

Lesson 48: The Tribulation of Israel Begins

Previously...

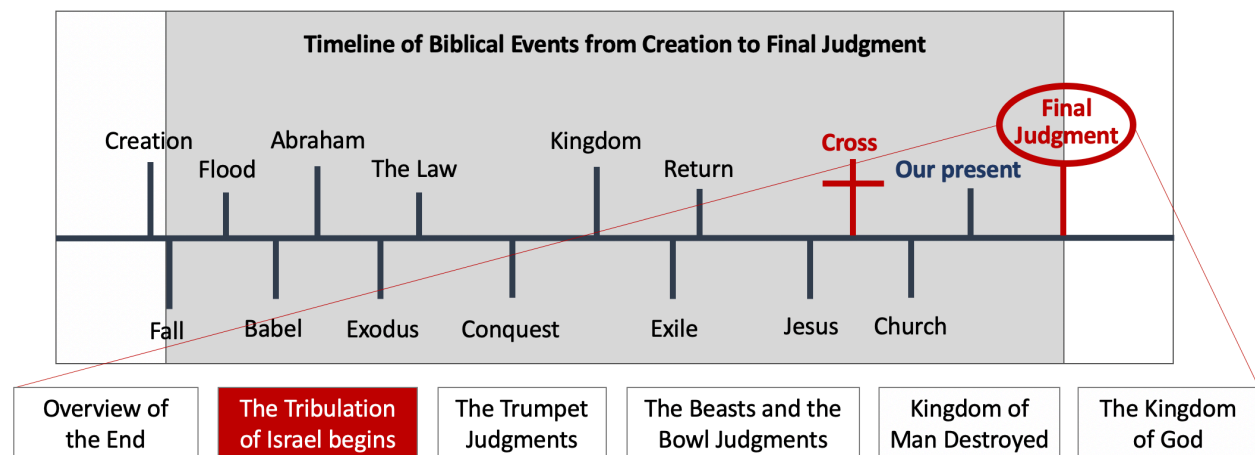
While John was exiled on the island of Patmos, the Lord Jesus appeared to him.

First, Jesus told him to write down His message to seven churches. This was His evaluation of how each of these churches were doing.



After that, Jesus revealed the future to John and told him to write it down.

What John saw and heard was recorded as the book of Revelation.



John in God's Throne Room in Heaven

After writing all seven letters, God brings John to His throne room in heaven.

Revelation 4:1–3

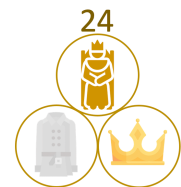
¹ Then as I looked, I saw a door standing open in heaven, and the same voice I had heard before spoke to me like a trumpet blast. The voice said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must happen after this." ² And instantly I was in the Spirit, and I saw a throne in heaven and someone sitting on it. ³ The one sitting on the throne was as brilliant as gemstones—like jasper and carnelian. And the glow of an emerald circled his throne like a rainbow.

God is not alone in His throne room. Others are there too.

1. The 24 Elders

Revelation 4:4

Twenty-four thrones surrounded him, and twenty-four elders sat on them. They were all clothed in white and had gold crowns on their heads.



Who are these elders? Possibly, they are humans representing the already raptured church of Christ. Also, it would appear that the church has already been judged and rewarded at the Bema (2 Corinthians 5:9–10).

Why do we think so? This is because they are wearing white clothes, crowns and are seated on thrones. When Jesus was talking to the seven churches, this was the promise He made to the churches about what would happen to faithful, church-age believers.

Revelation 3:21 (throne)

Those who are victorious will sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat with my Father on his throne.



Revelation 3:5 (white clothes)

All who are victorious will be clothed in white. I will never erase their names from the Book of Life, but I will announce before my Father and his angels that they are mine.



Revelation 2:10 (crown)

Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. The devil will throw some of you into prison to test you. You will suffer for ten days. But if you remain faithful even when facing death, I will give you the crown of life.



But why are there 24 of them? We're not sure. Perhaps this 24 represent the full number of the church. For example, in the Old Testament, the priests were divided into 24 groups who took turns performing temple duties. These 24 groups represented all the people (see 1 Chronicles 24). So maybe in a similar way, the 24 elders represent the whole church.

