaism has so long rejected.

A. Through the Two Witnesses

According to Revelation 11 God will set apart two witnesses with miraculous powers. They are described as two olive branches in verse 4. After the Antichrist kills them their bodies will be viewed

worldwide--perhaps by use of satellite television (v. 9). They will be murdered because of the prophetic message they will preach. The world will rejoice at their death. But after three-and-a-half days they will rise from the dead. I imagine their message will become more convincing at that point!

B. Through the 144 Thousand Witnesses

Revelation 7 and 14 reveal that 144 thousand Jewish people will be sealed and protected by God to serve as evangelists during the tribulation: twelve thousand from each of Israel's tribes. Their ministry will be essentially the same as that of the two witnesses: leading Jewish people to faith in their Messiah. Those who believe will in turn reach others--even in the midst of that holocaust! In that way a living remnant will be preserved as a redeemed nation. God assured Israel through Jeremiah, "I am with thee; for I will make a full end of all the nations to which I have driven thee; but I will not make a full end of thee" (46:28).

Though deliverance of Israel will involve the personal salvation of individuals, it will occur on a scale large enough to be termed a national deliverance. The remnant of believing Jews during the tribulation constitute the "all Israel" of Romans 11:26. Thus Israel's hope is that someday its purging will end, the nation will be saved, and the long-awaited messianic Kingdom will be established.

IV. A SPECIAL DESTINY (v. 2)

"Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. "

A. Declared

Resurrection will be the climax of the tribulation. Some commentators think the Jewish people never had the hope of the resurrection because they didn't have a clear understanding of life after death. But that's not what Scripture shows.

1. By Abraham

According to Hebrews 11:19 Abraham willingly offered his son Isaac because he was confident in the resurrection of the dead.

2. By Job

Job, who may have penned the oldest book in the Bible (he probably lived before Moses) , cherished the hope of the resurrection. He said, "I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God, whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another, though my heart be consumed within me" (19:25-27).

3. By Isaiah

Isaiah, who lived more than a century before Daniel, predicted that dead men would live again and their bodies rise from the dead (26:19).

4. By Hosea

Through Hosea, a contemporary of Isaiah, the Lord said, "I will ransom them [Israel] from the power of Sheol; I will redeem them from death" (13:14).

5. By David

David was predicting the resurrection of Christ when he wrote, "My flesh also shall rest in hope. For Thou wilt not leave my soul in sheol, neither wilt thou permit thine Holy One to see corruption" (Ps. 16:9-10).

The resurrection has been the hope of God's people from the beginning. The angel's message to Daniel was that there is good reason for hope: Israel will be saved and the resurrection will indeed occur.

B. Described

Daniel 12 and Revelation 20 speak of two aspects to the resurrection: one is to "everlasting life" while the other is to "shame and everlasting contempt. " Both the positive and negative parts to the resurrection involve the resurrection of the body.

1. Everlasting life

a) Its synonyms The resurrection to everlasting life is a resurrection of the just (Acts 24:15). John 5:29 calls it "the resurrection of life," while Hebrews 11:35 terms it "a better resurrection. " It's the resurrection of all glorified saints: all believers from the Old and New Testament eras, as well as from the tribulation period, will enjoy everlasting life. b) Its sequence The "first resurrection" (Rev. 20:5) has three parts. (1) Christ The first resurrection began with Christ. He was "the first fruits of them that slept" (1 Cor. 15:20). After He was raised from the dead several others were raised with Him (Matt. 27:52-53). That initial resurrection was a picture of what will happen in the coming kingdom. (2) The church The second part of this first resurrection involves the church. That will take place at the rapture according to 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: "The dead in Christ shall rise first; then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. "(3) The Old Testament and tribulation saints The Tribulation will occur after the church is removed from the earth--the church wasn't in Israel's first sixty-nine weeks, and it isn't going to be in its seventieth week (cf. Dan. 9:24-27). During that period of seven years God will deal exclusively with Israel. At the end of that time of purging the third and final part of the first resurrection will take place: the raising of the Old Testament and tribulation saints (cf. Dan. 12:13; Rev. 6:9-11). It will include Gentiles who were saved and martyred during the tribulation (Rev. 7:9-10). In Revelation 20:4 the apostle John gives a description of the first resurrection: "I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them; and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. " That verse implies a resurrection. In his vision John saw the thousand-year millennium kingdom, where the saints of all the ages will be alive and reigning with Christ. Verses 5-6 say, "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection [prior to the thousand years]. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection. "

2. Shame and everlasting contempt

The second resurrection has just one part. It will happen at the end of the millennium when God raises the bodies of the unjust from the dead. Revelation 20:7 provides the time frame: "When the thousand years are ended. " Verses 11-15 provide some of its details: "I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it. . . . And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God, and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and hades delivered up the dead that were in them; and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. "

Daniel did not see the thousand-year gap between the two resurrections. In the Old Testament you'll find gaps in the flow of redemptive history. Peter said the prophets examined what they wrote in an attempt to understand what it meant because they didn't have the full range of revelation (1 Pet. 1:10-11). Revelation 20 clarifies that the resurrection to life and the resurrection to shame and contempt will occur a thousand years apart. But prior to the New Testament clarification, the Jewish people didn't understand fully the timing of the resurrections.

Early in His ministry Jesus spoke of the two resurrections: "Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear [My] voice, and shall come forth: they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:28-29). All who have ever lived will be resurrected: some to life and some to death. The angel told Daniel that the resurrection is the hope of Israel.

