

The Tribulation

Revelation 6-16

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4/7/2024

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The last message we had in Revelation on Palm Sunday, we looked at Chapter 5 where we learned about an important scroll in heaven that was sealed with seven seals. And no one was worthy to open the scroll except for the *Lion of the tribe of Judah* who was also described as a *Lamb as though it had been slain*. These are all terms describing God the Son, the glorified Jesus.

Since Jesus was the only one qualified to open this scroll, I think that it represented the title deed to planet earth. This idea is supported by Jeremiah 32:6-15, which describes Jewish title deeds as being sealed. But there is no doubt that the earth is the Lord's (Psalm 24:1), though the governments of this world currently belong in some sense to Satan (Luke 4:5-8). God has always held the title deed to the earth — but the scroll must be opened, God's ownership must be revealed to even unbelievers. That is what the book of Revelation is all about... revealing the true Owner of Planet Earth and His taking possession of it.

This morning, we're going to take a look at what happens when Jesus opens these seals and, along with that, I'm going to give an overview of Revelation Chapters 6 through 16. These chapters describe what happens in a period of time we call the Tribulation with a capital "T". That is to distinguish it from the tribulation with a small "t" that everyone experiences in this fallen world (John 16:33).

The Tribulation will be a terrible time when God has had enough of this current evil world system and pours out His wrath on earth. It will be like the massive re-boot He did in the flood of Noah's day, but this time instead of a flood, He will be withdrawing His restraint of evil and giving mankind over to our ungodly ways. It is a time that the Antichrist will be ruling the world who will be a real person probably possessed by Satan himself.

We call the time-period just before Jesus returns to earth as the Tribulation because Jesus called the second half of it the "Great Tribulation" in His Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24). This is where Jesus answered His disciples' questions: "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3)

Among the signs Jesus gave us were increasing deception, wars, famine, earthquakes and persecution. He also warned those who will be in Judea to flee when they see the Abomination of Desolation which the prophet Daniel spoke of. This Abomination of Desolation is where the Antichrist will enter the Jerusalem temple and declare himself to be god. Things really get bad on earth at that point... following the Abomination of Desolation, Jesus had this to say about the Tribulation:

Matthew 24-21-22 – 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

It is only relatively recent in human history that the advent of nuclear weapons has given mankind the capability to destroy all flesh... so Jesus was referring to our time here.

We know from Daniel that the Abomination of Desolation occurs at the mid-point of the Tribulation so the Great Tribulation is technically the second-half of that time. But that doesn't mean the first half will be a walk in the park as we'll see.

We really can't talk about the Tribulation without looking at what Daniel had to say about it. Daniel Chapter 9 says there will be 70 weeks of years (or 490 years) when God would work through Israel to fulfill prophecy. 69 weeks of those years (or 483 years) were fulfilled in the Messiah coming and being *cut off*... which we now know means He died on the cross. This is why He came, to pay the penalty for our sin as required by the Law. And we also know He rose from the dead as the first-fruits of the resurrection.

The final 70th 7-year period was called out separately and it has not been fulfilled. About this week of years Daniel prophesied:

Daniel 9:27 – Then he [that is the Antichrist] shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate...

This passage not only refers to the Abomination of Desolation Jesus warned about but also describes what begins the Tribulation, the Antichrist confirming a covenant with the many... There will be some sort of peace treaty the Antichrist brokers with Israel that probably enables them to build a temple... there has to be a temple because there has to be a place for sacrifices that the Antichrist stops when he commits the Abomination of Desolation.

Before we dig into what happens during the Tribulation, let's remember the promise God gave us about studying the book of Revelation:

Revelation 1:3 – *Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it*

So, we're going to be considering some terrible things that will happen on earth as God pours out His wrath... how can that possibly be a blessing? It is a blessing to learn that God wins in the cosmic struggle between Him and His enemies.

It is also a blessing to be one of His own because we will not be here for the Tribulation! The church will be in heaven with Jesus! Today, God is working through the church as His representatives on earth, but the day will come when our Bridegroom comes for us as His bride, gives us our eternal, glorified bodies, and takes us to the Father's house in heaven. We call this the rapture of the church and it will happen before the Tribulation. Jesus promised His faithful:

Revelation 3:10 – *Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.*

This *hour of trial* is the Tribulation, which we can also refer to as the 70th week of Daniel when God resumes working through Israel as His representatives on earth.

We need to make a distinction between Jesus returning to earth to rule and His return in the air for the church. A lot of people try to make them the same event but a careful study of Scripture reveals that there are distinct differences. I'll not take the time to go into all that here... suffice it to say that the return of Jesus is in two phases: first for the church when we will meet Him in the air sporting our newly resurrected bodies before the Tribulation, and later at the end of the Tribulation when He will actually set foot on the Mount of Olives.

So, if the church is not going to be on Earth for the Tribulation, why bother to even study what happens during this time? Well, as we see the stage being set for the Tribulation, this gives us a sense for how close we are to the end of the Church Age... and this should give us a sense of urgency to get on with what God is calling us to do.

