

13. The beginning of the Great Tribulation

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We cannot separate the word 'Tribulation' away from the Book of Revelation. After all, from chapter 6 to chapter 19 are about the Great Tribulation that would happen to the unbelieving people on the earth right after the rapture.

Many people are fascinated by what is going to happen during the Tribulation. Several Christian authors wrote books and novels about them. A couple of authors don't have to work for the rest of their lives, because the book series became so successful. Even though I told you guys that the Book of Revelation is to encourage and to give hope to the believers who were and are going through difficult times, the curiosity about the future couldn't be denied.

However, we must keep the right perspective about studying the Great Tribulation.

A. THE FIRST SEAL: THE CONQUEROR

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 scroll cannot be opened and read until all the seals have been broken. Whenever the seal is opened, the sentence of judgement appears to be executed.

As each seal was opened, one of the four living creatures summoned a rider on a horse. Actually, "Come and see" should read, "Come!" In other words, events take place on earth because of the sovereign direction of God in heaven.

The horse imagery is probably related to the vision described in Zechariah 1:7-17. Horses represent God's activity on earth, the forces He uses to accomplish His divine purposes.

Daniel 9:26-27 "And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; And the people of the prince who is to come Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, And till the end of the war desolations are determined. 27 Then he 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, Even until the consummation, which is determined, Is poured out on the desolate."

Daniel states that there is a "prince who is to come," who will make a covenant with Israel to protect her from her enemies. In other words, the future world dictator begins his career as a peacemaker! He will go from victory to victory and finally control the whole world. Notice that the rider has a bow without an arrow. That means he would use peaceful tactic to win people's hearts instead of wars.

We would expect the antichrist to resemble the Christ, because antichrist is satan's great imitation of the real Messiah! This great deceiver will come as a peaceful leader, solving the world's problems for a short time.

The word for crown in Revelation 6:2 is 'stephanos', which means "the victor's crown." The crown that Jesus Christ wears in chapter 19 is 'diadema', "the kingly crown".

B. THE SECOND SEAL: WARS ON EARTH

Revelation 6:3-4 When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come and see." 4 Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword.

Antichrist's conquest begins in peace, but soon he exchanges the empty bow for a sword. The color red here is associated with wars.

We live in the age of war and conflict. Since World War II, there have been more than 150 wars of one kind or another on the earth, and at any given time there may be some three dozen armed conflicts taking thousands of lives yearly. The nations of the world often spend more than \$1 trillion on military expenditures a year. With the stockpile of 60,000 thermo nuclear bombs that gives the human race the power to destroy our planet for 17 times over, mankind has armed himself to teeth. Some of this stockpile of nuclear bombs will be used during the Tribulation time.

Anyone who thinks there can be true political solutions to the world's problems is sadly mistaken. Politics is solely about gaining and maintaining their own power.

James 4:1-2 Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.

Truly, any man who thinks he can bring about peace politically, or any church that looks to the government for a solution to our country's problems will be disappointed. Because political power always brings war.

C. THE THIRD SEAL: SEVERE FAMINE

Revelation 6:5-6 When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come and see." So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. 6 And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine."

The color black is here connected with famine. Famine and war go together. A shortage of food will always drive up prices and force the government to ration what is available. A denarius was a standard day's wage for laborers. A "measure" of wheat was about two pints, sufficient for the daily needs of one person. Ordinarily, a person could buy 16 to 24 pints of wheat for a denarius, and much more of barley, which was the cheaper grain.

However, during the Tribulation, a man will have to work all day just to secure food for himself! There will be nothing for his family! At the same time, the rich will be enjoying plenty of oil and wine. No wonder antichrist will eventually be able to control the economy as he promises to feed the hungry people.

D. THE FOURTH SEAL: DEATH EVERYWHERE

Revelation 6:7-8 When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come and see." 8 So I looked, and behold, a

pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth.

The color pale means literally "yellowish green". It is the color of a dead body. This fourth judgement is inevitable consequence of the first three.

Note that the three elements God used to judge the earth are the same elements to bring the people of Israel to repentance during the OT time.

According to the U.S Census Bureau, at midyear 2002, the world population was 6.2 billion people and just over two people were being added each second. That means 74 million people were added in year 2002. Let's say we are reaching 6.4 billion people by the end of 2004. If the rapture happens at the beginning of next year and the tribulation begins, by the time the fourth seal is broken in heaven, there will be 1.6 billion people on earth would be dead. That is a lot of death all over. Can you imagine odor and sickness from all those dead bodies on the earth?

Power is given to the horseman, and given by God. Though all hell is breaking loose on the earth, God is very much in control. He still holds the scroll and opens the seals.

E. THE FIFTH SEAL: THE CRY OF THE MARTYRS

Revelation 6:9-11 When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. 10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" 11 Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.

