# Will There Be a Place of Refuge?

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#### Will God provide a place of safety for His Church during the Great Tribulation? Or, will members of God's true Church be protected, individually, regardless of where they may be living, scattered over the entire globe?

##### by Raymond F McNair

What does the Bible have to say regarding whether or not God will provide a place of refuge in which He will protect His people during the unprecedented time of human suffer­ing called the "Great Tribulation"? It is not a matter of *whether* God *can* provide a place of safety for His people; neither is it a matter of whether God *can* protect His people, individually, wherever they may happen to be throughout the whole earth. The important thing is: What does God's Word reveal about *how He chooses* to protect His people in times of great danger?

### "Watch and Pray Always"!

The Great Tribulation is men­tioned in three places in the Bible as being the most horrible period of humanity's entire history (Jer. 30:7; Dan. 12:1 and Matt. 24:21). Jesus Christ pointedly discussed the Great Tribulation in the Olivet Prophecy; recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. After fore­telling numerous terrible end-time events, Christ warned His disciples to keep their eyes open so they would recognize, in advance, when those catastrophic events were about to strike the world.

"But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day [the Great Tribulation—Matt 24:7-33] come on you unexpectedly. **For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth"** (Luke 21: 34-35)! Notice that the Great Tribulation will come *unexpectedly* upon the peoples of the entire earth—and those who will be caught off guard will *include* multitudes of *careless,* lethargic members of God's Church!

Christ admonished, **"Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to ESCAPE ALL THESE THINGS that will come to pass, and to stand [blamelessly] before the Son of Man"** (v. 36)!

Some think Christ was *mistaken* when He told His disciples to *watch* and *pray* that they might *escape* all the terrible things soon to come. They do *not* really believe Christ's words. But those who *do* believe Christ's warnings, and who urge God's people to watch and pray always that they might be accounted worthy to *escape,* are sometimes falsely accused of preaching a "save-your own-skin" gospel.

Those who follow Christ's command are helping to zealously *stir up* God's people so they will *not* fall into a lethargic, Laodicean stupor, and be caught napping when the Great Tribulation suddenly, like a gigantic steel trap, springs upon an unsuspecting world!

### The Past Gives a Clue to the Future

The *past* often reveals the *future.* The Old Testament accounts of Israel's disobedience to God and the many punishments they brought upon themselves are examples for us all to look to in order to learn important lessons (1 Cor. 10:1-11).

On numerous occasions Almighty God sent His judgments upon cities, nations, or even upon the whole world, as in the time of Noah (Gen. 6-8). However, *before* God destroyed all humanity in the Great Flood, He first sent Noah, "a preacher of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5), to warn mankind that Almighty God was about to destroy them—*if* they did not turn away from their evil ways.

But how would a loving God save a righteous man like Noah and his household? First, God com­manded Noah to build a huge Ark (Gen. 6). Later, He brought all the animals, birds and the eight persons of Noah's family into the Ark, thereby saving them from impending destruction.

In the case of Noah and his family, God separated them from the rest of the wicked inhabitants of the earth and protected them *in the Ark—before* the Great Deluge began. When the torrential rains fell, the great Ark was soon lifted up above the treetops, the high hills and the loftiest mountains (Gen. 7:17-24). Noah and his wife, plus their three sons and their wives, were all saved by being given sanctuary in the Ark, while those who rejected God's warning message of repentance were destroyed.

Sadly, Mankind did not learn the vital lessons God intended to impress upon their minds by the Flood experience. People soon for­got that there is a penalty for evil, plunging headlong once again into wickedness and violence.

Not long after the Great Flood, the moral stench of Sodom and Gomorrah caught God's attention as they grew increasingly corrupt. Finally, a holy God would no longer tolerate them.

However, before God destroyed those exceedingly wicked cities, He sent His angels to warn a righteous man and his fami­ly—"and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed with the filthy conduct of the wicked" (2 Pet. 2:7). Genesis 19 gives a vivid account of God's deliverance of Lot, his wife (who later looked back and per­ished—Gen. 19:17, 26) and his two daughters from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by an all­-consuming fire.

Notice that it was *before* God burned up Sodom and Gomorrah that He took Lot and his family *out of* those wicked cities—telling them to quickly flee from Sodom and Gomorrah—lest they perish along with the wicked. One of the two angels who helped drag a lingering Lot and his family out of Sodom and Gomorrah told them, "Hurry, escape there [Zoar, a small, distant town]. For I cannot do anything until you arrive there" (Gen. 19:22)!

