

Week 7

The Great Tribulation

Rev 6-12

Introduction

As we begin to enter the meat of the description of the Great Tribulation (GT) we need to make a few literary remarks.

While the material before us is apparently chronological (ordered by time) there are distinct passages where John's perspective turns from what happens on earth to what is happening in heaven. Schofield, in his notes on Revelation called these **parenthetical** visions. I am not sure that they are parenthetical as much as they are two visions interwoven into a single presentation, one revealing the outpouring of God's wrath and provision of repentance within that wrath and another playing out in heavenly realms that is NOT contemporary, but works toward contemporaneous manifestation in the conclusion of the book. So, for example, the song of the great multitude does not take place after the opening of the fifth seal, but begins during the opening of the first seal and continues through the seals in a different location.

A second literary matter, as we have said in a different venue, the theme of all of Scripture is God's **love** and **rescue** of man. The chapters we will look at tonight contain great wrath and destruction, yet in all of this we will find pictures of God's grace, mercy, and desire that men **repent**.

Another literary question – How **universal** are the wraths revealed? Some would confine the violence of the judgments to the known world or the Middle Eastern world. These folks are usually the same folks who confine the Genesis flood to a local catastrophe. It is for such reasons that one must consider what they affirm about other issues in scripture. The common non-pre-tribulational view of the extent of the judgments are global but also cumulative over the entire period of the gentiles. I believe the judgments are global and confined to the period of the GT

Finally, The structure of the judgments, those we will look at this evening and those for future studies, should be a matter of discussion. Two views exist for the manner in which the judgments are made.

1. The seals, trumpets, and bowls all happen **at the same time** and overlap. This view sees each judgment as separate and the intensity is in the quantity of judgment.
2. The seals, trumpets, and bowls **proceed** out of each other much as a section of a telescope extends from another section. In this view the seventh seal is the trumpets and the seventh trumpet is the seventh bowl. The severities of the judgments **increase** in intensity and thus provide the depth of judgment.

Seals

The judgments – Each of the seals broken involve the expression of God’s presence in the world. The first four are called out by the beasts before the throne, the fifth by the martyrs under the throne, and the sixth by nature – the primary expression of God’s presence.

Seal 1 – The **White Horse** – the “peace” of destruction, the rider of the white horse carries a bow but no arrow. He is the marker of a **seductive** peace that will leave the world deluded. Spoken of in Daniel “*He will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will destroy many and take his stand against the Prince of princes. Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power.*” Daniel 8:25 (NIV) So the first of the judgments is a seductive **leader** – AntiChrist – who deludes the world. That the world can be deluded is easily demonstrated in modern times and recent history. Since AntiChrist must always be ready to take control it is interesting to view certain historic matters that confirm the delusion of the white horse.

In 1985 Doug Henning, a world famous magician, teamed up with the Maharesh Mahish Yogi to build a theme park in Niagara Falls, Ontario to celebrate and inform the world about Eastern mysticism. During the news conference Henning told the press that a day is coming when a lot of people are going to disappear. At that point someone like the Yogi must be prepared to take over and lead the world from chaos.

Seal 2 – The **Red Horse** – The horror of **war**. The peace is short lived as men turn against one another and slay one another. The large sword of the rider depicts the severity of the destruction. God has often used man’s own greed, envy, and lack of trust to bring about his ends and has in biblical history caused armies to fight against themselves as in Judges 7 when Gideon drove out the Midianites; “*When the three hundred trumpets sounded, the LORD caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords. The army fled to Beth Shittah toward Zererah as far as the border of Abel Meholah near Tabbath.*” Judges 7:22 (NIV)

Consider how vile and devastating this judgment will be. WWI was considered the worst war of the 20th century. By most measurements an entire generation of men died in the five-year conflict. American losses in WWII numbered greater than 400,000 and German, Russian, and Japanese losses vastly exceed those numbers. Considering this is it no wonder that Jesus said, “**If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.**” Matthew 24:22 (NIV)

Seal 3 – The **Black Horse** – **Famine**. With the world employed at war the production of food becomes so secondary that famine occurs. The famine is restricted to **labor** intensive crops – wheat and barley – grapes and olives grow whether men are there or not. The measures of food are the standard consumption of a typical family in a day. Therefore, all of man’s resources are geared toward their simple **survival**. When we

consider the world wide death that precedes this we can subtly grasp the depth of devastation on the earth.

