

# Revelation Six: A Preface

## A Reminder of Basic Principles

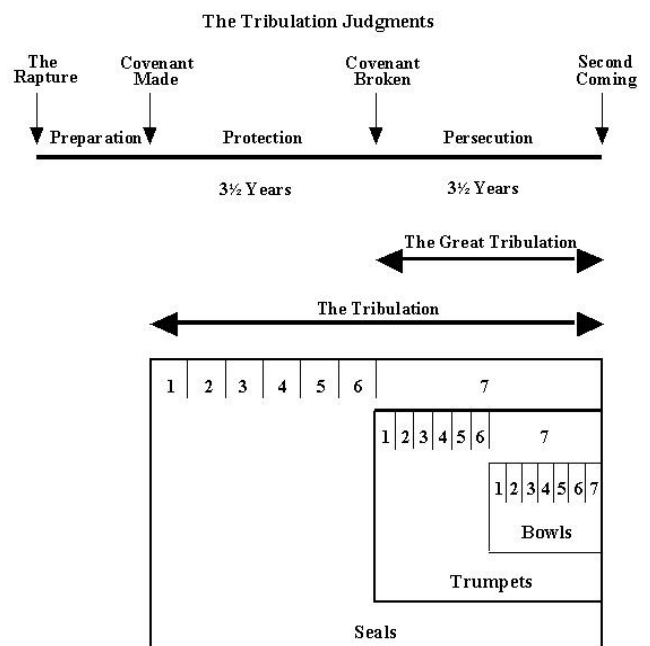
- Revelation 6 describes the commencement of the seven-year Tribulation period on earth. The Lamb has taken the scroll from the right hand of Him who sits on the throne (5.7) – the great reclamation project of planet Earth has begun. But before Christ can reign on earth, the kingdom of Satan must be demolished. The Lamb looses the seven seals to *unleash* divine judgment, *claim* His inheritance and *unroll* God's programme for kingdom blessing.
- The church will not be on earth to experience the awful terrors of the Tribulation. This promise has already been made to the church at Philadelphia (3.10). In addition, this section of Revelation concerns "things which must be hereafter" (4.1), that is, *after* the church age. John has been called up to heaven by the trumpet-like voice of the Lord Jesus – a plain picture of the rapture (1 Thessalonians 4.16). The church is not mentioned from Revelation 4-18. She only reappears under the figure of the "wife" of the Lamb just prior to the coming of Christ to earth (19.7).
- Jim Allen notes, "*Israel as a national entity is taken up again as the testimony for God on earth (7.1-8); the distinction between Jew and Gentile, no longer operative throughout the church age, is reestablished and the characteristic word for saved ones is 'saints' rather than 'believers'. The name used for deity is no longer 'God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' but 'God of the earth' (11.4), 'Lord God Almighty' (15.3), 'God of heaven' (16.11), terms reminiscent of OT days.*"
- Notice the alternating pattern of scenes in heaven and scenes on earth. Revelation began with a vision of Christ in *heaven* (1). Then the Lord spoke to seven churches on *earth* (2-3). Next, John was taken, in spirit, into *heaven* to glimpse the throne room of God (4-5). Now, the awful judgments of the seals break on *earth* (6). It is evident that what happens on earth is not haphazard – these events have already been planned in heaven. God is in control.

## The Revelation of Daniel's Prophecy

- The Tribulation is the last remaining unfulfilled 'week' (seven years) of Daniel's prophecy (9.27).
- The 'week' (or 'period of seven') clearly divides into two periods of 3.5 years, also referred to as 42 months (Revelation 11.2; 13.5) or 1,260 days (11.3; 12.6). The first *half* of the week (first 3.5 years) is called "the beginning of sorrows" (Matthew 24.8). The second half is called "great tribulation". *Matthew 24.21: "Then shall be great tribulation [megas thlipsis, pressure or distress] such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be."*
- Other general names for the Tribulation period include: Day of Vengeance (Isaiah); Day of Destruction (Zephaniah); Day of Darkness (Joel) or *Wrath to Come* (1 Thessalonians 1.10). The Tribulation will be limited to **seven** years or "no flesh [should] be saved" (Mark 13.20). Jeremiah says, "*That day is great, there is none like it!*" (30.7).

## The Reasons for the Tribulation

- Divine **government**. The world has rejected Christ and must bear the consequences. *Isaiah 13.9: "Behold, the day of Jehovah comes... with wrath and fierce anger; to make the land a desolation, and to destroy the sinners thereof out of it."*
- Divine **glory**. Pharaoh once asked, "*Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice?*" (Exodus 5.2). During the Tribulation, there will be a growing and fearful realisation of the existence and wrath of God (Revelation 6.16; 16.9).
- Divine **grace**. During the Tribulation, Israel will witness to the nations. (Matthew 24.14). The result will be "a great [saved] multitude, which no man could number, of all nations" (Revelation 7.9).
- As for Israel, a third part of the nation will be brought through the Tribulation. They will be refined as silver and tried as gold. Ultimately, a faithful remnant "*shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God.*" See Zechariah 13.9.