The LORD did *not* protect Lot and his family while still living *among* the wicked people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Neither did God attempt to protect Noah and his fami­ly while living among the evildoers at the time of the Great Flood. Rather, in *both* instances, a merciful Deliverer took the people He planned to save out of—away from—the rebellious populations who refused to listen to His divine warning and live according to His will.

### Flee to the Mountains!

During Jesus Christ's three­-and-a-half year ministry, He did not just preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14; Acts 10:36-38). The Son of Man also warned His own people, the Jews, that unless they would amend their ways, the Romans would soon come and destroy their beautiful Temple, their fair city of Jerusalem and their nation.

"Now as He drew near, He saw the city [Jerusalem] and wept over it, saying, `If you had known, even you, especially in this your day; the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies [the Romans] will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another**, because you did not know the time of your visitation"** (Luke 19:41-44). Christ gave the Jews of His day numerous other warnings showing that an awful calamity would soon befall their nation—*unless* they turned away from their wickedness.

But it was to His own intimate disciples that Jesus revealed how *they could escape* from the slaugh­ter and destruction which He fore­told would soon befall their people living in Judea, Galilee and throughout much of the Middle East by the hand of the Romans.

Notice the warning signs which Christ gave His disciples as men­tioned in Matthew 24. Jesus said there would be wars, rumors of wars, famines, pestilences and earthquakes (Matt. 24:6-7). The true Gospel of the Kingdom would be preached globally (v. 14), followed by an abominable *desolation* of the "holy place" in Jerusalem (v. 15).

"Then let those who are in *Judea, flee to the mountains.* Let him who is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those with nursing babies in those days! **And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be GREAT TRIBULATION, such as has not been since the begin­ning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.** And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the ELECT'S sake those days will be shortened" (vv. 16-22).

Jesus admonished His disciples to pray that God would *not* allow this Great Tribulation to occur at such a time as would cause them greater danger or hardship, such as fleeing in the *winter* or on God's holy *Sabbath,* which in a Sabbath­-keeping society would draw unwanted attention and make access to transportation difficult.

Notice Luke's account of this same Great Tribulation period: "But when you see Jerusalem *surround­*ed by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those in Judea **flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart,** and let not those who are in the country enter her. For these are the days of *vengeance,* that all things which are written may be fulfilled" (Luke 21:20-22).

Christ continued His warning, "But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be *great distress* in the land and wrath upon this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (vv. 23-24).

What happened to Jerusalem in 70 A.D. was merely *a forerunner* of a much greater end-time slaughter and devastation which will yet occur in the land of the modern State of Israel and, by extension, will also occur in all of the lands of the modern-day descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel—the sons of Jacob—thereby bringing about the long-prophesied day called "Jacob's Trouble" (Jer. 30:7).

Some fail to understand this lat­ter-day significance behind Christ's Olivet Prophecy. What He said was to have *a dual* fulfillment: 1) The terrible destruction and slaughter which happened in 66-70 A.D. was merely *a type* or forerunner of what would happen in the *end time*; 2)But what happened in 66-70 A.D. would not be anywhere near so vio­lent and destructive as the desola­tion and butchery which would occur at the close of this age.

It is a crucial error to *assume* that what Christ said to His disci­ples in *circa* 31 A.D. was to be the only fulfillment of His prophecies. Those who draw such an erroneous conclusion will overlook the *sec­ondary,* yet main, prophetic fulfill­ment to occur in the terrible time of the end.

### Did Christ's Disciples Obey His Command to Flee?

Christ's early disciples heeded His admonition to flee out of Jerusalem and headed for the mountains when they saw Jerusalem surrounded by the Roman armies, *circa* 66-67 A.D. History reveals that the Christians fled from Jerusalem before the final butchery occurred in 70 A.D. "Late in 66 [A.D.], Vespasian was sent by Nero to crush a rebellion in *Judea.* What was unusual was the appoint­ment of Titus to control one of His father's three legions.... Titus was prominent in four sieges during 67 [A.D.] Jotapata, Japha, Tarichaeae, and Gamala.... On Nero's death (June 9, 68), Titus' diplomatic expertise was once again in demand. He was sent to Rome on a delicate mission, ostensibly to pay his respects to [the new Emperor] Galba, but in fact to assess his fami­ly's standing with the new emperor. However; on reaching Corinth, he heard of Galba's death, openly advocated that his father [Vespasian] seize power...and *returned to Judea.* His role in Vespasian's ultimate success (he was proclaimed emperor on July l, 69) was again essentially diplomat­ic, involving constant negotiations with Flavian supporters in Egypt, Judea, and Syria. As a reward, he was made consul in absentia and *replaced* Vespasian as supreme commander of the Jewish war. Victory came quickly: by July 70 [A.D.] the Antonia [fortress in Jerusalem] had fallen and in August the temple was taken and destroyed" *(The Anchor Bible Dictionary,* Vol. VI, pp. 580-581).