With that bit of introduction, let's take a look at what happens during the Tribulation...

Rev 6:1 – *Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals ...notice that it is Jesus who opens the seals resulting in what is called the seal judgments. The first four of these judgments are also called the four horses of the apocalypse because they are symbolized by horses and riders representing what happens.*

The first seal is the Antichrist coming on the scene. He will be recognized by the one who brokers a 7-year peace treaty with Israel probably accommodating them building a temple. The church will not know who the Antichrist is until we're in heaven so it is totally futile to speculate.

The second seal brings war to the earth. As Jesus said in His Olivet Discourse, there would be wars and rumors of wars. We have always had wars but Jesus characterized the Tribulation wars as birth pangs... increasing in frequency and intensity.

The third seal will feature inflation so bad that a day's wages will barely purchase a day's food. We are experiencing worldwide inflation today which may well be birth pangs of the scarcity during the Tribulation.

The fourth seal will bring death to 1/4 of population of the planet (2B)... People will be killed by war, hunger, beasts of the earth (pestilence)...

The fifth seal brings intense persecution of Christians. All the church-age Christians will be in heaven but multitudes of people will turn to Christ following the supernatural event of the rapture and when the prophesied events of the Tribulation begin to unfold.

The opening of the sixth seal brings earthquakes & cosmic signs... by the way... we will have something of a cosmic sign tomorrow as a matter of fact. There are a number of amazing coincidences associated with this total eclipse that I'll not take the time to go into here. But I will point these out this evening at our Bible study... you are invited: 6pm at Moss Creek Chapel.

The description of the 6th seal could well be the use of nuclear weapons: *great earthquake (BLAST); the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood (DUST IN ATMOSPHERE)... the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind (ICBM WARHEADS ENTERING THE ATMOSPHERE)... the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up (MUSHROOM CLOUD)*

And then there is this:

Rev 6:15-16 – *And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!*

I understand that Mark Zuckerberg is building an apocalypse bunker in Hawaii... I can't help but wonder if he will be among the great, rich, and mighty men hiding from the wrath of the Lamb.

Rev 7 – God seals 144,000 Jews, 12,000 from each tribe representing all of Israel. These will be the evangelists that God raises up to replace the church as His representatives on earth. They are sealed meaning they are supernaturally protected during at least part of the Tribulation.

Chapter 7 also describes (v9) *a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.* These were people who came to Christ during the Tribulation and became martyrs for their faith. It will be much better to become a Christian now during the current Church Age, than have to die for your faith during the Tribulation.

Rev 8 & 9 – The 7th seal initiates the 7 trumpet judgements...

1. 1/3 of earth's vegetation burned up
2. 1/3 of sea creatures die, 1/3 of the ships destroyed
3. 1/3 of all groundwater poisoned
4. 1/3 of the sun and other cosmic lights darkened
5. Locusts from hell torment people for 5 months
6. 200M soldiers kill 1/3 of those on earth (2B)

The 7th trumpet heralds in the final set of judgments called the Bowl Judgments:

Rev 10:7 – *but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets.*

The mystery of God that is about to be finished is the revelation of God the Son to the world. And the

establishment of the promised Millennial Kingdom of the Messiah on earth.

The Millennial Kingdom will be a glorious 1,000-year time when the Lord Jesus Christ will rule mortal people on earth and most (but not all) the curse will be removed. So, this will be the utopia the nations long for, not achieved through human effort but by the Prince of Peace Himself.

Before we get to the Bowl Judgments in Chapter 15, Chapters 10-14 is something of an interlude describing some key events on earth and in heaven.

The first interlude is in heaven: Rev 10:8-11 – A little book John ate that was sweet in his mouth but bitter in his stomach...

God's prophecies about the many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings were sweet when spoken of but bitter when digested or contemplated in depth.

- God is absolutely serious about dealing with the evil of this world and the Day is coming when He will take action.

Rev 11 – Takes us back to earth and describes the two witnesses from God who would preach in Jerusalem near the temple for 3.5 years (Rev 11:3)...

One will probably be Elijah, the other either Moses or Enoch. We know for sure one of the two will be Elijah because of this prophecy:

Malachi 4:5-6 – Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.

Enoch is considered here because like Elijah, he did not die and was taken directly to heaven before the flood of Noah making him a type of the rapture of the church (Gen 5:24). But I think it likely that the other one will be Moses because he was seen with Elijah and Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8).

About the two witnesses...

- No one can harm them (Rev 11:5)
- They display supernatural signs (Rev 11:6)
- They are killed by the Antichrist (Rev 11:7)
- Earth-dwellers will see their dead bodies on their smartphones and celebrate their death for 3.5 days (Rev 11: 9-10)
- God will resurrect them and take them to heaven

Rev 11:15-19 – Describes the 7th trumpet judgment which ushers in the final Bowl Judgments and proclaims the Millennial Kingdom of God...

