

OUT OF THE TRIBULATION CLOSET

LAURA URISTA

I was watching a favorite TV program when a strange advertisement for peanut butter grabbed my attention. The commercial went something like this:

As a young woman runs through an abandoned street, with smoke and ash falling all around her, a young man beckons her to enter an underground shelter, similar to a tornado shelter you might see on a farm in the Midwest. The young woman enters, obviously relieved and thankful to be safe. As her eyes take in her new surroundings, she notices the walls are filled with shelves of provisions.

On further scrutiny, she realizes the shelves are stocked with a generic brand of peanut butter. The realization causes her to shake her head and she darts out of the shelter, back into the destruction of a fiery war zone. She runs into a half-demolished warehouse and pulls out the brand of peanut butter she prefers, takes a spoonful and smiles. Then the slogan appears, “[Brand]— so good you’d brave the Apocalypse for it.”

EMERGENCY SUPPLY CLOSET

Clever? Undoubtedly. Humorous? Perhaps. But for me,

seeing that short peanut butter commercial instantly took me back fifty years, to a terrified seven-year-old girl, as memories flooded my mind of the emergency supply closet in my childhood home. Many families have emergency supplies on hand in case of a natural disaster. That isn’t a bad thing. In fact, it is actually a necessity in many areas of the world. But there was a much deeper, sinister reason behind my family’s closet full of provisions.

My brother and I were told to never open that closet door or touch the emergency supplies. I got spanked for “stealing” a few crackers from it one time when I was terribly hungry and there was little or nothing in the kitchen cupboards or fridge easily accessible for a small child to eat.

You see, the supplies in that closet were meant to be used only for the *End-Times* (see glossary). Similar to the idea of being “left behind” from the *Rapture* (see glossary), my parents feared they might not qualify to escape the coming wrath and judgment of God upon mankind.

As an adult, I came to refer to our family’s emergency supply closet as “The *Tribulation* Closet.” Growing up with such a tangible

symbol of that looming, inevitable apocalyptic *tribulation* (see glossary) just a few doors away from my own little bedroom definitely messed with my head as a kid, to say the least.

I grew up believing that no matter how many good things you try to do, and no matter how hard you try to obey your parents, teachers, ministers and ultimately God himself, you just never know for sure if you’ll be deemed good enough to escape the “soon-coming” tribulation or not. You might try your hardest, but if God was angry you would be punished or killed.

TOXIC IMPACT OF THE CLOSET

As I grew from a child into a teen and young adult, this “tribulation closet” mentality continued to have a huge impact on my life. I lived with a constant fear of never knowing whether I might wake up one day in a horrific war zone, all because I or my parents didn’t do enough to “qualify” for God’s salvation.

Beyond that, I was constantly afraid of disappointing my parents and family by not measuring up to God’s holy standard. By age nine, this constant heightened state of anxiety began to manifest itself

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in the form of headaches, recurring nightmares, stomach troubles and eventually nervous hives. I remember that my mom used to wash and double-rinse all my clothing, bedding, towels—everything that came into contact with my skin—thinking I had an allergy.

I didn't know why I was having these physical manifestations of anxiety until I was much older. As a young adult, my intense fear and anxiety finally began to subside, but occasionally I would get nervous hives before a big exam, speech, job interview or presentation.

In my early thirties, I went to counseling, and I finally got some real help in dealing with the deep-seated fear of being "left behind" and all the terror that might entail, along with the idea that I could never measure up.

Now, as I look back at those errant teachings and their impact on my life, I realize that I allowed fear to paralyze and hold me captive in many ways. I made choices in my life based on fear—fear that I wouldn't or couldn't be good enough to be saved. Fear that I wouldn't live long enough to go to college, get married or have children one day.



Photo by Toni Oprea
Romania

DISTORTED VIEW OF GOD

In retrospect, I recognize that fear played a role in my relationships with my parents, friends, coworkers, bosses, my husband and especially with God. Talk about “trust issues”! How could I ever trust a god who would allow his children to be taken captive, tortured and destroyed? How could a “loving Father” kill his own Son, or allow him to be killed to satisfy his “wrath”? If God did that to his only Son who was perfect, how much more would he do to me, a sinner?

What a profound difference there is between those errant teachings of my religious past and the TRUE gospel Jesus taught. Jesus came to show us his loving *Abba*—his kind, compassionate and caring “Daddy.”

Contrary to what many preachers *say* the Bible teaches, God did not torture or kill his Son. Humans were responsible for those errant teachings, and humans were responsible for Jesus’ beating and crucifixion.

In fact, humans have always been responsible for the atrocities of captivity, slavery and all the evils of war. But God always has been and always will be simply divine, perfect love—and “*perfect love drives out fear*” (1 John 4:18). □

Laura Urista is managing editor of CWRm and a survivor of the alleged tribulation.

Tribulation Fever by Brad Jersak

Some of our readers will recognize Laura’s experience from their own religious history. My childhood in the Baptist church was also infected with a tribulation fever of sorts. Our version was caught up in the Hal Lindsay’s *Late Great Planet Earth*, the top-selling book on all things rapture, tribulation, Antichrist and Armageddon.

My childhood imagination was ignited with the hellfire prophecies of Jack Chick Comics, Larry Norman’s haunting lyrics (“You’ve been left behind”) and the Evangelical horror movie, “Thief in the Night.” We were programmed to believe Christ would rapture away the true believers so we’d miss the Great Tribulation, but woe to those who’d be left behind.

It was thrilling and terrifying all at once because I was sure I would be raptured—until, that is, those traumatic moments when it seemed my family was taken and I was left...*Home Alone* on a cosmic scale!

I won’t recount how that all unraveled except to say that fear-based religion has a shelf-life but divine love does not. The Light of perfect Love exposed the silliness and healed the trauma, thanks be to God. □

PARTIAL APOCALYPTIC GLOSSARY

Dispensationalism: A method of interpreting future events spoken of in the Bible. Most iterations of dispensational theology believe human history will last 6,000 years followed by a 1,000-year millennial earthly rule of Christ.

End-Times: Believed to be the last generation on earth before the Second Coming of Jesus. Dispensationalism has produced many such

end-time generations since 1843, which was one of the first dispensationalist-inspired predictions for the date of the Second Coming.

Rapture: The supposed event when those who are not Christians will see and hear the spectacle of Christians being whisked away to safety in heaven while they are left behind.

Tribulation: A biblical term interpreted by dispensationalists as referring to seven years of unparalleled trouble shortly before the Second Coming.