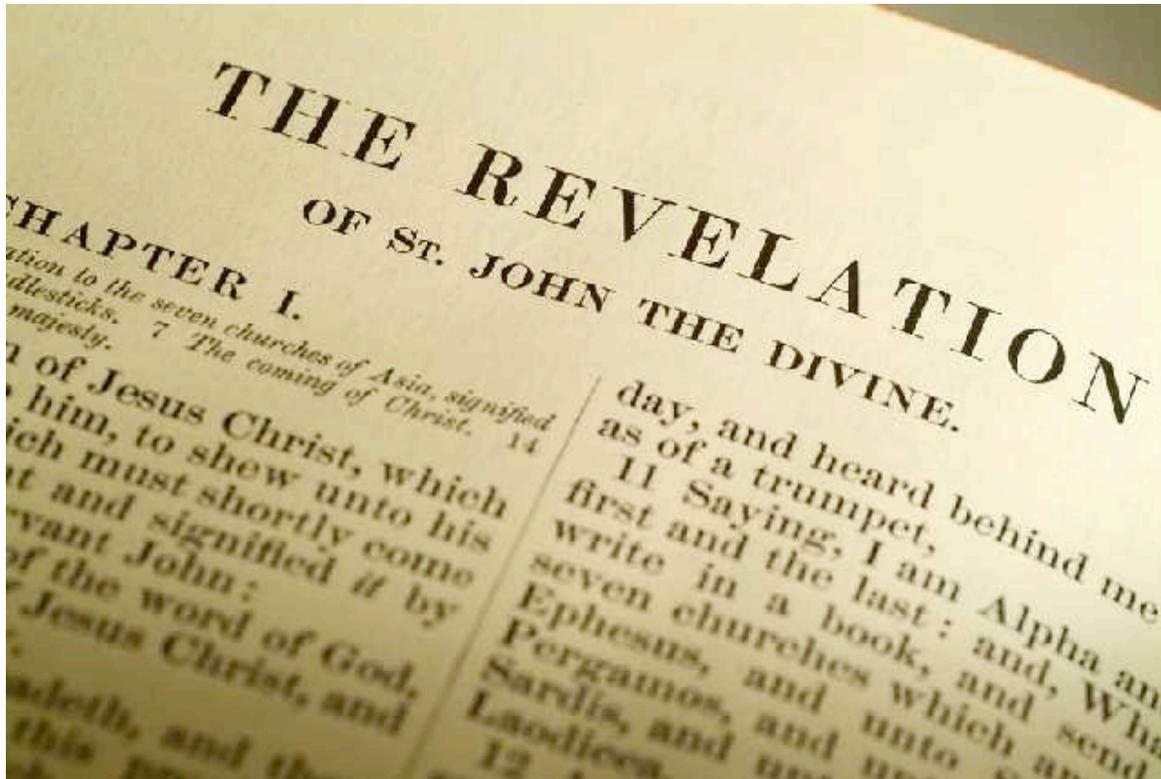


THEMES IN REVELATION: TRIBULATION



A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

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The Fellowship of Ailbe

*Themes in Revelation:
Tribulation*

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Themes in Revelation: Tribulation

From the very beginning of Revelation, the Apostle John wants us to know that we are already *in* tribulation, just as Jesus promised we would be (Rev. 1.9). Tribulation comes in the world because of the widespread, far-ranging, and deep-seated effects of sin. We can't escape it, and we need to make sure we know what to expect as we press on in our Kingdom-and-glory calling from the Lord.

Tribulation of all kinds is in the world – personal, economic, environmental, political, and more. The root of tribulation is sin, and the father of sin and lies is the perpetrator of all the harm done in the world through sin.

But he is a defeated foe, and so although we expect to know tribulation in this world – as Christians in every age have known tribulation – still we can persevere in seeking the Kingdom and righteousness of God because we ride forth each day with Him Who is overcoming all tribulation in Himself.

We are happy to provide *Scriptorium* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity with the Lord.

