

4. THE SEQUENCE OF GREAT TRIBULATION EVENTS

Preliminary Signs (Mt 24)

- Wars, famines, earthquakes
- Persecution, increase of evil, apostasy
- False prophets and false religions
- Gospel preached throughout the world

The Great Tribulation (Rev 6-18)

The first 3 ½ years

- The Lamb opens the first seal of the scroll of destiny in heaven (6:1), inaugurating the Great Tribulation period.
- The Antichrist begins his campaign of world domination (6:2, 13:1-4). Daniel says the 'little horn' comes up among the ten world leaders and uproots three of them (Dan 7:8)
- The Antichrist starts WW3, taking peace from the Earth and making people kill each other (6:3-4). The first four trumpets describe the effects of this war:

The first trumpet announces hail and fire mixed with blood being hurled down on earth, a description of modern land warfare. A third of the earth, trees, and vegetation is burnt up.

The second trumpet announces a blazing mountain being thrown into the sea, probably nuclear missiles, a description of naval warfare. A third of the sea turns to

blood, a third of sea creatures die, and a third of ships are destroyed.

The third trumpet announces a great star, blazing like a torch falling from the sky on rivers and springs, poisoning them through nuclear contamination so that many people die.

The fourth trumpet announces darkness resulting from the light of the sun, moon, and stars being reduced by a third. 'A third' may simply give a contrast with the total devastation that comes on the day of the Lord.

- The opening of the third seal reveals worldwide famine which results from the warfare (6:5-6)
- One-quarter of humanity perishes (2 billion people) as a result of war, famine, plague, and wild animals (6:7-8)
- God's people are sealed for their eternal security (7:1-8)
- The environment is ruined as a result of WW3 (8:7-12)

One-third of land and vegetation is burnt.

One-third of the sea is polluted.

One-third of rivers and springs are polluted.

One-third of light produced by sun, moon, and stars is reduced.

- The third temple is built in Jerusalem (Ezek 40:2-5, 2 Thess 2:4, Rev 11:2)

The last 3 ½ years

- Two powerful witnesses preach in Jerusalem for 42 months, at the end of which the Israeli remnant give glory to God (11:3-13).
- There is war in heaven and Satan and his demons are thrown down to earth (12:7-12). Satan has ten horns and seven crowns just like the beast, showing that the beast is satanically inspired.

- Satan seeks to destroy Israel, who flees to the wilderness (12:13-16).
- Antichrist rules the world for 3 ½ years (Rev 13:1-10). He blasphemes God and wages war against the saints and defeats them (12:17, 13:7).
- The False Prophet deceives the nations with miracles and enforces the worship of Antichrist (13:11-14). He sets up an image of the Antichrist in the temple, the abomination of desolation, and requires everyone to receive his mark (13:15-17).
- Victorious martyrs from all nations are seen in heaven awaiting Messiah's kingdom when Jesus returns (6:9-11, 7:9-17, 14:1-5, 15:2-4).
- Final warnings are given by different angels flying high up in the sky. The first one has the gospel and encourages everyone to fear God and repent because judgment day is imminent. The second warns that Babylon is about to be destroyed. The third warns people that any one who worships the Antichrist and receives his mark will be thrown into hell. It is not stated how the angels communicate their warnings, but it could be evangelists preaching on the internet.
- God's wrath is poured out on creation. Painful sores afflict unbelievers, the sea is destroyed, fresh water is polluted, sun's heat is intensified (16:1-9). Unbelievers are tortured for five months by a 'locust' army (9:1-11) that stings like scorpions and brings darkness and pain (16:10-11).
- Armageddon - Gog and Magog and allies invade Israel. A third of humanity (a further 2 billion) is killed (9:13-19, 14:17-20, 16:12-16).
- Jesus returns to judge the dead and begins his rule (11:15-18).
- Resurrection and rapture of the saints (14:14-16).

