



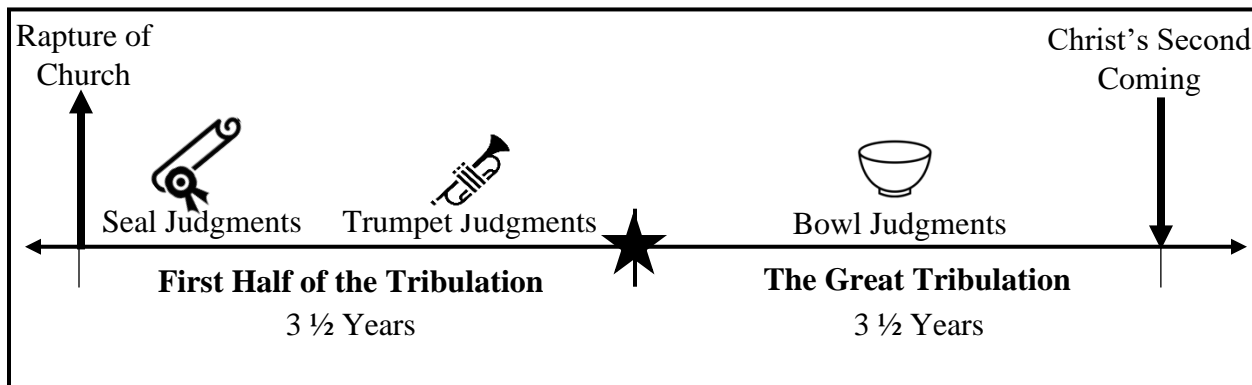
Eschatology – A Study of the End Times

Lesson 17: The Seven Year Tribulation Period, Part 4

Introduction

Last time we began looking at the midpoint of the tribulation (see star below) and the events that will take place. With the rise of the antichrist and the false prophet, the world is going to be under a great deception. The rule of these two wicked men will bring about a time on earth that is so bad that Jesus said, “For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will” (Matt. 24:21). However, before that great tribulation comes, there are a few more things that must take place. In this lesson we will look at what will take place at the midpoint, right before the great tribulation.

Timeline of Tribulation Judgments



The Jewish Remnant Flees

In Revelation 12, John saw a sign appear in heaven of a woman who was with child crying out because she was in labor. John saw another sign appear in heaven of a great red dragon. The dragon stood before the woman so that when she gave birth, he could devour her child. She did give birth to her son, but her son was protected, being caught up to God and His throne. The woman then fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared for her by God so that she would be taken care of for 1,260 days (Rev. 12:1–6)

The vision that John saw is best understood when we identify the symbolism of the woman, the dragon, and the son who become main characters in the great tribulation. The woman is to be understood as Israel, the dragon is Satan, and the son is Jesus, the Messiah. Throughout history, Satan has been seeking to destroy Israel, the line through which the Messiah (the son) would come. Satan also tried to destroy the Messiah before He could do His saving work (Matt. 2:16). He was unsuccessful as the Messiah was born (Luke 2:7), accomplished His redeeming work (1 Tim. 2:5–6), and then ascended to heaven (Acts 1:9).

However, since Satan was unsuccessful at destroying the Messiah, his prime target has become Israel (the woman). While Satan has been seeking to destroy Israel throughout the history of the Old Testament, his attempt to destroy Israel will ramp up at the midpoint of the tribulation as the antichrist rises to power and breaks his covenant with Israel. Satan will attempt to destroy Israel, but they will flee to the wilderness where God will hide His people and protect them during the last three and a half years (Rev. 12:14).

The Mark of the Beast

In Revelation 13, we read that the antichrist and the false prophet will rule the entire world so that no one can buy or sell without the mark of the beast. John tells us in Revelation 13:16, “And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, and *he provides* that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, *either* the name of the beast or the number of his name.”

The false prophet will seek to force the whole world to worship the antichrist. Everyone will have to make a choice to either live by receiving the mark and worshiping the antichrist or starve with no ability to buy or sell. Many will take the mark and will give their worship to the beast so that they can continue to live.

From God’s perspective, receiving the mark of the beast is serious business. Revelation 14:9 tells us, “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.”

Revelation 16:2 also tells us that those who receive the mark of the beast will have harmful and painful sores come upon them for taking the mark and worshiping the antichrist. Anyone who expresses loyalty to the antichrist and his cause will suffer the wrath of God.

Nevertheless, there will be those during this time who do not receive the mark of the beast or worship the antichrist. Revelation 20:4 says, “And I *saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.”

What is the mark of the beast? Revelation 13:18 says, “Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six.” Bible interpreters have offered many suggestions as to the meaning of 666, but no one is certain. A popular theory is that the number 7 is the number of perfection, and the number 777 would reflect the perfect Trinity. Therefore, perhaps 666 points to a being who aspires to perfect deity but never attains it. Others have speculated that the number refers to a certain person by making mathematical renderings of the letters in these person’s names.

The church father Irenaeus cautioned against speculating about the identity of the person associated with the number 666 until that person arrives on scene. Although we don’t know exactly what this number means as to the identity of the person associated with it, the people who are living during the tribulation period will understand what this means. This is why John says, “Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast.” Those alive during the tribulation will understand what this number means, and the identity of the person associated with it.

Some have speculated that the mark of the beast will be a computer chip placed in the skin where people will be able to buy and sell in a cashless society. While there may be some technological advancements associated with the mark, the mark will not be placed under the skin. John says in Revelation 13:16 that people will be “given a mark *on* their right hand or *on* their forehead” (italics added). The mark will be a visible sign that will identify allegiance to the antichrist. Therefore, those who do not receive the mark will be easily identifiable as they will make a public statement by rejecting the mark and giving their allegiance to Christ.