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We hope you find this study of Revelation a challenging and stretching experience of journeying more deeply into the Word of God. Thank you for joining us.

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1 The Root of Tribulation

Week 12, Monday: The Father of Lies

It is decidedly short-sighted to think that “tribulation” in the book of Revelation refers only to a brief period at the end of history when violence and immorality will be widespread and martyrdom will be the lot of many. After all, does this not sound like the world of the first century? Or the twentieth? Or the twenty-first?

In the Kingdom of God we expect to know tribulation (Rev. 1.9) because our Lord Jesus has told us it would be so (Jn. 16.33). Tribulation occurs when the plan and will of God are opposed, exposing the world to God’s promised judgment and bringing trouble on *all* people and *all* creation, not just on believers. Tribulation is a major theme of the book of Revelation. All who have made the turn into the Kingdom of God will know tribulation, because tribulation is the normal way of things in the world.

We can overcome tribulation and its destructive effects, but first we must understand it well. This is the theme we will be exploring across the facets of Revelation in this installment.

Read Revelation 12

Meditate on the following passages from Revelation

1. Revelation 1.9: We are “companions” with John and the other apostles in the tribulation that accompanies our Kingdom-and-glory calling from the Lord (1 Thess. 2.12). Jesus told us how to approach the tribulation we can expect in this world (Jn. 16.33). How does this compare with the way people normally approach such trials? Why are Christians able to have such an attitude toward trials?
2. Tribulation results when the Word and ways of God are repudiated and opposed. How can you see, in Revelation 12, that the tribulation we have in this world is basically *spiritual* in its roots?
3. The whole world is subject to tribulation in this time before the return of Christ. But the dragon, who is the source of the world’s woes, focuses his special fury on the Church. Why? What is he hoping to accomplish by bringing believers to misery and woe?
4. The Church should regard herself as “in the wilderness” during this period of worldwide tribulation. What period of Israel’s history does this reference recall? Why can believers take comfort from seeing themselves in this way?
5. According to James (Jms. 1.1-4) and Peter (1 Pet. 1.3-9), companions with us in this tribulation, how can trials and tribulation actually be of benefit to us?

My Reflection

Paul – another companion in tribulation with us – counsels us concerning how to respond to tribulation (Phil. 2.14, 15; Phil. 4.6, 7). How does this compare with the way you typically respond to unfavorable, disturbing, or inconvenient situations?

The Glory of God

Everything God does is for His own glory, to make Himself known to the world, to attract people to seek and know Him (Acts 17.26, 27). How does the tribulation of the world glorify God?

Glory to Glory

How should believers, in their lives and spoken witness, show the glory of God to the world through the

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tribulations we must endure?

Memorize

Our memory verse for this week is Revelation 1.9. Write this verse on an index card, using your preferred translation of the Bible. Carry this with you throughout the week, and spend some time each day working to memorize this passage.

Closing Prayer

Plead *my cause*, O LORD, with those who strive with me;
Fight against those who fight against me.
Take hold of shield and buckler,
And stand up for my help.
Also draw out the spear,
And stop those who pursue me.
Say to my soul,
“I *am* your salvation.”
Let those be put to shame and brought to dishonor
Who seek after my life;
Let those be turned back and brought to confusion
Who plot my hurt.
Let them be like chaff before the wind,
And let the angel of the LORD chase *them*.
Let their way be dark and slippery,
And let the angel of the LORD pursue them.
For without cause they have hidden their net for me *in* a pit,
Which they have dug without cause for my life.
Let destruction come upon him unexpectedly,
And let his net that he has hidden catch himself;
Into that very destruction let him fall.
And my soul shall be joyful in the LORD;
It shall rejoice in His salvation.

Psalm 35.1-9

2 The Reach of Tribulation

Week 12, Tuesday: Three Horsemen

As the Lord Jesus goes forth, by His Word and Spirit in His Church, conquering and to conquer, three other riders on horses also have designs on the earth and its peoples. By understanding the “mission” of these three, we may gain a better understanding of the reach of tribulation. And knowing the reach of tribulation, we can prepare to overcome it by our testimony and obedience.