- Jesus sets foot on the Mount of Olives, and there is a great earthquake (Ezek 38:19-20, Zech 14:4-6).
- The wrath of God is poured out - worldwide earthquakes, cities of the nations collapse, mountains and islands disappear (6:12-14, 16:17-21). Sun and moon darkened (6:12, 8:12).
- The fall of Babylon, the worldwide network of commerce and entertainment (17:15-18, 18:1-24).
- Victory to Israel - Jesus, together with his saints, defeat the nations (19:11-18, 21, Zech 12:1-9), destroying those who destroy the earth (11:18).
- Antichrist and False Prophet are thrown into hell (19:19-20), Satan is imprisoned in the Abyss (20:1).
- Descent of New Jerusalem out of heaven to earth's atmosphere (21:2-4, 9-10).
- Marriage feast of the Lamb in the New Jerusalem (19:6-9, 21:9-10).
- Eternal state. The last word revealed is that the throne of God and Jesus will be in the city, his servants will serve him, see his face, and reign with him forever and ever (22:3-5).

The Great Tribulation Events

- **The Great Tribulation**

Revelation 6-18 describes events that will happen during the seven years of tribulation before Jesus the Messiah returns to earth to reign during the thousand years called the millennium. John sees a series of visions, and because of their complexity, they're not always in chronological order. The attempt here is to put these events into their correct order. Compare this with the overview of second-coming events below.

- **The apostasy**

In 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul declared emphatically that Jesus would not return until the rebellion occurs first, and the man of

lawlessness is revealed. The first sign will be a rejection of all divine order by the bulk of mankind, which will open the way for the man of lawlessness, the Antichrist, to become a world dictator. It will also affect the church. In 1 Timothy 4:1, Paul says that in later times some people will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Jesus prophesied the same thing in Matthew 24:10-12.

- **The Final World Empire**

The second event is described in 13:1-4 with the rise of the final world empire, which is called the beast, following the prophet Daniel's terminology of four world empires, and especially the final world empire. This beast, or animal, will devour the whole earth and be terrifying and extremely powerful. It will crush and devour its victims and trample underfoot what is left (Dan 7:19). It has ten horns and seven heads. The horns represent leaders who will reign simultaneously. The heads are seven hills, and as Rome was built on seven hills and was the empire of John's day, this final world empire is seen as a revived Roman empire, symbolically called Babylon, a coalition of world countries resulting from globalization. The empire will be satanically empowered, and all men will worship Satan and the empire he has established.

- **God's servants are sealed**

The Great Tribulation is so-called because it is a time of distress for everybody, the greatest distress this world has known since Noah's flood, but especially for God's people, Israel and the Church. The final world empire will be opposed to the God of the Bible and to all who follow him. In chapter seven, angels hold back destructive forces on Earth to prevent any destructive activity until the servants of God are sealed. The seal identifies them as belonging to God and, in some cases, protects them from physical harm. But there will be many martyrs, so the seal does not guarantee protection from death. The number of those sealed is given as 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel. This is interpreted as being a symbolic number representing all who belong to God.

- **The world is conquered by the beast**

The first four seals reveal four apocalyptic horsemen: destructive forces that wreak havoc worldwide. The first one represents conquest, the second warfare, the third famine, and the fourth death. No less than 25% of the world's population will be killed during this time as a result of warfare, resulting famines, and epidemics. The first four trumpets describe the same period as the first four seals, but they concentrate on the environmental result of the conquest. One-third of the land is burnt, possibly by weapons of modern warfare. One-third of sea creatures are killed, and one-third of ships are destroyed by naval battles and nuclear missiles. One-third of freshwater sources are polluted by radiation from nuclear warfare. One-third of the light of the sun and moon is obscured by the smoke of the warfare, resulting in frightening semi-darkness. This is all that is revealed to us about the first half of the seven-year tribulation period.

- **Satan is hurled down to earth**

The midpoint of the tribulation is marked by a very significant event in heaven. There is war in heaven (12:7) between Satan and Michael and their angelic armies, and Satan and his angels are defeated and lose their place there. He is hurled down, and the Earth and sea are warned that the devil has come down to them and he is filled with fury because he knows that his time is short (12:12). His first inclination is to destroy Israel, but God has prepared a place to protect them in the wilderness (12:14-16) for 3 1/2 years. Satan then pursues Christians.