V. A SPECIAL DIVIDEND (v. 3)

"They that be wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars forever and ever. "

Daniel 12:3 does not speak further about the punishment of the wicked since that event will occur a thousand years after the resurrection of the just. Verse 3 focuses on Israel's hope of the resurrection to everlasting life.

A. The Recipients

At this resurrection will come reward--a time of special dividends. Those who will receive them are identified as "they that be wise. " They will believe in Christ and remain faithful to Him through the time of their nation's purging. The wisest people in the world are the saved and the biggest fools are the unsaved. Both Jews as well as Gentiles will come to faith in Christ during the Tribulation.

Revelation 7:9-10 says innumerable Gentiles will be saved during the tribulation.

B. The Rewards

1. Analyzed

Those who are rewarded "shall shine like the brightness of the firmament . . . as the stars forever and ever. " I believe that means we will be rewarded in eternity by a capacity to manifest the blazing glory of God. When we look into the night sky we see stars of varying size and brilliance, but they are all beautiful. That's the way we will be in heaven. I believe our size and brightness depend on our faithfulness. All who know Jesus Christ will have the capacity to eternally radiate the glory of God, but those who "turn many to righteousness" will be especially bright.

According to the New Testament the rewards or crowns we will receive when we go to heaven will simply be ways of expressing our capacity to radiate the glory of God. If we're saved we'll shine like stars, and all the more if we've turned "many to righteousness. " The brightest glories are reserved for those who have influenced others to believe in Christ. Thus the angel was telling Daniel that during the tribulation Israel will be saved and lead others to Christ, including many Gentiles, "which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues" (Rev. 7:9). The Jewish evangelists of the tribulation will be able to manifest God's glory with a special brilliance.

2. Applied

We as Christians can apply that reward to ourselves. Our faithfulness to witness will help determine our eternal capacity to manifest the glory of God. We will shine like "stars" (v. 3). There have been many earthly stars in the past, such as Caesar, Napoleon, and Hitler, who have led great armies that wreaked havoc. There are also many contemporary stars. A walk down Hollywood Boulevard will reveal who they are right underneath your feet (as would a walk through a nearby cemetery). But few earthly stars shine very long or brightly in the memory.

In contrast to the stars of earth the greatest stars in God's sky are those who "turn many to righteousness. " One such star is John the Baptist. An angel said of him, "He shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord, their God" (Luke 1:15-16). Jesus said that John was the greatest human being who ever lived up to His time (Matt. 11:11). He will shine brightly forever when he is resurrected, with a tremendous capacity to radiate God's eternal glory because he turned "many to righteousness. "

When you examine your own life, what have you done to contribute to such a future? Although the angel spoke specifically to Israel in Daniel 12, the principle extends to us. The Lord wants us all to be faithful to preach the Word and share the gospel. The apostle Paul wrote that we are to "be blameless and harmless, children of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom [we] shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life" (Phil. 2:15-16).

CONCLUSION

Daniel 12:1-3 is a message of great hope. Israel can anticipate great distress in the future, yet they

will be specially defended and delivered. All who are saved can look forward to a special destiny with glorious dividends: the capacity to radiate the glory of God forever. Israel's hope is ours as well: we are blessed in the tents of Shem (the Gentile descendants of Japheth will be spiritually blessed through the Jewish descendants of Shem--Gen. 9:27; 12:3). We become the seed of Abraham by faith, and therefore we too will reign in the kingdom and share the same privilege of radiating the glory of God!

Focusing on the Facts

1. Why is hope essential to a meaningful life? Why is it especially important to those who suffer?
2. What does God give Israel in the first three verses of Daniel 12? Why?
3. When will hope dawn for Israel?
4. What are Israel's sufferings designed to do?
5. When will the unprecedented time of trouble for God's people occur?
6. According to Zechariah 13:8 what portion of the Jewish people will be redeemed after their final purging?
7. Who is the special defender that will stand up for Israel? What singular responsibility has he been given?
8. Why has Satan continually tried to destroy the nation of Israel?
9. How will demons be prevented from totally destroying Israel?
10. What gave Daniel confidence?
11. What part of Israel referred to in Romans 11:26 will be saved?
12. How will the remnant of Israel come to believe in Jesus Christ?
13. Show from Scripture that the resurrection has always been the hope of God's people.
14. Describe the three sequential parts of the first resurrection to everlasting life?
15. According to Revelation 20:4, what will the saints of all ages do during the millennium?
16. What is the second resurrection? When will it occur?
17. Who will receive special dividends at the resurrection?
18. What will increase the brilliance of one's reward? Why will the Jewish evangelists of the tribulation be able to brightly manifest God's glory?
19. What is one reason that John the Baptist was "great in the sight of the Lord" (Luke 1:15-16)?

Pondering the Principles

1. What is your greatest hope? The Bible says that a Christian's greatest hope is the assurance that he will share in the glory of God (Rom. 5:2). Meditate on Romans 5:1-5. Why can we rejoice in the tribulations we face (vv. 3-4)? Our trials are like the rigors an athlete must endure while he trains. His hope to win is strengthened by the assurance that his suffering is a necessary part of the prize he will win. Do you rejoice in your trials, knowing that they are enhancing your spiritual maturity (James 1:2-4)? Christians in the midst of trials and suffering experience a hope and confidence in the future that will not disappoint them. Remember and take comfort in that hope as you face difficulties in your own life.
2. Are you committed to turning "many to righteousness" (Dan. 12:3)? If you desire to "be great in the sight of the Lord" (Luke 1:15), pray that you will be effectively used by God to speak about spiritual things to unbelievers. As you shine as a light "in the world, holding forth the word of life" (Phil. 2:15), look forward to the ability to manifest God's glory more fully in His presence in heaven.

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