Read Revelation 6.3-8

Meditate on the following passages from Revelation

1. Keep in mind that Revelation 12 provides the spiritual and chronological backdrop for all the events in the book of Revelation. We do not read Revelation in *chronological* order. Rather, we read it spiritually and cyclically, looking for recurring themes and ideas as the story of the last days is told and retold from different perspectives. In that respect, is it reasonable to see Revelation 9.1-11 as coming before Revelation 6.3-8? Why?
2. How would you summarize the “mission” of those spiritual forces of wickedness unleashed in Revelation 9.1-11? Is this mission directed *only* at believers? What effects of this “mission” should we expect to see among the people of the earth? Do we in fact see these?
3. Which aspects of human life are encompassed by the “mission” of the three riders in Revelation 6.3-8? Is it fair to say that there is not an aspect of human life in the world where the rage of the dragon does not reach? Explain.
4. In a previous lesson we talked about the “institutionalization” of sin (cf. Rev. 13)? What do we mean by this? How does this happen, say, in a political system or a culture? How does the institutionalization of sin increase the reach and effects of tribulation? Can you give an example?
5. In Revelation 15 and 16 the court of heaven responds to the tribulation in the world caused by sin. How does the wrath of God (Rom. 1.18-32) compound the tribulation of the world? Why is this consistent with the glory of God and the progress of His Kingdom?

My Reflection

It’s clear that many people are suffering from the reach of tribulation. We’ve discussed how we should be prepared to deal with the trials that come our way, so that we can overcome tribulation by holding fast our confession of faith in Jesus. How should we regard the people around us who are facing tribulations of various kinds? What do we have to offer them?

The Glory of God

Tribulation provides an opportunity for pointing people to the grace of God; however, many people simply will not embrace that, but will become further hardened against the Lord (Rev. 16.9, 11). Should this cause us as believers to be dismayed? Does even the hardening of men’s hearts against the Lord glorify Him? Explain.

Glory to Glory

It is not uncommon for people to talk about various tribulations facing the world – terrorism, economic uncertainty, environmental concerns, personal troubles, and so forth. Suggest some ways you might prepare for such conversations in order to participate in them for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10.31). What might you

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expect of others in the conversation as you take this tack?

Memorize

Let's look more closely at our memory verse, Revelation 1.9. Recite your memory verse aloud. Are you a "companion" with John and the other apostles today? What does Hebrews 12.1 suggest about this? How should this "companionship" affect your ability to overcome in the face of tribulation?

Closing Prayer

Preserve me, O God, for in You I put my trust.

O my soul, you have said to the LORD,

"You *are* my LORD,

My goodness is nothing apart from You."

As for the saints who *are* on the earth,

"They are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight."

Psalm 16.1-3

3 The Rage of Tribulation

Week 12, Wednesday: Wars and Martyrs

Spiritual sickness leads to unreasonable and violent behavior, and not always against the followers of Jesus. Violence is like a flood, and when the dragon wants to destroy the Church, he will “flood” the earth with violence in hopes of destroying the followers of Christ (Rev. 12). War is terrible, horrible, and destructive of everything that is good; yet human beings continue to pursue it as a policy for gaining their sin-sick ends. Not all wars are unjust, but all wars bring out the rage of tribulation, especially as that is expressed toward the Lord and His followers.