Note: Verses in blue indicate the study moving ahead verse by verse through Revelation.

2. The Sevenfold Spirit of God

John also sees God the Holy Spirit at the throne of Yahweh.

Revelation 4:5

From the throne came flashes of lightning and the rumble of thunder. And in front of the throne were seven torches with burning flames. This is the sevenfold Spirit of God.



In the Bible, the number seven often represents God's completeness. So here we see the completeness and fullness of the Holy Spirit.

3. The Four Living Creatures

There are also four living creatures around God's throne.

Revelation 4:6–8

⁶ In front of the throne was a shiny sea of glass, sparkling like crystal. In the center and around the throne were four living beings, each covered with eyes, front and back.



⁷ The first of these living beings was like a lion; the second was like an ox; the third had a human face; and the fourth was like an eagle in flight. ⁸ Each of these living beings had six wings, and their wings were covered all over with eyes, inside and out. Day after day and night after night they keep on saying,



Lion



Human



Ox



Eagle

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty—
the one who always was, who is, and who is still to come.”

These creatures are most likely cherubim or spirit beings of some kind. Cherubim are a special type of angel whose job is to declare and guard the glory of God. Perhaps the four creatures together show all of God's creation worshipping Him.



John sees the living creatures and the 24 elders all worshipping Yahweh, the Creator-God of the universe!

Revelation 4:9–11

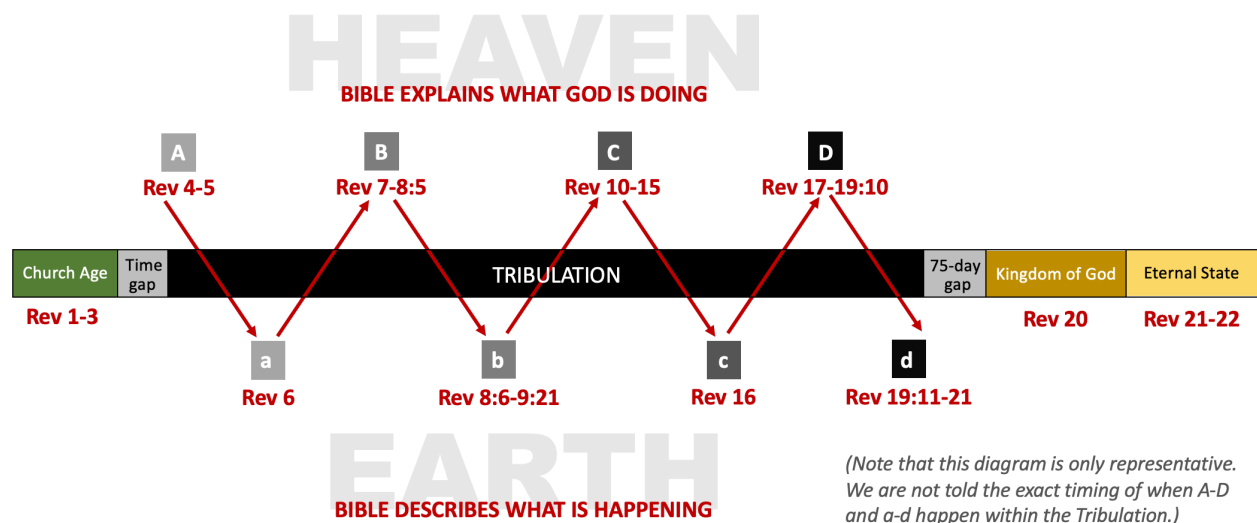
⁹ Whenever the living beings give glory and honor and thanks to the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever), ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders fall down and worship the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever). And they lay their crowns before the throne and say,

¹¹ “You are worthy, O Lord our God,
to receive glory and honor and power.
For you created all things,
and they exist because you created what you pleased.”

After this, God gives John a “behind-the-scenes” view of what He is doing. But before we learn what John sees, it is important for us to understand two main points about how God structured the Tribulation part of the book of Revelation.