So far we are seeing what is going to happen on the earth. Now all of sudden, the scene changes to heaven.

When the Old Testament priest presented an animal sacrifice, the animal's blood was poured out at the base of the Altar of the Burnt Offering of the Tabernacle. In Old Testament imagery, blood represents life. So, here in Revelation, the souls of the martyrs "under the altar" indicates that their lives were given sacrificially to the glory of God.

This is the only seal that does not bring disaster on the earth for now.

Before I explain about these martyrs under the altar in heaven, I have to clarify a few terms we are going to use throughout the study of this Book Revelation:

- The church - That is all the born-again Christians who have died before and those who will go up to heaven by the rapture. They are in heaven while the fifth seal is opened.
- The Tribulation saints who get killed by the antichrist - These are the people we are studying about now. These people missed the rapture because they didn't believe Jesus as the Lord and the Savior. But after the rapture, they accepted Him into their hearts.
- The Tribulation saints who will survive through this seven year period - They are going to keep their normal physical bodies like our present bodies and would populate this earth during the time of the Millennium.

These Tribulation saints were slain by the enemy because of their witness to the truth of God and the message of Jesus Christ. The forces of antichrist do not accept the truth, because satan wants them to be deceived and accept his lies.

Since their murderers are still alive on earth, these martyrs are apparently from the early part of the Tribulation. But they represent all who have laid down their lives for Jesus Christ and the cause of God's truth, and they are an encouragement to all today who may be called to follow them.

But is it "a Christian thing" for these martyred saints to pray for vengeance on their murderers? After all, both Jesus and Stephen prayed that God would forgive those who killed them. These martyred saints in heaven know that God will eventually judge sin and establish righteousness in the earth, but they do not know God's exact schedule. It is not personal revenge that they seek, but vindication of God's holiness and the establishment of God's justice.

Psalms 116:15 Precious in the sight of the Lord Is the death of His saints.

F. THE SIXTH SEAL: THE SKY IS FALLING

Revelation 6:12-17 I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. 13 And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. 14 Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. 15 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, 16 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! 17 For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

In the Bible, celestial disturbances are often connected with the coming of the Messiah. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel, Zephaniah and Jesus Himself all describe such things.

The martyrs cried, "Avenge us!" but the unbelievers on earth will cry, "Hide us!" The opening of the sixth seal will produce worldwide convulsions and catastrophes, including the first of three great earthquakes. All of nature will be affected: the sun, moon, and stars, as well as the heavens, the mountains, and the islands.

One wise Biblical scholar said that the day would come when the most expensive piece of real estate would be a cave in the mountain to hide from God.

The phrase "wrath of the Lamb" seems an oxymoron. You know 'Oxymoron,' like jumbo shrimp, tasty airline food and female drivers? "Wrath of the lion" would be more consistent. We are so accustomed to emphasizing the meekness and gentleness of Christ that we forget His holiness and justice. The same Christ who welcomed the children also drove the merchants from the temple. God's wrath is not like a child's temper tantrum or punishment dished out by an impatient parent. God's wrath is the evidence of His holy love for all that is right and His holy hatred for all that is evil. If anyone think that our God should not punish evil thing humans do, he is believing a wrong God.

Even though these people see the sky is falling down on them, they stubbornly refuse to submit to God's will. They would rather hide from God in fear like Adam and Eve after their sin than turn to Him in faith. They are proof that judgment by itself does not change the human heart. Not only will men seek to hide from God, but they will blaspheme Him as well.

Before we conclude, we must note the parallels that exist between Christ's prophetic words recorded in Matthew 24 and in Revelation 6:

Matthew 24

False Christs (v 4–5)

Wars (v 6)

Famines (v 7a)

Death (v 7b–8)

Martyrs (v 9)

Worldwide chaos (v 10–13)

Revelation 6

White horse rider: Antichrist (v 1–2)

Red horse: War (v 3–4)

Black horse: Famine (v 5–6)

Pale horse: Death (v 7–8)

Martyrs under the altar (v 9–11)

Worldwide chaos (v 12–17)

G. APPLICATIONS

1) There is only One who can bring the real peace. That is Jesus Christ.

Many people cling onto the power of the United Nations. I believe that the United Nations is nothing more than a platform for the antichrist. There is not a politician who can bring true peace around the world. If there is any, it would be nothing more than a temporal peace that will be broken at man's will quickly.

We need put our trust in our Lord and Savior Jesus who gives true peace.

John 14:27 Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

2) We must remember that no matter what happens on this earth or in our individual lives, God is in control and all the things happen to us are allowed by His providential will.

If we don't remember this important aspect it will be a great reason to be depressed and become suicidal. Remembering His sovereignty and His love for us would keep us from sleepless night, ulcer and nail biting.