Read Revelation 13

Meditate on the following passages from Revelation

1. In the book of Revelation, war is most often presented as violence against the saints of God (cf. Rev. 13.7, 17; 19.19). Does such “war” always involve battlefields, military actions, and overt violence? Do the dragon’s minions conduct “war” by other means against the saints?
2. In Revelation 6.9-11, departed saints are described as having been “slain for the word of God and the testimony they held.” We discussed this earlier as a symbolic way of describing every believer’s calling to lay down his or her life and take up the cross of Jesus. How does doing so set us at odds – lead us into war – with the world around us (cf. Eph. 6.10-13; Jn. 15.18-25)? What should we expect as we engage in this “warfare”?
3. In Revelation 11 tribulation in the form of violence comes upon the “two witnesses.” Isn’t the Gospel supposed to be “Good News” for lost men and women? Why do people sometimes respond so violently to the proclamation of the Gospel? Do you experience this response from people as you tell them the Good News of Christ and His Kingdom?
4. In Revelation 19.11-21 Christ is depicted in martial terms upon His return. Is He really going to “strike” rebellious nations with a “sharp sword,” or clobber them with a “rod of iron”? How should these images lead us to think about what will actually happen when Jesus returns? How should they counsel us in carrying on our “warfare” during this time of tribulation?
5. The book of Revelation warns us that war is to be expected, in particular, against those who hold fast to the testimony of Jesus. Yet John’s book begins with the words, “Grace to you and peace...” (Rev. 1.4). How can believers know peace amidst the tribulations of war, whether spiritual or otherwise?

My Reflection

Do you think of yourself as a “soldier” in Christ’s “army”? Would you describe your life as an ongoing “warfare” for Jesus’ sake? Why or why not?

The Glory of God

Christians are sometimes uncomfortable thinking about God as a Warrior against His enemies. But war is a fact of these times of tribulation and thus provides a useful metaphor for thinking about Christ’s rule over the nations. Explain.

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Glory to Glory

How, at the beginning of your day, might you make better use of your time in order to prepare for the warfare you expect to confront throughout the day?

Memorize

Recite your memory verse aloud: Revelation 1:9. Share it with a Christian friend. Explain to your friend what you're learning about living in the Kingdom of God during this time of tribulation.

Closing Prayer

He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High
Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress;
My God, in Him I will trust."
Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler
And from the perilous pestilence.
He shall cover you with His feathers,
And under His wings you shall take refuge;
His truth shall be your shield and buckler.
You shall not be afraid of the terror by night,
Nor of the arrow that flies by day,
Nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness,
Nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday.
A thousand may fall at your side,
And ten thousand at your right hand;
But it shall not come near you.

Psalm 91:1-7

4 The Ruse of Tribulation

Week 12, Thursday: The Church Deceived

Tribulation, motivated and sustained by sin, can be ugly, frightening, and terrible. Tribulation is compounded, as we have seen, as God responds to it in judgment, often intensifying and expanding tribulation as a result. But tribulation is not always like this – at least, not at first. The devil, we recall, is able to make himself appear as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11.13-15). Sometimes we bring tribulation unnecessarily into our midst, where, with a bit more circumspection, we might succeed at keeping it better at bay.

Read Revelation 2.8-29, 3.7-13

Meditate on the following passages from Revelation

1. Tribulation comes upon the world in various guises. How might you spell out in more detail what we see summarized in Revelation 18.3-9? According to verse 4, how are the saints supposed to respond to such wickedness? What does that mean?
2. Yet, in our reading for today, it seems clear that somehow the tribulation of the world manages to insinuate itself into the community of the faithful. How does this happen?
3. Revelation 2.1-7 suggests the primary reason why believers and churches become susceptible to the ruse of tribulation, to its disguising itself as something to be desired. What is this reason? What does this look like in a church? In your life?
4. Sometimes tribulation can lead people to seek the Lord, or to be open to His seeking them. How can you see that, for example, in the case of the Apostle Paul? In other cases, tribulation compounds the blindness of people to their true need (cf. Rev. 16.9, 11; Rev. 20.7-11). How should knowing this affect our attitude toward lost people, including those who try to visit tribulation upon us for our faith? How can believers help one another to maintain this attitude?
5. Meditate on Romans 1.18-32, in particular, in the light of what we've seen about sin, the tribulation it visits upon the world, and God's response to sin and tribulation. Humans, it seems, have an uncanny ability to *adapt* to sin and tribulation, which can often lead to their *adopting* these as policies and practices. How, given the deceitfulness of sin, should knowing this instruct the believer?

My Reflection

What is your approach to protecting yourself against the “wiles” of the devil? What is your responsibility in helping to keep your church from opening its doors to this angel of light and the tribulation he brings with him?