This proclamation is immediately followed by lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail

Rev 12 – Symbolically describes key events on earth and in the spiritual realm...

Rev 12:1 – *a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars.*

...Israel, the 12 stars represent the sons of Jacob reminiscent of Jacob's dream (Genesis 37)

v2 – *Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth.*

...Jesus, the Messiah (see verse 5)

v3 – *And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads.*

...Satan (Rev 12:9)

v4 – *His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth.*

...angels; 1/3 became Satan followers

Rev 12:6 – *Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days (3.5 years).*

She fled the land of Israel following the Abomination of Desolation to be supernaturally protected by God during the 2nd half of the Tribulation (Rev 12:13-14).

Rev 12:12 – *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.*

The fallen angels aligned with Satan are kicked out of the spiritual realm by Michael and the angels faithful to God. With all the demons on earth, that will make for hell on earth... as Jesus said, "Great Tribulation."

Rev 13:1-10 – What we learn about the Antichrist:

- Beast from the sea – from sea of Gentile nations
- Satan gives him power and authority
- Invincible (v. 4)
- Becomes the world ruler
- Persecutes saints, kills with the sword (v. 10) ...Rev 20:4 says they are beheaded (what religion does this?)

Rev 13:11-15 – the Beast from the land...

- Aka the False Prophet – the leader of the world religion of the Antichrist
- Land, a symbol of Israel... so he may be a Jew
- Looks like a lamb, speaks like a dragon
- Performs great signs
- Causes the world to worship the Antichrist or be killed

It is interesting to note: Muslims expect "the prophet" Jesus to return to cause Christendom to worship Al Mahdi, the Islamic Messiah who is expected to unite the world under Islam (this represents Satan spin on Revelation)

Matthew 24:5 – *For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many.*

Rev 13:15 – the Image of the beast...

- An automated means to tell if people are worshipping the Antichrist or not – he is not omniscient so he has to employ technology to enforce worship
- People fear A.I. for good reason... it will likely be used to determine if a person is sincere in their worship of the Antichrist.

Rev 13:16-18 – the mark of the Beast...

Swearing allegiance to the Antichrist and receiving a mark in the hand or forehead making it possible to buy and sell (participate in the economy, go to the grocery store).

the ramification of taking this mark...

Those doing so have sealed their eternal fate... they will be going to the lake of fire, see Rev 14:9-11.

- This is not something we need to fear during the Church Age.
- But people are already being conditioned for this (the COVID mandates)

Rev 14 gives some more details about the 144,000 of Israel; this time they are in heaven in resurrected bodies called the first-fruits to God. I take it these will be the first of the Jews resurrected when God declared their evangelistic Tribulation complete. In general, Old Testament saints will be resurrected at the end of the Tribulation (Daniel 12:1-2).

And Chapter 14 also describes a world-wide proclamation of the gospel by three angels fulfilling one of the Olivet Discourse prophecies of the Lord:

Matthew 24:14 – *And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.*

Also, angels will reap the grapes of wrath – great numbers of people will die during the Tribulation.

Rev 15-16 – the bowl judgments...

1. Foul and loathsome sores on those who had the mark of the beast
2. Sea poisoned so that all sea creature will die
3. All ground water poisoned
4. Men scorched with fire (true global warming)
5. Darkness and pain for the kingdom of the Antichrist

6. Three unclean spirits gather the world's armies for Armageddon "*to the battle of that great day of God Almighty*" (v4)
7. A great world-wide earthquake sinking islands and leveling mountains ...oh, and 75lb hailstones fall as well.

As we'll see, after this in Revelation 19, Jesus returns to earth to put an end to humanity's rebellion. Oh, and everyone here under this pavilion who has accepted Jesus as Savior will be with Him clothed in white linen and riding on white horses!

The resurrected church will remain on earth ruling with Jesus during the Millennial Kingdom... each of us will have something we're in charge of running the government of the Lord.

Following the Tribulation and before the Millennial Kingdom, there will be the Sheep & Goat Judgment described in Matthew 25. Only believers who survive the Tribulation will be allowed to go into the Millennial Kingdom. These are the mortal people from every nation on earth who will repopulate the earth during the Millennial Kingdom.

To summarize, we need to consider: Why the Tribulation? Why does God pour out His wrath on the earth?

- It is to prepare Israel and the Gentile nations for the Millennial Kingdom when He will fulfill His promises to both Israel and the Church.

I hope this passage has given you something that brings you closer to Jesus...

- And has helped you to look forward to the time when Jesus returns to fix all that is wrong with this sin-sick world
- And even better for us personally, I hope this message has you looking forward to our Blessed Hope when we will receive our permanent, glorified bodies and begin our eternity with Jesus!

Before I close us in prayer; what observations have you made during this discussion of the Tribulation?

If you have any question later, please let me know. I love to talk about the Lord's return because His prophetic Word is what led me to Jesus.

Let's pray...