

GREAT TRIBULATION

Matt. 24:15-28

Immediately following the rapture, the seven years of tribulation begin to unfold here on earth. The seven years are divided into two equal parts of 3 1/2 years. In Mathew 24 the Lord referred to the first half as “the beginning of sorrows” and the second as “great tribulation.” In chapters 6-19 of the book of Revelation He described the entire period in great detail.

During the first half of the tribulation the beast, that man of sin or the antichrist will rise to power. At the mid-way point he will declare himself to be God. **2 Thessalonians 2:4**, “Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.” The Lord warns believing Jews that when they see this they are to “flee into the mountains...For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no nor ever shall be.”

Revelation chapter six and the sixth seal brought us to the middle of the tribulation period. Chapter seven describes the sealing of the 144,000 preachers and switches to a scene in heaven. Chapters eight and nine resume the narrative of the judgments and begin with the announcement that the seventh seal is opened.

Chapters ten through thirteen with exception of (11:15-19) are an interlude, which gives description of other events and the main characters of the tribulation period. Chapter fourteen looks ahead and anticipates the victory of the Lamb. Chapter fifteen prepares the final judgments that bring about the victory. Chapter sixteen describes the actual pouring out of those judgments. Chapters seventeen and eighteen describe the judgments on the false religious system that has plagued the earth since the tower of Babel. Chapter nineteen describes the return of Christ.

I. THE SEVENTH SEAL IS OPENED (Rev. 8:1-6).

This is the last seal and is obviously the most important development up to this point. In this seal are all the remaining judgments leading to Christ’s return to the earth, including the seven trumpets and the seven vials of the wrath of God. There is silence in heaven for half an hour. This is the calm just before the storm breaks. The Father's patience has run out, no one dares to speak. Seven angels are given seven trumpets. The angle, the Lord Jesus, makes intercession for the saints (v.3-4) then the storm breaks.

A. The first trumpet is hail and fire and blood (8:7).

- 1. One third of the trees are burned up.*
- 2. All of the green grass is burned up.*

B. The second trumpet is a mountain cast into the sea (8:8-9).

- 1. One third of the sea becomes blood.*
- 2. One third of the sea creatures die.*
- 3. One third of the ships are destroyed.*

C. The third trumpet is a great star from heaven (8:10-11).

- 1. It spoils one third of the fresh water.*
- 2. Many people die because of the foul water.*

D. The fourth trumpet affects the sun, moon and stars (8:12).

- 1. A third part of them is darkened.*
- 2. The days and nights are shortened (Matt. 24:22).*

The three remaining trumpets are woes to the earth (v.13).

E. The fifth trumpet opens the bottomless pit (Rev. 9:1-12).

- 1. The creatures that escape appear as locusts (v.3).*
- 2. The creatures are to hurt those who are not sealed (v.4-6).*
- 3. The creatures have a peculiar shape (v.7-10).*

4. The creatures have a king named Apollyon (destroyer - Satan) (v.11).

F. The sixth trumpet looses the four angels (9:13-19).

- 1. They have been prepared for this particular moment (v.15).*
- 2. They control a very large army (v.16-17).*
- 3. They kill a third part of the remaining people (v.18-19).*

The first woe falls on the land, but not on those sealed out of the twelve tribes of Israel. This is torment from Satan on the reprobate Jews. Next the horsemen are let loose on the western powers. This is a scathing infliction from the east on the corrupt and idolatrous western world.

G. The survivors refuse to repent (v.20-21).

Man's heart is hard. Even though he sees worldwide destruction and divine judgment from God and a clear testimony of God's power to deal swiftly with every human soul, he still refuses to repent.

II. THE SEVENTH TRUMPET IS BLOWN (Rev. 11:15-19).

The scene switches to Heaven. The 24 elders once again fall on their faces (v.16). The temple in Heaven is opened (v.19). The ark of the testament is seen.

A. The seven last plagues are prepared (15:1-8).

Seven angels have the seven last plagues. Martyred saints sing of the coming victory. The temple in heaven is opened (v.5). The angels receive the golden vials of God's wrath. God's glory and power fill the temple with smoke.

B. God's wrath is poured out (Rev. 16:1-21) (10:5-6).

The vials seem to cover a very brief period at the end of the tribulation just prior to the Christ's return. They have particular reference to unbelievers with special reference to the Beast and his followers.

- 1. The first vial is on the beast worshippers (v.2).*
- 2. The second vial is on the sea (v.3).*

The result of this judgment is spiritual death. The sea here is seen to become lifeless, "as the blood of a dead man."

- 3. The third vial is on the rivers and fountains (v.4-7).*

They lose their power to nourish or satisfy or sustain life. It seems to have reference to removing the possibility of finding life from those who followed the Beast.

- 4. The fourth vial is on the sun (v.8-9).*

Malachi 4:1, "For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch." **Isaiah 24:6**, "Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left." **Isaiah 30:26**, "Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the LORD bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound."

- 5. The fifth vial is on the seat of the beast (v.10-11).*

Darkness on the center of the Beast's power looks forward to the destruction of the empire that claims to be the kingdom of the Messiah.

- 6. The sixth vial is on the river Euphrates (v.12-16).*

This prepares the way for an invasion of kings from the east that they, with the Beast's armies, might come to judgment at Armageddon.

- 7. The seventh vial is poured out into the air (v.17-21).*

A great convulsion completely overthrows the ordered affairs of men as they experience the "fierceness of his wrath" This brings about the world's greatest earthquake and hailstorm.

All the details of these judgments are not immediately understood, but it is clear that the whole world is being brought to the bar of justice before Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords. There is no escape from divine judgment except for those who avail themselves of the grace of God by faith in Jesus Christ.