The Glory of God

For the honor and glory of God, how would you describe Jesus' attitude toward churches that are beguiled and deceived and allow the devil to gain a foothold in their midst?

Glory to Glory

What do you expect of your pastor(s) and church leaders when it comes to guarding your church against the ruse of sin and tribulation? Talk with one or more of them about this question.

Memorize

Recite Revelation 1.9. How can having a clearer vision of the Kingdom of God – to which we are called and

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which we seek (1 Thess. 2.12; Matt. 6.33) – help to protect us against the deceptions of sin and the tribulation that can result?

Closing Prayer

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from Your presence,
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,
And uphold me *by Your* generous Spirit.
Then I will teach transgressors Your ways,
And sinners shall be converted to You.
Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,
The God of my salvation,
And my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.
O Lord, open my lips,
And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.

Psalm 51.10-15

5 The Ruin of Tribulation (1)

Week 12, Friday: The Widespread Effects of Sin

Sin produces tribulation, and tribulation has devastating effects wherever its reach is extended. The world God loves so much that He sent His Son to redeem is presently being savaged by sin and tribulation. The work of Christ's redemption, and therefore of His Kingdom-and-glory-seeking people, must extend like His, "far as the curse is found."

Read Revelation 8

Meditate on the following passages from Revelation

1. Tribulation is compounded when the judgment of God falls against it. In chapter 8 we see the devastating effects of this. Describe the tribulations that come upon the creation because of sin. In what ways do we see this ruin of the creation in our own day?
2. According to Revelation 9, in what ways does the ruin of sin and tribulation affect humankind? Do we see this process at work in our day? In what ways?
3. The ruin caused by tribulation and sin powerfully affects the hearts of people toward God. How can you see that, for example, in Revelation 11.7-10 and Revelation 16.8-11? How should knowing this affect our attitude toward people who are still lost in sin?
4. Revelation 16 shows even more effects of the ruin of sin and tribulation. How does this add to what we've seen already, and in what ways can you see these effects in our day?
5. There's even a sense in which the ruin of sin and tribulation makes people slaves to those who wield power through institutions that have become corrupted by sin. How can you see this in Revelation 13?

My Reflection

We cannot escape the tribulation that comes upon the earth because of sin and the judgment of God. Rather than try to *avoid* tribulation, or hope we might somehow be able to *escape* it, believers are called by the Lord to *overcome* in the midst of tribulation. What does this mean for you?

The Glory of God

Meditate on Revelation 12.10-12. Heaven rejoices at the ruin of tribulation. Why? How does this contribute to the glory of God?

Glory to Glory

Can you see in Revelation 12.10-12 a pattern for overcoming in the face of tribulation? See if you can tease this out, then share your observations with a Christian friend.

Memorize

Review Revelation 1.9. What does it mean to be a companion with God in His Word and the testimony of Jesus Christ? Talk with a Christian friend about this question.

Closing Prayer

Write a prayer based on Revelation 1.9 and Revelation 12.10-12. Try praying this aloud. Does that feel right? Comfortable? Biblical?

6 The Ruin of Tribulation (2)

Week 12, Saturday: The Wages of Sin Collected

Tribulation will come to an end, and the wages of those who have perpetrated tribulation will be paid and collected in full.

And it won't be pretty.

Read Revelation 19.17-21, 20.7-15, and 21.7 and 8.

Meditate on the following passages from Revelation

1. Meditate on Revelation 1.7 and 8. Here is a hint of where sin and tribulation are headed. How does this verse function in the book of Revelation? The saints are warned about this throughout chapters 2 and 3. How can you see this?
2. The ruin of sin and tribulation is foreseen in Revelation 6.12-17. What is implied in the final question of this passage?
3. Revelation 11.15-18 again look forward to the destruction of sin and the end of tribulation. What is the nature of the "wrath" God displays at this time? Do people deserve to be warned about this, as Jesus warns us? How do you incorporate this "warning" into the Gospel as you share it?
4. Perhaps the most gruesome depiction of the ruin of sin and the tribulation it causes is in Revelation 14.17-20. Is it *necessary* to represent this situation in this way? Why?
5. This brings us to Revelation 19.17-21, 20.7-15, and 21.7 and 8. The ruin of sin and tribulation is here in view, but not the ruin of those who were the cause and agents of it. How can you see this?