“Explain and Show”

- God first explains what He is planning and what is happening in heaven (see A–D in the diagram below).
- Then we see how God’s decisions in heaven affect what is happening on earth (see a–d in the diagram).



By doing this, God wants John to clearly understand that He is the One in total control of everything that is happening both in heaven and on earth at these end times. He is absolutely sovereign. So everything that is happening on earth is actually controlled by Him from heaven.

“Rewind and Show”

Jesus actually explains the Tribulation events several times. Each time, He reveals what’s happening from a different perspective.



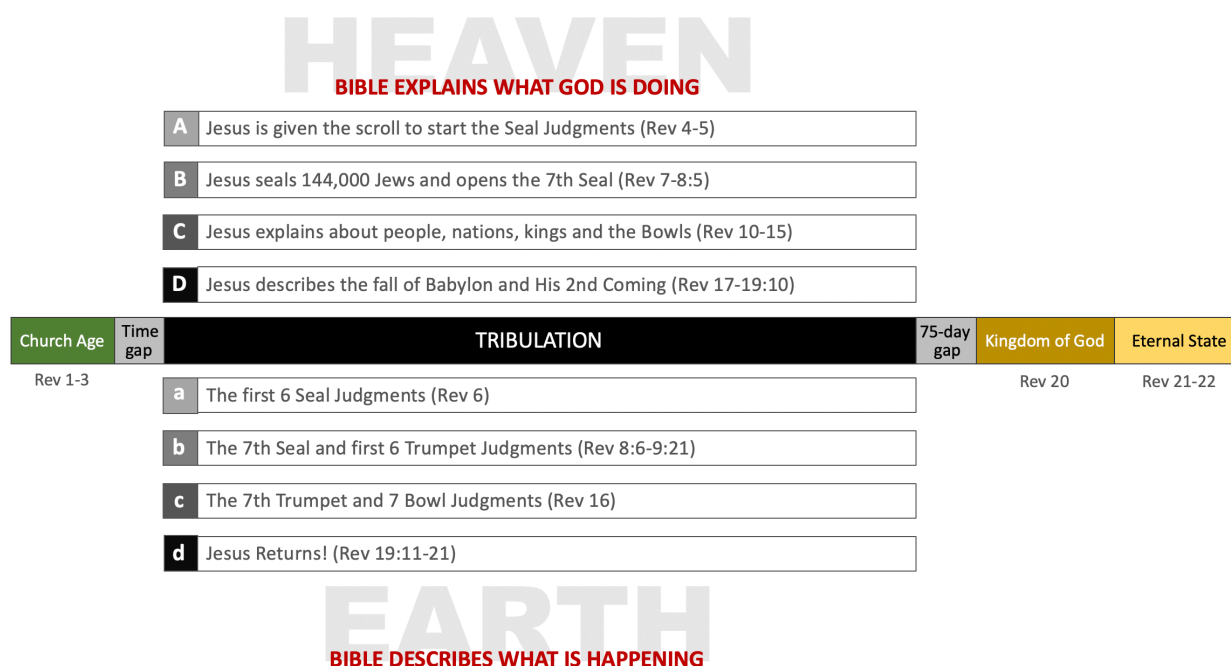
- God’s perspective
- Earth’s perspective
- Israel’s perspective
- Antichrist’s perspective
- Etc.

For example:

- Jesus begins by showing God's perspective of the judgments He is sending.
- Then He shows what's happening on the earth itself from the start of Tribulation.
- After that, Jesus goes back to the start of Tribulation to focus on what happens to Israel.
- Then He goes back to the start again to show what happens to the Antichrist.
- ...and so on.

This is the pattern we will see in Revelation. We will go back over the Tribulation events again and again, but each time Jesus focuses on a different person, group, place or aspect.

Now that we understand the structure, we can move on. What exactly did John see in heaven and what did he see happen on earth? (Read A-a, B-b, C-c, D-d.)



In this lesson, we will look at events A, a and B and cover more in the following lessons.