- **The rise of the Antichrist and the False Prophet**

The Antichrist is described as a 'mouth' given to the beast, because of his arrogance and slander against God. He'll exercise authority for 42 months (13:5) and he'll make war against the saints and conquer them, empowered by Satan. The Antichrist is described as a 'little horn', but he manages to defeat three of the ten world leaders and take control as world dictator. The False Prophet exercises all the power of the

Antichrist on his behalf and deceives people with signs and miracles. He makes everyone worship the Antichrist and sets up an image of him in a rebuilt temple at Jerusalem, which he makes talk. This image was prophesied by Daniel and mentioned by Jesus, who warned those in Judea at that time to flee to the mountains. Worship Antichrist or die! The False Prophet will force everyone to take the mark of the beast, and without it, nobody can buy or sell anything.

- **The martyrs**

There will be many martyrs during this time, perhaps most Christians, because the choice will be between Jesus and Antichrist. At the opening of the fifth seal, the martyrs call out to God for vengeance. In chapter 20, they come to life, are resurrected, and reign with Christ. God's servants have been sealed, so their eternal salvation is guaranteed. There are several visions of martyrs in heaven waiting for the Lord's return (6:9-11, 7:9-17, 14:1-5, 15:1-4). They sing a new song and have God's name written on their foreheads. They wear white robes because they have been made righteous through the blood of Christ.

- **Final military manoeuvres**

Following the fifth trumpet, there is a detailed description of locusts that sting like scorpions. The plague is directed toward unbelievers to torment them for five months. These locusts are portrayed in the book of Joel as destructive agents. They may be crowd-controlling tanks. After the sixth trumpet, armies of 200 million from the East are released at the Euphrates and 33% of the world's population are killed by the warfare that follows. They are killed by plagues of fire, smoke, and sulfur that issue from the horses' mouths – presumably gunfire from tanks, shells from mortars, missiles, and bombs. The sixth bowl is poured out on the Euphrates and refers to the same event. Evil spirits go forth from Satan, the Antichrist, and the False Prophet to gather armies from the whole world to descend on Israel for the battle of Armageddon. The final world empire is unstable, a mixture of iron and clay, a coalition

of nations from all over the world. The coalition will unravel, the nations will fight each other, and Jerusalem will be the unfortunate center of attention.

- **Antichrist and Jerusalem**

Daniel 9:27 tells us the Antichrist will make a covenant with many for seven years, but in the middle of the ‘week’, he will put an end to sacrifice and offering, and on a wing of the temple, he will set up an abomination that causes desolation. Jesus said that when the Jews in Judea see this abomination standing in the holy place, they should flee to the mountains. Chapter 11 tells us about two witnesses who preach in Jerusalem for 3 1/2 years during the time that Gentiles trample Jerusalem. It’ll be in the Antichrist’s hands, but the two witnesses are powerful and will continue their witness during this time. Antichrist eventually kills them, but they come back to life after 3 1/2 days and ascend to heaven. There is a great earthquake, 7,000 die in the city, and the survivors in Jerusalem give glory to God.

- **God’s wrath poured out on an unbelieving world**

After the first bowl, sores break out on people who bear the beast’s mark. After the second bowl, everything in the sea dies. After the third bowl, all fresh water turns to blood, and those who shed the blood of saints are left with blood to drink. After the fourth bowl, the sun burns people. They refuse to repent and curse God. The fifth angel pours out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom is thrown into darkness, resulting in anguish and pain. It is at this time that the beast treats the prostitute (the great city) hatefully and destroys her. Antichrist and his confederacy of kings deliberately destroy the financial and commercial system of the world kingdom.

Overview of second-coming events

The Battle of Armageddon

(Zech 12:3, 14:2-3, Rev 16:16)

The biggest earthquake ever
(Ezek 38:19-20, Rev 6:12, 11:13, 16:18)

The Messiah returns
(Mt 24:30-31, 1 Thess 4:16-17, Rev 19:11-16)

The resurrection of the righteous
(1 Thess 4:16, Rev 20:4)

The living saints are raptured
(1 Thess 4:17, Rev 14:14-16)

The descent of New Jerusalem
(Rev 21:2 – 22:5)

Jesus descends to the Mount of Olives
(Zech 14:4, Acts 1:11-12)

The marriage feast of the Lamb (Rev 19:6-9)

Israel is empowered, and the surrounding armies are destroyed.
(Zech 12:2-9, Rev 19:11-16)

The Antichrist and False Prophet are cast into hell
(2 Thess 2:8, Rev 19:19-20)