Famine is an issue during and after war. Not only is there the reduction of producers as farmers become warriors. There is also the reassignment of production as equipment and factories are re-g geared toward war. During WWII women did without silk hose, meat was rare, pennies were made of steel instead of copper, and automobile production ceased. While the U.N. may showcase Isaiah's promise of the Millennial Kingdom, "*He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore*". Isaiah 2:4 (NIV) such an action is the work of Messiah, not some world government or leader for Micah echoes *Isaiah making it plain that such a matter is reserved for God alone when he also says, "He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore."* Micah 4:3 (NIV) The reality of the GT is the words of Joel, "*Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears. Let the weakling say, 'I am strong!'*" Joel 3:10 (NIV)

Seal 4 – The **Pale Horse** – **Death**. Through the powers of the three previous destroyers and other pestilences, 25% of the world's population is eradicated. In mid 2003 the world's population was **6.314** billion using that raw number, and not factoring out the redeemed who will be raptured, the death toll of the the first four seals exceeds 1.5 billion (1.57 billion); a number greater than the populations of North America 323,000,000, Europe 727,000, South America – 358,000,000 and the Russia – 145,500,000 combined

Seal 5 -- Cry of the **Martyrs** – Displaced anger. The world and its system has always hated the Godly first hating **Noah**, then Israel, the church and finally those who stand for God in the final days. In response to God's wrath the people of the GT could repent, but instead and in keeping with the nature of man defined by Paul:

Romans 1:28-32 (NIV)

²⁸ Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; ³¹ they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³² Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

The people of the GT turn to **persecuting** those who have believed.

Seal 6 – Earthquake. The catastrophic **natural** disaster that follows sounds like something out of a Hollywood disaster movie. The earth shakes, stars fall (asteroid strikes?), and the sun and sky are blocked – probably by the dust and smoke of destruction.

Mans' Response

Remember, repentance or rescue is always in God's vision and the Day of Wrath is no exception. Man's response is revealed in Rev. 6:15-17

Revelation 6:15-17 (NIV)

¹⁵ Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. ¹⁶ They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!" ¹⁷ For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

The small and the great would rather die than accept God's judgment and repent.

The Witness

Paul proclaimed the gospel to the inhabitants of Lystra and revealed an interesting aspect of God's character when he told them; "Yet he [God] has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy." Acts 14:17 (NIV) If this has been God's act in the past then we must also look for God's testimony of himself in this time as well and clearly that testimony is the remnant of Israel.

Again, we are faced with defining the meaning of a number.

The 144,000 could be a literal number of Jewish **evangelists** proclaiming the Messiah in the world.

The 144,000 could be a symbol of a **completeness** of Israel's remnant or all (nearly all?) of Israel standing for God. In my opinion, the absence of the tribe of Dan in the itemized list in vv. 5-8 argues *for* the symbolic nature of the number since Hebrew lists that are representative often omit components while exhaustive Hebrew lists do not. (Examples of representative lists – Matthew 1, I Chronicles 1-3; Exhaustive lists - Numbers)

Meanwhile, backing Heaven...

The church is proclaiming God's glory

Their definition

1. They are a **Universal** group because they are "...*from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.*" Revelation 7:9 (NIV)
2. They are a **victorious** group because "...*They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands*" Revelation 7:9 (NIV)
3. They are a **redeemed** group because "*These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*" Revelation 7:14 (NIV)

Putting together all of the pieces above, one comes to the conclusion that this is the raptured church.

Their blessing

Taking the form of the blessings used by Isaac of Jacob and Jacob of the 12 sons the church is blessed in heaven specifically

Revelation 7:15-17 (NIV)

¹⁵ Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. ¹⁶ Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷ For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

1. Enjoying God's **presence** -
2. Enjoying God's **prosperity**
3. Enjoying God's **protection**
4. Enjoying God's **pasturing**
5. Enjoying God's **pardon**

Trumpets

The seventh seal is the seven trumpets.

The silence that echoes through heaven as the seal is opened creates the ominous understanding that these judgments **increase** in severity. If the world responds to the seals with, “*For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?*” Revelation 6:17 (NIV) how much more will they cry out when God’s next wrath is revealed. While the first judgments were for the rejection of God’s **presence** the trumpets are God’s wrath for the rejection of God’s **people** for they originate with the prayers of the saints and the proclamation of God’s name in worship. These

Trumpet 1 – the destruction of **earth’s** resources.

Revelation 8:7 (NIV)

⁷The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down upon the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.

The nature of the destructive hail is mysterious. The hail may be flaming and thus be some exceptionally unnatural natural phenomenon. Some have suggested that the trumpet plagues are all of man’s doing; the consequence of their poor stewardship. Therefore, the hail is the destructive consequence of air pollution magnified by God to its destructive height.

Trumpet 2 – The destruction of the **ocean’s** resources.