My Reflection

How does the coming ruin of sin and tribulation, and the consequence to unrepentant sinners, affect you?

The Glory of God

Is God really glorified in all this destruction and damnation? Explain.

Glory to Glory

Think of creation, as it moves from the glory of Genesis 1 and 2, through the work of Christ, to the glory of Revelation 21 and 22. Does this suggest a pattern for our daily lives? Explain.

Memorize

Recite Revelation 1.9. Share this verse and what you've learned from it with a fellow believer today.

Closing Prayer

Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns;
The world also is firmly established,
It shall not be moved;
He shall judge the peoples righteously."
Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad;
Let the sea roar, and all its fullness;
Let the field be joyful, and all that *is* in it.

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Then all the trees of the woods will rejoice before the LORD.
For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth.
He shall judge the world with righteousness,
And the peoples with His truth.

Psalm 96.10-13

7 Rest from Tribulation

Week 12, Sunday: Living above Tribulation

Christians are companions with John and the other apostles in the Kingdom and tribulation of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is part of our Kingdom-and-glory calling here and now.

But rejoice! This will not always be the case.

Read Revelation 7

Meditate on the following passages from Revelation

1. Tribulation is unavoidable and inescapable. As Revelation 2 and 3 make clear, the saints are even at times the cause of their own trials. But, like the churches of Revelation 2 and 3, believers are called to “overcome” the sin and tribulations of the world, including those they bring on themselves. What does this involve?
2. The picture in Revelation 7.9-17 is of events in heaven at this time. Here we may expect to know genuine rest from sin and tribulation. But even this is merely *temporary*. Explain. Does this “interim” status suggest even greater rest to come?
3. Meditate on Revelation 19.1-9. Our rest from the tribulation that comes because of sin is ultimately to be found in God, in our union with Him. What does this suggest about how we may overcome tribulation here and now?
4. Meditate on Revelation 22.1-5. How many images suggesting rest can you identify here? What will it be like to be in such an environment *uninterrupted by sin or tribulation of any sort*?
5. Look again at the prayer of the saints in heaven in Revelation 6.10. Does this suggest a subject for our prayers in the here and now?

My Reflection

Summarize the rest from tribulation that is coming for us as believers, and that rest as we may know it here and now.

The Glory of God

What is it about being united with God – immersed in, surrounded and suffused by His glory – that brings us into rest? How would you counsel a new believer to access that rest?

Glory to Glory

We truly rest, even in the midst of tribulation, when we see God in His glory. When we see God in His glory, then we can rest, in spite of everything that might threaten that rest. How does this work out in your own walk with the Lord?

Memorize

Review Revelation 1.9. What does it mean that we exist in the Kingdom of God and the tribulation of the world at the same time?

Closing Prayer

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I remember the days of old;
I meditate on all Your works;
I muse on the work of Your hands.
I spread out my hands to You;
My soul *longs* for You like a thirsty land. *Selah*
Answer me speedily, O LORD;
My spirit fails!
Do not hide Your face from me,
Lest I be like those who go down into the pit.
Cause me to hear Your lovingkindness in the morning,
For in You do I trust;
Cause me to know the way in which I should walk,
For I lift up my soul to You.
Deliver me, O LORD, from my enemies;
In You I take shelter.

Psalm 143.5-9

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Week 12: Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. Why is tribulation an important and inescapable part of Kingdom living?
2. What should our attitude be toward the sin and tribulation which bring ruin to creation and the peoples of the world?
3. How can we continue in the peace and joy of the Kingdom while having to endure the tribulation that is in the world?
4. What are the most important lessons for you about sin and tribulation in the book of Revelation?
5. How are you beginning to implement those lessons in your walk with and work for the Lord?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.