

The Tribulation – part 1

Eschatology = study of end times or last things.

- *Eschatos* (last things) + *logos* (to study)
- **Titus 2:13**, "*looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,*"

So we've looked at the Rapture the last two Sundays. And this is something that is going to be secret or hidden from the world and will be distinct and separate from the Second Coming of Christ. This is the gathering of the Church to meet the Lord in the air and return to heaven with Him where we will forever be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

- Now though it will be a secret gathering, the world is suddenly going to know that millions of people are missing. How will this be explained? We're not sure exactly, but isn't it interesting that there seems to be quite a bit of talk about extra-terrestrial beings lately?
- In fact, the CIA came out at the beginning of this year declassifying a bunch of documents they've had on UFO sightings over the last 70 years.
- What this has done is kind of normalize the idea of aliens and I believe it can be a great excuse used to explain away the rapture.
- Now I believe these sightings are demonic in nature, and certainly a tool that the enemy can use to dismiss the legitimacy of the rapture.

I say all that to say, you often wonder how people won't just automatically run to Jesus once they see a mass of people gone. But they're going to be deceived and many will be more than happy to believe the lie rather than the truth.

Now after the Rapture, the Tribulation period will unfold on the earth. The Tribulation has been referred to by different names throughout the Bible: Day of the Lord (Isaiah 2:12; 13:6-9; Joel 1:15; 2:1-31; 3:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:2); trouble or tribulation (Deuteronomy 4:30; Zephaniah 1:1ff); the great tribulation, which refers to the more intense second half of the seven-year period (Matthew 24:21); time or day of trouble (Daniel 12:1; Zephaniah 1:15); time of Jacob's trouble (Jeremiah 30:7).

What is the purpose for this Tribulation period:

1. To judge the world and bring retribution for sin (Psalm 2:1-6).

2. To refine Israel and prepare her to receive her Messiah (Deuteronomy 4:30-31; Zechariah 13:8-9). *Remember Daniels 70 week prophecy.

So though the Tribulation is not going to be pretty, the Lord is giving people an opportunity to repent and turn to Him. We don't like to talk about the judgment and wrath of God, but it reminds us that God is slow to anger and He gives people plenty of opportunity to be spared from His judgment.

We saw the Rapture in Revelation 4 when John was called up to heaven. Now check out the scene in heaven:

- **Revelation 5:1–7**, *"And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. ² Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?" ³ And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it. ⁴ So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it. ⁵ But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals." ⁶ And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷ Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne."*

What was this scroll?

Some see the scroll as being the Old Testament, or the law of Moses. Some think it's the Book of Revelation or the next chapters to come.

But I feel that a likely and right view is that it's the title deed of the earth. This idea has real value to it. We know that following the tribulation, Jesus will reign in power on the earth.

- In Israel, land couldn't be sold to other people. It could never be sold permanently among each other. It was God's land and would remain in His possession. But He did entrust it to the various tribes and families of Israel. If someone had lost a piece of land by debt, he had the opportunity to buy it back when he was able. He would have to show that he had the authority to take the scroll, break its seals, and meet the requirements to buy it back.
- "Under Jewish law, if you yourself couldn't redeem your property, a relative or near of kin could step in and redeem it. This way the property remained in the family. If your relative did redeem it, he would be known as the *goel* (in

Hebrew) or “kinsman redeemer.” If you could redeem it, you would call for the elders of the city to meet with you before the city gates. You would bring out the scroll that had all the requirements upon it and you would break the seals. You’d open the scroll and show your ability to pay the price, proving that you had the right to redeem it.” (Chuck Smith)

Many bible scholars have taken this view that the scroll is the title deed to Planet Earth. He created it, Jesus redeemed it, and it is rightfully His.