The Lamb and the 144,000 on Mount Zion

Revelation 14:1–5 serves as a passage of hope in the midst of a terrible turn of events that happen in chapter 13. With the rise of the antichrist and the false prophet, the worship of and the mark of the beast, John is given a vision of the future where Christ will be triumphant over all. In verse 1, John is given a vision of the Lamb, Jesus Christ, standing on Mount Zion, accompanied by 144,000 people who also have a mark on their forehead, only this mark is the mark of God. John tells us that the 144,000 will have “His name [the Lamb’s] and the name of His Father written on their foreheads.” This will be a visual sign to all that these people belong to God.

Because the Lamb is standing on Mount Zion, this vision takes place after the great tribulation where the 144,000 have been kept safe through the entire tribulation period. Mount Zion is interpreted by some as being heaven, but this cannot be. If Mount Zion was heaven, then that means the 144,000 died and are in heaven and the mark of God on their forehead would be rendered meaningless. Mount Zion, therefore, is a physical place on earth, often another name for Jerusalem, where the 144,000 will be worshipping the Lamb.

John hears a voice which sounds like harpists playing on their harps coming from heaven. When Christ returns to Mount Zion in triumph to establish His earthly kingdom, heaven will break out in praise and the 144,000 will join them. The song that they sing cannot be learned from the unregenerate because they do not praise God. However, the 144,000 will learn the song and will

sing out in praise to God for the triumph of the Lamb and His protection of them through the terrible time of the tribulation.

These 144,000 will be different and will stand out from the great sin upon the earth during this time. They are described as “the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste” (Rev. 14:4). This does not mean they won’t be married, but it means they will be sexually pure, unlike the corrupt world around them. They will also be known as loyal followers of Christ (Rev. 14:4), speakers of truth, and will be blameless (Rev. 14:5). This does not mean they will be sinless, but they will be sanctified and above reproach. Even in the midst of this terrible time in history, God will save His people who will sing out His praises.

The Announcements Uttered from Heaven

Revelation 14:6–20 serves as a link between the events that take place midway through the tribulation and the events that will take place in the second half of the tribulation period (the great tribulation). In this passage, there are six key revelations that are given from heaven.

The first revelation (Rev. 14:6–7) is the gospel message from an angel. This gospel message will be preached “to every nation and tribe and tongue and people” (Rev. 14:6). In the midst of people worshiping the beast and his image, this angel will command the world to “worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters” (Rev. 14:7). He will also warn the people of the judgment that is to come from the God that they must fear and worship.

The second revelation (Rev. 14:8) is given by an angel concerning the fall of Babylon the Great. Instead of preaching good news, this angel announces the bad news of judgment. Babylon here could refer to a rebuilt city of Babylon or to the antichrist’s worldwide political, economic, and religious empire. It is most likely that latter. Babylon has always symbolized evil and rebellion against God. This angel’s announcement is prophetic of what is to come upon the antichrist’s worldwide system.

The third revelation (Rev. 14:9–11) is given by an angel as a warning to those who are living on the earth at this time. He will announce with a loud voice the damnation of all those who worship the beast and take his mark. Those who do this will receive God’s eschatological wrath and be tormented with ceaseless infliction and unbearable pain. However, in the midst of this warning, God gives John comfort with that fact that the saints will be preserved by God and will not undergo God’s wrath (Rev. 14:12).

The fourth revelation (Rev. 14:13) is most likely not given by an angel, but by God Himself. John hears a voice from heaven commanding him to write. What John is told to write down is a blessing that is given to all those martyrs who die throughout the rest of the tribulation period.

The fifth revelation (Rev. 14:14–16) is given by an angel who comes out of the heavenly temple pronouncing the execution of judgment. The three angels before in verses 6, 8, and 9 pronounced judgment that was coming in the future; this angel brings forth the command to execute that judgment. The angel announces to the one who was sitting on the white cloud that it is time to put in his sickle and reap his grain harvest. This one sitting on the cloud is none other than Jesus Christ. The Father sends this message by the angel to the Son of Man that it is time for Him to

move in judgment. God's anger has reached its limit, and His wrath is poured out. The details of the fulfillment of this judgment will be seen later on in Revelation 16.

The sixth revelation (Rev. 14:17–20) is given by an angel that speaks of a grape harvest. While the fifth revelation was of a grain harvest, this one is of a grape harvest. This grape harvest does not speak of the bowl judgments to come, but of the judgment to come at the battle of Armageddon. The reaper in this harvest is not the Son of Man, like in the grain harvest, but the angel. The battle of Armageddon will take place “outside the city” (Rev. 14:20) meaning outside of Jerusalem in the Plain of Esdraelon near Mount Megiddo (Rev. 16:16). This battle will be very bloody as millions of people will gather together to fight against Christ. This battle will be more of a slaughter than a battle as “blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses’ bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles” (Reve. 14:20). Those who refuse to repent during the tribulation period will endure God’s wrath and realize that “It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31).

Application

1. Praise God for His comfort and protection during difficult times. Just as God will protect Israel, He promises to protect all who belong to Him.
2. Praise God for His promises. God made a promise to Abraham a long time ago. We see His faithfulness to keep His promises all the way through the tribulation period.
3. Praise God for the assurance of our salvation. Just as the 144,000 will have the mark of God on them ensuring their salvation, we can be sure of our salvation because of what Christ has done for us.