History reveals that the Roman armies surrounded Jerusalem, *circa* 66 A.D., and were then withdrawn to deal with problems elsewhere in the Empire, before returning to total­ly demolish the city of Jerusalem in August 70 A.D.! When the Roman armies surrounded Jerusalem, then withdrew not long afterward (according to Christ's words in Luke 21:20-21), the Christians took that as a clear-cut indication that they ought to flee from Jerusalem—before it was too late!

The Christians fled to a not-too-­well-known city, Pella, situated in the "mountains," a few miles south­east of the Sea of Galilee. "PELLA...an ancient city situated in the foothills of the Transjordanian plateau, a little less than 5 km [c. 3 miles] E. of the Jordan river and 32 km [20 miles] S. of the Sea of Galilee" *(Anchor,* Vol. V, p. 219).

This .same article also says, "Pella is not mentioned by name in the NT, but Jesus certainly would have known of the city, and could have visited it on His travels in the region of the Decapolis and Peraea (Mark 5:1-20; 7:31-37; 10:1-16 and par.). A few decades later Pella played a distinctive part in the his­tory of the nascent church. *Around A.D. 67,* when the Roman army began to threaten Jewish insurgents in Jerusalem during the First Jewish Revolt, **the Christians of that city are reported to have fled to Pella** in obedience to an oracle [divine word] delivered by a prophet active in the [Jerusalem] Church. It is pos­sible that the apocalyptic passage in Mark 13:3-37 and parallels, which includes Jesus' instruction that when Jerusalem is desecrated His followers in Judea should `flee to the hills' (v. 14), is related to the oracle which prompted Jerusalem Christians to seek refuge at Pella. That Pella would have been con­sidered an appropriate REFUGE is plausible if one considers that the Christians who fled to Pella may have been primarily Hellenists [Greek-speaking Jews], of which there were many in the Jerusalem church from the earliest days (cf. Acts 6:1). Precisely because Pella was known as a non-Jewish city, it could be pre­sumed to be safe from Roman aggression during the Revolt.... The length of time that these early Christians stayed at Pella is not recorded. Perhaps some of the refugees chose never to return to Jerusalem" *(Anchor,* p. 220).

Clearly, history reveals that the Christians did flee from Jerusalem shortly *before* the Roman legions totally destroyed the city and deci­mated many of its people, sending scores of thousands of Jews into slav­ery throughout the Roman Empire.

A careful perusal of the Olivet Prophecy reveals that the main ful­fillment of Christ's words were to take place, *not* during the First Jewish Revolt (66-70 A.D.), but at the very *end* of this terrible age of violence and genocide.

Two important events yet to occur will apparently signal that we are at the *beginning* of the Great Tribulation: The *first* event, will be the *surrounding* of Jerusalem by Gentile armies, according to Christ's prophecy found in Luke 21:20 at which point He says to flee. The *second* event is the "abomination of deso­lation" which will be established in Jerusalem three and a half years prior to Christ's Second Coming (Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14; Dan. 11:31-45).

### Will God Prepare Numerous Places of Refuge for His People?

Will God prepare only one place of refuge for His people or *numerous* places of refuge for His people during the Tribulation peri­od? What does the Bible say about this?

"And *war broke out* in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the DRAGON; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world, he was cast to the earth; and his angels were cast out with him" (Rev. 12:7-9).

The Bible reveals that, after being hurled back to this earth, an enraged Satan will seek to annihi­late God's people—those who really *believe* His Word and *keep* His COMMANDMENTS! God says, "Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time" (v. 12). At that time a furious devil will go rampaging through the earth in an all-out effort to totally destroy God's Church—­the "woman" mentioned in Revelation 12:1-17, 19:1-9 and Ephesians 5:22-33.

"Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the *woman* who gave birth to the male Child. But the *woman* was given *two wings* of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to HER PLACE [singular], where she is nourished for a time [1 year] and times [2 years] and half a time [half a year], from the presence of the serpent" (Rev. 12:13-14). The total time mentioned here is *three and a half years.* The Scriptures reveal that, when speaking prophetically, each day equals one year (Num. 14:34; Ezek. 4:6). Notice that this last quoted verse does *not* say there will be *several* places which God will prepare as a refuge for His Church during the soon-coming Great Tribulation.

What are the "two wings of a great eagle" by which God will convey His Church to a place of safety? Compare this verse with Exodus 19:4. The LORD told the Israelites, "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how **I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself"** (Ex. 19:4). Clearly, God supernaturally guided and *protected* His people, Israel, as they fled Pharaoh's army, crossed through the Red Sea, and headed toward the Promised Land. Nonetheless they *walked* from Egypt to the Promised land!

God will guide and protect His Church as He leads it to the place which He will have prepared for His Church as a refuge during the Great Tribulation. But they will not necessarily be miraculously airlift­ed to a place of safety. God's peo­ple may experience quite a bit of difficult travel before reaching the place of refuge.

After God's Church flees to her "place," then what? "So the serpent [Satan] spewed water out of his mouth like *a flood* after the woman, that he might cause her to be car­ried away by the *flood.* But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the *flood* which the drag­on had spewed out of his mouth" (Rev.12:15-16).

Now what can this "flood" rep­resent in this prophecy? Remember, we must always let the Bible interpret itself. "Knowing this first, that *, no prophecy* of Scripture is of any *private interpretation,* for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved [inspired] by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:20-21 ). Men are forbidden to put their own private interpretations on any verse of Scripture. Rather, we must always be careful to let Scripture interpret Scripture. God interprets His own Word.

Notice God's interpretation of "flood": "Who is this coming up like *a flood,* whose waters move like the rivers? *Egypt* rises up like a *,flood,* and its waters move like the rivers; and he says, `I will go up and cover the earth, I will destroy the city [of Carchemish on the Euphrates River—v. 2] and its inhabitants" (Jer. 46:7-8)! A care­ful study of Jeremiah 46 verifies these verses' historical fulfillment. In the year 605 B.C., an Egyptian Pharaoh joined battle with the Babylonians at the famous city of *Carchemish.* Pharaoh was defeated. His "flood" or army was scattered to the winds.

When we compare this Scripture in Jeremiah 46 with the "flood" mentioned in Revelation 12, the word "flood" undoubtedly refers to an *army* which Satan will *control.* (See also Isaiah 59:19.) When Satan sees that the "woman," the Church, has taken refuge in her place of safety, he will command the political power serving him to destroy God's Church. But, just as God opened up the Red Sea and swallowed up Pharaoh's army at the time of the Exodus, so He will cause the "earth" to "open its mouth and swallow up the flood." So God will prevent Satan from destroying God's people who will have taken refuge from the Great Tribulation!

**Revelation 12:14 plainly states that God will prepare a “place" in which His Church will take refuge during the Great Tribulation. Nothing is said about God preparing more than *one* place!**

What will happen to those sleepy, foolish virgins (Matt. 25:1­12) who do *not* think they must flee to the place which God will prepare for His people? What will happen to those who say, "Well, God can protect me, and all of His people, wherever they may happen to be?"

Does the Bible plainly tell us what will happen to those in God's Church who do *not* flee to a place of refuge *before* the Great Tribulation begins! It certainly does: "And the DRAGON was *enraged* with the woman, and he went **to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ"** (Rev. 12:17).

Satan will first attempt to destroy those of God's people who got up and departed to the place of refuge. But any who are *not* safely settled in God's *place of safety* will experience the full fury of an enraged Devil. There will be such fiendish persecution and slaughter that the examples listed in Fox's *Book of Martyrs* may seem tame by comparison!

This prophecy reveals that some will *not* flee into God's place of refuge, but will remain without that place of safety. It is *they* who will suffer the full fury of Satan. Many, if not most, of them will give up their lives for their beliefs at that time!

Jesus Christ, our Savior, said His disciples should "watch and pray" that they might be accounted worthy to *escape* all the fiendish horrors of Satan. Will your chances for deliverance be just as good if you decide that you don't need to heed His instructions?