But isn't the Lord in control now, and always has been? Well the answer is yes, but, He has allowed some things to take place. You see the title deed to earth was originally given to Adam. Adam was to have dominion over all things on the earth (Genesis 1:28). But Adam forfeited that right to the devil when he intentionally sinned. That caused a downward spiral of God's perfect creation. Sin brought decay into the world. Paul called Satan the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4), and Jesus called Satan the ruler of this world (John 12:31). Now of course God is still on the throne – always has been. But Satan has been given opportunity to run his course, and it all stems from man's disobedience.

Every kinsmen redeemer had to meet three qualifications: 1) he had to be related to the original owner; 2) he had to be able to fulfill the requirements for purchasing the property; 3) he had to be willing to buy back the property.

1. Jesus came as a relative of Adam, but more than that, He was fully God. Jesus had every right to be our kinsman redeemer.
2. The requirements to purchase this real-estate was death. Jesus came and died in our place and in so doing met the demands of Adam's disobedience and sin.
3. And He did this sacrificially and willingly. Jesus chose to come and redeem us.

So today we live in this period of time where we await the Lord to take hold of that which is rightfully His, that which He has already redeemed, and one day will lay claim to that redemption (Ephesians 1:13-14).

Now the tribulation is broken up into two parts primarily – two 3½ yr. periods. The first half we'll look at today, the second half we'll look at next week.

The first half really begins with the seals being opened which trigger various events happening on earth.

1. The Seal Judgments – Revelation 6:1-17

First Seal – the antichrist (white horse). Rev 6:2

Revelation 6:1–2, *"Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, "Come and see." ² And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer."*

The first horseman is riding a **white horse**, he has a **bow** and a **crown**. Now many have seen this first horseman as Jesus Christ.

I mean, he's wearing a crown, he's got a bow, and he's on a white horse - is that not evidence enough? But we cannot mistake this person with Jesus. Yes, Jesus does come back on a white horse (Revelation 19:11), but there are some differences that we need to note.

- First of all, Jesus is wearing a crown that is different than the rider in Ch. 6. The **crown** we see in 6:2 is a 'stephanos' crown. It was a crown of triumph, given to deserving people as a display of public honor. Athletes received this when competing in the games (it was temporary). Jesus Christ, however, comes back wearing a 'diadem' crown (Revelation 19:12). This is a crown of a sovereign reigning king.
- Secondly, Jesus will come back with the armies of heaven at His side, also on white horses. The rider in Ch. 6 is accompanied by some not so good company as we shall see.

This rider is the antichrist. Coming in appearance as a saviour, but being everything but.

Now we often wonder why people will accept the antichrist – especially Jews. Well, the antichrist is going to come on the scene and get a lot of things done that is going to win the approval of many. He's going to be a dynamic political leader that will settle a lot of chaos. There's a real void of such leaders today. One of the ways he's going to win the favour of many is by bringing in a peace treaty that will involve Israel. Now one of the things many believe will be a part of that peace treaty is the ability to rebuild the temple.

- When I've been in Israel, I've asked various Jews what they are looking for in their Messiah, or how will you know who their Messiah is? And the answer I most often get is, *'He will lead us in the rebuilding of our temple.'* I believe this is the role the antichrist will have.

But how can you possibly see a temple built in Jerusalem today when you have the Dome of the Rock (an Islamic shrine) on the top of the temple mount? To disturb that structure would incite a holy war like no other.

- Some have suggested that the temple could be built to the north of the Dome of the Rock. There is a gazebo on the temple mount called the Dome of the Spirits or Tablets. Some say it's where the Holy of holies sat. So the Temple could be built on the temple mount without disturbing the Dome of the Rock.
- Another suggestion that's been getting traction is that perhaps the temple was never on what we call the temple mount. It's possible that the temple was in the city of David. The temple mount then would have been the Fortress of Antonia.
- The city of David has the Gihon springs providing water necessary for ritual cleansing of the priests and cleaning after sacrifices.
- So, some possibilities to enable the Temple to be rebuilt. And items are ready and in place to see things begin to function quickly. People are ready and there is a heightened excitement for the rebuilt temple.