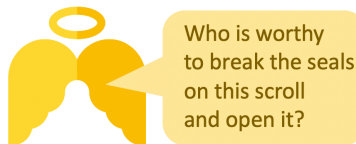
A. Jesus is Given the Scroll to Start the Seal Judgments

As John looks on, this is what he sees.

Revelation 5:1–2

¹ Then I saw a scroll in the right hand of the one who was sitting on the throne. There was writing on the inside and the outside of the scroll, and it was sealed with seven seals.

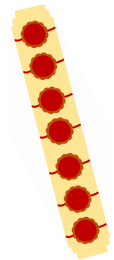
² And I saw a strong angel, who shouted with a loud voice: “Who is worthy to break the seals on this scroll and open it?”



John sees Yahweh, the Creator-God of the universe, holding the scroll in His right hand.

But what is the scroll? Perhaps it's the will or inheritance document for the Kingdom.

Why do we think this? It was common in the first-century Roman world to put seven seals on a person's will and testament. For example, historical records show that the emperors Augustus and Vespasian had seven-sealed wills.



Such documents were normally sealed shut with hot wax over the threads that tied the scroll closed. Seven witnesses would press their personal seals into the hot wax, making an impression on the wax. This showed they were official witnesses.

Sealed this way, no one could tamper with the scroll. Only the one who has the right to open it could break off the hardened wax seals.

So when we understand what the entire book of Revelation is about, it seems possible that:

- the scroll is a will or **inheritance document**
- what is being given is **the Kingdom of God** and
- only the **One who is qualified** to inherit it can break the seals and open it.

But who is worthy to inherit the Kingdom?

How does John react to the angel's question?

Revelation 5:4–5 (NIV)

⁴ I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside.

⁵ Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.”

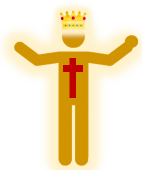


Why is John crying at the thought that no one can open the scroll?



The Jews, including John, have been waiting for the Kingdom of God to return for a very long time. It will be terrible news for them if it never arrives!

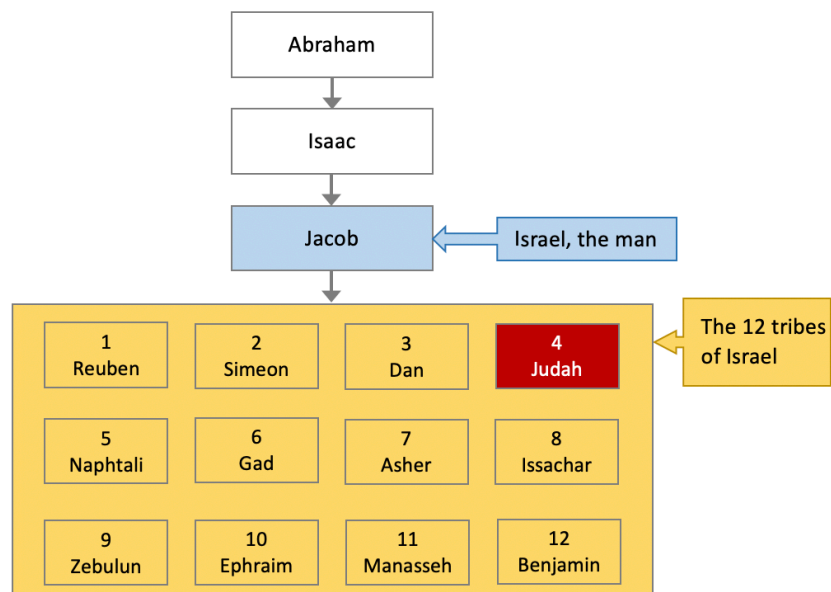
But one of the elders speaks to John and tells him there is a qualified person: it is Jesus!



In fact, two of Jesus' titles are the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Root of David.

Jesus is “the Lion of the tribe of Judah”

The Lion of Judah comes from Jacob's prophecy that he spoke over his 12 sons who became the 12 tribes of Israel.



Joseph's tribe was divided into two: Ephraim and Manasseh. Because of Levi's special priestly role, they were often not counted as a tribe. Hence there are still 12 tribes of Israel.