### God is Our Refuge!

What will happen to those who, for one reason or another, are *not* able to take refuge with the people of God in a "place of safety" before the Tribulation begins? "God is our *refuge* and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea" (Ps. 46:1-2). It is true that God *can* protect any of His children even if they do go into the Great Tribulation.

Many of the wiser Jews saw what was coming and fled Hitler's Nazi Europe *before* it was too late! Some six millions of those who remained behind suffered inde­scribable humiliation, hunger, tor­ture and gruesome deaths. *A few* Jews who went thorough the Nazi death camps did escape—but at a horrible price!

When you look at all the Scriptures, you cannot help but conclude that God means what He says—**there will be a PLACE** (singular) **OF REFUGE for His people during that awful period of time known as the Great Tribulation!** Those who are *not* in that refuge when the Tribulation strikes will suffer ter­ribly—even though *some* of them may have their lives spared during the time of great TRIAL and test­ing (Ezek. 5:1-4, 12-13).

Notice what Christ promises to those who have a Philadelphian-like attitude of loving God's Word and of zealously doing His Work: "Because you have *kept My com­mand* ["Word"—KJV} to persevere; I also will keep you from the HOUR OF TRIAL [Great Tribulation] which shall come upon the WHOLE WORLD, to *test* those who dwell on the earth" (Rev. 3:10).

It is not a matter of *whether or not* God *can* protect His faithful people in their homes or places of business in their own locale; rather, it is a matter of what the Scriptures plainly say about a place of refuge. Clearly, as we have seen, the Bible only speaks of one "place" of refuge in which His people will be granted divine protection during the Great Tribulation.

### A Word of Wisdom and Caution!

God has *not* yet revealed *where* the place of refuge will be! He has not shown *when* His peo­ple are to flee to that place of safe­ty! Neither has He made known *how* God's people will travel to that place of refuge! And we don't yet know *who* will be counted worthy in God's sight to be grant­ed asylum in that place of safety during the Great Tribulation! God will make all of these things known to His people at the proper time.

*If* each and every one of us will truly love, obey and please God—­then we can *rest assured* that He will count us worthy of *escaping* the worst of the end-of the-age horrors, AND God will grant us blameless­ness before His Son, Jesus Christ, at His Second Coming—receiving our eternal reward (Rev. 22:12)!

We must all remain vigilant, with our *lamps full of oil* (the Holy Spirit) and our

*lights always burning—*ever ready to joyfully greet the Bridegroom when He returns to marry His bride (Matt. 25; Rev. 19)!

"And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to *awake out of sleep....* The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us *cast off* the works of dark­ness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in licentiousness and lewdness, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts" (Rom. 13:11-14)!

The Prophet Zephaniah wrote, "Seek the LORD, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His jus­tice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be *hidden* in the day of the LORD's anger" (Zeph. 2:3).

Truly, Jesus Christ knew what He was talking about when He commanded, "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:36)!

## Why Did Rome Withdraw After Surrounding Jerusalem?

According to Josephus, the Roman General Cestius led a Roman army to Jerusalem and surrounded the city—apparently, in the early part of 66 A.D. Then "he retired from the city, without any reason in the world.…” (Josephus, *Wars of the Jews,* Book II, chap. xix). "After this calamity [the Jew's had inflicted heavy losses on Cestius' retreating army], many of the most eminent of the Jews swam away from the city, as from a ship when it was going to sink" *(Wars of the Jews,* Book II, chap. xx). Was that when the Christians fled to Pella?

Subsequently, the Roman General Vespasian (later made Emperor) led a second Roman Army to break the back of the First Jewish Revolt. But when the brutal Roman Emperor, Nero, died in 68 A.D., he was quickly followed by a succession of *four* new Emperors during the next year or so: Galba (68-69 A.D.), Otho (69 A.D.), Vitelius (69 A.D.) and Vespasian (69-79 A.D.). Vespasian had withdrawn his Roman army from Judea because of the problem of succession, but after he was made Emperor in 69 A.D., he sent his son, Titus, to crush the Jewish rebellion.

Josephus says that numerous divine warnings were given the Jews *before* the Romans butchered the inhabitants of Jerusalem. "Moreover, at that feast which we call Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner [court of the] Temple, as their custom was, to perform their sacred ministrations, they said that, in the first place, they felt *a quaking,* and heard a great noise, and after that they heard a sound as of a great multitude, saying, `Let us remove hence"' *(Wars of the Jews,* Book VI, chap. v).