Revelation 8:8-9 (NIV)

⁸The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, ⁹a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

Asteroids have attracted much attention lately and have been credited with the beginning of the ice age and the end of the dinosaur. The blazing mountain could be an asteroid. Others argue this is a missile. The result is the fouling of oceanic resources so great that it destroys fleets of ships and the living creatures of the sea.

Trumpet 3 – The destruction of **fresh** water.

Revelation 8:10-11 (NIV)

¹⁰ *The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water—¹¹ the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter.*

Again, the asteroid argument is possible for the fouling of the fresh water of the world. However, the naming of the “star” may have other meaning. It is true that many asteroids carry designations of names and numbers.

My personal opinion is that the wraths of the trumpets originate with God himself or the legions of Hell. The seals were the turning of man upon himself and inflicting his own wounds but these are far more severe because man cannot blame himself or excuse himself for these judgments. Because of this I reject the pollution argument and am skeptical of the missile and other military arguments for the trumpets.

Trumpet 4 – The destruction of Light.

Revelation 8:12 (NIV)

¹² *The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night.*

The pollution argument points to the smoke and smog of our making removing the light. Possibly the result of the grievous woes that have already come upon the earth which have created fires, chemical exposures, and the removal of air purifiers in the form of destroyed greenery. The plague is still supernatural and overcomes man’s thinking and explanation.

Trumpets 5-7 The three Woes.

Revelation 8:13 (NIV)

¹³ *As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: “Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!”*

These trumpets are of such demonic origin and so destructive in nature that they demand special recognition. Their focus is the inhabitants of the earth and specifically those who remain stubborn against God.

Trumpet 5/Woe 1 – Locust from the Abyss.

Revelation 9:1-6 (NIV)

¹ The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss. ² When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. ³ And out of the smoke locusts came down upon the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth. ⁴ They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. ⁵ They were not given power to kill them, but only to torture them for five months. And the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when it strikes a man. ⁶ During those days men will seek death, but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them.

It was once suggested these were Cobra attack helicopters used in global war. Their **origin** is the abyss of Hell and their **mission** is the torture of men. Please note: they do not kill – only make men long for death. Significantly, the plague only strikes those who have **rejected** God.

Trumpet 6/Woe 2 – The conquering army.

Revelation 9:13-16 (NIV)

¹³ The sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the horns of the golden altar that is before God. ¹⁴ It said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.” ¹⁵ And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind. ¹⁶ The number of the mounted troops was two hundred million. I heard their number.

This one has often been equated with the army of Communist China. The evidence is pretty good within the text

The Chinese would need to march through the Euphrates valley to arrive in Israel

The Chinese are the only nation able to raise the 200 million man army

The Chinese just happen to use the colors red, blue and yellow in their national banners.

The horses described in the text sure do resemble tanks and biblically, God has used foreign armies to judge the world. Is this a Chinese army? I don't know.

Trumpet 7/Woe 3 – the 7 thunders and the 7 bowls.

More about these in our next session.

Man's Response

Revelation 9:20-21 (NIV)

²⁰The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshipping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk. ²¹Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.

The hardening of man's heart has begun. While the previous plagues brought man to a level of agony so severe they begged for death still they will not repent. They continue to deny God they continue to practice evil.

God's Witness

During this time the world will also have the testimony of the two witnesses.

Their witness lasts for 3 1/2 years.

Their witness stands for unchanging truth.

Their witness defies the world and silences its critics.

Their witness reflects God's symbols of authoritative speech

The identity of the witnesses

Their miraculous signs mirror those of Moses and Elijah

The two most significant men of the OT were Moses and Elijah

Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration Mt. 17:3

Moses death is unusual in that God buries him and his grave is reported as unknown. Jude affirms a spiritual battle over his body. Elijah never dies but is gathered to God in a chariot of fire.

Am I saying that the two witnesses are Moses and Elijah? Not really but...

Their death and resurrection

The two witnesses will be martyred.

Their murderer is the AntiChrist

They will die in Jerusalem

The remaining world will so blame God for their agony and rejoice in the evil that they give presents to one another

I've often wondered if this is more of a statement of time than of activity. There is part of my mind that has always wondered if the witnesses die at Christmas time and a twisted world that has lost sight of the truth of Christmas give presents to one another adding to the irony of the moment. John would not know of the current practice for celebrating Christ's birth and the world will surely have forgotten. It's just a thought...

They remain dead and in the city square for three and a half days – as many days as the years they have testified – and the world rejoices.

The witnesses are resurrected publicly and strike terror in the world

The witnesses are publicly translated to heaven

7,000 die in an earthquake

The remainder of the city believes.

Israel and Jerusalem are now at odds with the AntiChrist and the world order.