Second Seal - war (red horse). Rev 6:3-4

This peace of the antichrist doesn't last long. And notice, he doesn't need to start war, he just needed to ***take peace***.

Third Seal - famine (black horse). Rev 6:5-6

War always brings with it difficulty aside

Fourth Seal - death (pale horse). Rev 6:7-8

A fourth of the earth's population is devoured (6:8). We can't even begin to imagine what this would be like. And it's only the start.

Fifth Seal – cry of the martyrs. Rev 6:9-11

Sixth Seal – cataclysmic events. Rev 6:12-17

Chapter 7 brings us to our first parenthetical pause - a break in the seals to fill in some added information and activity taking place at that time.

And this is a wonderful chapter because coming from chapter 6 you'd think there's no hope. God is angry and He's just wiping people out. But that's not the case. Chapter 7 reveals that this is going to be a time of great revival. We see that there are 144,000 Jews that God seals to be His servants. It's believed these Jews are going to be spreading the gospel during this time. In every situation, God always has a remnant set aside to be witnesses of Him. This just shows the great grace of our God.

And this chapter shows that a great multitude is going to be saved during this time from every nation. Some say that the Tribulation is going to be a time where we see the greatest revival in history take place. That's the mercy of God!

The seventh seal then gives way to the first of the trumpet judgments (Rev 8:1-6).

Seventh Seal – silence in heaven. Rev 8:1-6

Why is there silence in heaven? Perhaps it's in preparation or awe of the coming judgments that will be coming upon the earth. Understand that we see the judgments increasing in intensity from the seals, to the trumpets and then to the bowl judgments.

- Interestingly this is what Jesus said when speaking of the tribulation in Matthew 24.
- The seals and trumpet judgments parallel the events of Matthew 24:4-14. Then in Matthew 24:15-24 we see the mid-point of the tribulation with the abomination of desolation. Matthew 24:25-29 takes us to the end of the tribulation where there will be huge cosmic signs in the heavens and then the coming of the Son of Man.

First Trumpet – hail and fire mingled with blood thrown to earth. Rev 8:7

This resulted in a third of the trees being destroyed and the grass being burned up.

- **Joel 2:30**, *“And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: Blood and fire and pillars of smoke.”*

Second Trumpet – oceans affected. Rev 8:8-9

A third of the oceans were turned to blood killing a third of all life in it. Can you imagine the stench of all this rotting seafood??

Third Trumpet – fresh water sources affected. Rev 8:10-11

A third of the rivers and fresh water sources were turned bitter and killed people

Fourth Trumpet – heavens affected. Rev 8:12

The sun, moon, and stars will be damaged so that they only give 2/3 of their light.

In Revelation 8:13 we see the angel flying in the midst of heaven shouting out:
“Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!”

- These first four trumpet judgments are very natural – they affect natural elements in the world and in the heavens. Whereas the next two judgments are much more supernatural and demonic in nature and directly hurt mankind..
- It's as if this angel in vs. 13 is saying, *You think you've seen some scary stuff? Jjust wait, you 'aint seen nothing yet!*

Fifth Trumpet – demonic forces from the bottomless pit. Rev 9:1-12

Sixth Trumpet – four angels released from the pit. Rev 9:13-19

So these angels are released to kill a third of mankind (9:15). They lead a 200 million person army.

- Is this a literal army of people or a demonic army? Scholars are divided on what exactly we're talking of here.
- For the first 1900 years, Bible students saw this number as being symbolic and spiritualized this army.
- When John wrote the book of Revelation there wasn't even 200 million people on the planet.
- But in the last 150 years we've seen an incredible explosion take place in the world's population.
- In 1965, China boasted it could field an army of 200 million [Time Mag. May 1, 1965 Vol. 85, No. 21) on page 35]

This is evidence to suggest a literal physical army.

Chapters 10-15 gives us a longer parenthetical break between the trumpet and bowl judgments to reveal a number of things that are going to be happening during the tribulation.

It's going to be a wild time! Thankfully we'll have a view from heaven. **(2787 wds)**