## The Relationship of the Seals, Trumpets & Vials

- There will be *three* cycles of seven judgments that cover the whole Tribulation period culminating in Revelation 19 with the Second Coming of Christ. These judgments begin with the *seals*, followed successively by *trumpets* and *vials*.
- John Walvoord says, "*The six seals seem to unfold successively in a chronological pattern. Out of the seventh seal will come another series of seven trumpets and out of the seventh trumpet will come another series of seven vials or bowls*"

of the wrath of God... [therefore] the seven seals comprehend the whole, as all the trumpets and all the vials are comprehended in the seventh seal.”

- That the judgments are *successive* (or telescopic) and *chronological* is suggested by a range of evidence. **1.** The use of *ordinal* numbers, i.e. first, second etc. suggests a sequence. **2.** The seven vial judgments are called the “seven last plagues” because they complete the judgment of God (15.1). **3.** The judgments increase dramatically in severity.
- The seal judgments unfold during the first 3.5 years of the Tribulation – the “beginning of sorrows”. This is evident from the very close parallel with the words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 24 (see table). The vials are the “last plagues” at the end of the Tribulation. The trumpets seem to cover the time in between.
- The sixth seal may mark the midpoint of the Tribulation, with the first trumpet sounding the commencement of the Great Tribulation. This is suggested by a company of martyrs under the fifth seal “*who are told of another company to join them in a second period of intense persecution. This obviously anticipates the intensification of persecution (Matthew 24.9-13) in the second half of the week. After the ‘abomination of desolation’ has been set up in the temple the Lord clearly envisages a second company to die in testimony for Him (24.15-23).*”
- The sixth seal seems to be the beginning of *seismic* (on earth) and *cosmic* (in heaven) disturbances which are continued and intensified under the sixth trumpet. The full climax is reached in the seventh vial just before Christ appears (6.12; 11.13; 16.18). The seals, trumpets and bowls therefore have the same *terminus* in time.
- Each series of judgment is carefully designed and has a distinct purpose:
  - The **seals** are opened by the *Lamb*. These judgments are because men have rejected Christ. They are not great visitations from heaven, but God allowing men to reap the consequences of their own actions. War, famine and death have been common throughout history but are now seen in more widespread and intense form.
  - The **trumpets** are loud, public judgments. Trumpets are blown by *angels* for spirit beings will release (fallen) spirit beings (cf. 9.1-5). The trumpet judgments are because men have sided with the devil. They have worshipped him, and thus God gives them what they desire – mass demonic activity.
  - The **vials** reveal the “wrath of God” (15.7; 16.1) and are poured out (quickly) because the world has blasphemed Him (16.9, 11). Administered by angels, God is declaring war on the kingdom of the Beast (16.10).
- Both the trumpets and the bowls clearly echo the plagues of Egypt. God’s deliverance and redemption of His people is something He has done before, on a smaller scale, and will now accomplish again. The plagues of Egypt were in *three* groups of *three* (nine in total), followed by a *divine visitation* (the Passover). So the judgments of the tribulation will be in *three* groups of *seven* (21 in total) followed by a *divine visitation* – the return of Christ Himself.

### The Resemblance to Zechariah & Matthew 24

- Zechariah 1.8-17 and 6.1-8 describe two of Zechariah’s night visions. Both describe horses in a variety of colours reminiscent of Revelation 6. They are not, however, describing the same events. The horses of Zechariah 1 are sent out to patrol the earth and report to God on the activities of the nations. In Zechariah 6, the horses draw war chariots and represent God’s judgment of the world powers, such as Babylon, that had and would oppress His people Israel.
- Matthew 24-25 is the prophetic discourse of the Lord Jesus on Mount Olivet. In 24.4-14, He describes the first 3.5 years of the tribulation in language which bears remarkable similarities to that of Revelation 6.

Matthew 24		Revelation 6	
<b>v.5</b>	False Christs	<b>First Seal</b> (v.2)	Rider on a <i>white</i> horse conquering by creating a deceitful false peace
<b>vv.6-7</b>	Wars and rumours of wars Nation shall rise against nation	<b>Second Seal</b> (vv.3-4)	Rider on a <i>red</i> horse taking peace from the earth
<b>v.7</b>	Famines	<b>Third Seal</b> (vv.5-6)	Rider on a <i>black</i> horse with a pair of balances in his hand – famine
<b>v.7</b>	Pestilence (plagues) Earthquakes	<b>Fourth Seal</b> (vv.7-8)	Rider called death on a <i>pale</i> (green) horse – using warfare, famine and wild beasts. Having authority over 25% of the earth
<b>vv.9-10</b>	Persecution	<b>Fifth Seal</b> (vv.9-11)	The souls of those violently slain because of their testimony to the word of God
<b>v.7</b> <b>v.29</b>	Earthquakes Signs in sun, moon and stars	<b>Sixth Seal</b> (vv.12-17)	Huge earthquake with signs in sun, moon and stars