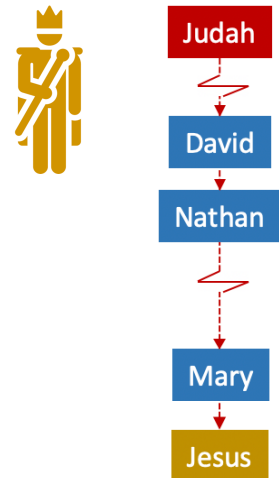
Judah is described as a lion and is said to hold the sceptre, the king's symbol of authority.

Genesis 49:9–10

- ⁹ Judah, my son, is a young lion
that has finished eating its prey.
Like a lion he crouches and lies down;
like a lioness—who dares to rouse him?
- ¹⁰ The scepter will not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler's staff from his descendants,
until the coming of the one to whom it belongs,
the one whom all nations will honor.

On his human side, Jesus is a descendant of Judah, the rightful king.

He is the One who has the right to the sceptre!



Jesus is “the Root of David”

The Root of David is a reference to the Davidic Covenant where Yahweh promised that a descendant of David would sit on the throne of the Kingdom of God forever.

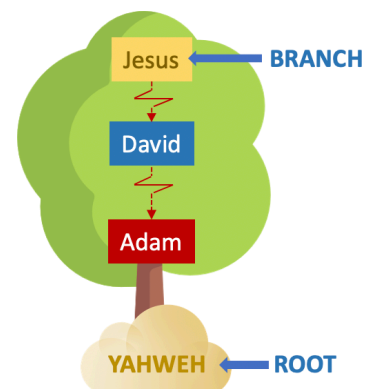


Jesus is both the Root and the Branch of David!

- He is the source (the creator) of David's family as well as
- the righteous heir of David's family!

Isaiah 11:1

Out of the stump of David's family will grow a shoot—
yes, a new Branch bearing fruit from the old root.



After the elder assures John there is One who can open the seals, John looks but instead of seeing the Lion of Judah, he sees a slaughtered lamb!

Revelation 5:6

Then I saw a Lamb that looked as if it had been slaughtered, but it was now standing between the throne and the four living beings and among the twenty-four elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which represent the sevenfold Spirit of God that is sent out into every part of the earth.



John is looking right at Jesus, the Lamb of God who died for all mankind! In this appearance, He bears the marks or scars, of the crucifixion. Then this is what Jesus does.

Revelation 5:7

He stepped forward and took the scroll from the right hand of the one sitting on the throne.

Why is Jesus qualified to take the scroll? Here is the reason the Bible gives.

Revelation 5:8–10

⁸ And when he took the scroll, the four living beings and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp, and they held gold bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of God's people.

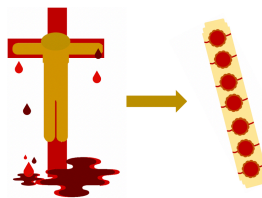
⁹ And they sang a new song with these words:



“You are worthy to take the scroll
and break its seals and open it.

For you were slaughtered, and your blood has ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation.

¹⁰ And you have caused them to become
a Kingdom of priests for our God.
And they will reign on the earth.”



Jesus is qualified because:

<p>He is the One who died and rose again</p> 	<p>He saved people from every nation on earth</p> 	<p>He caused believing mankind to finally take their rightful role as under-lord of the world</p> 
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After this, those in heaven continue to praise and worship God!

In fact, heaven is full of praise and worship! It is not a quiet place at all! While John is there, this is what he hears:



Worship 1	Worship 2	Worship 3	Worship 4	Worship 5
Revelation 4:8	Revelation 4:10–11	Revelation 5:8–10	Revelation 5:11–12	Revelation 5:13
Addressed to the Father	Addressed to the Father	Addressed to Jesus	Addressed to Jesus	Addressed to the Father and Jesus
By: • 4 living creatures	By: • 24 elders	By: • 4 living creatures • 24 elders	By: • 4 living creatures • 24 elders • Angels	By: • 4 living creatures • 24 elders • Angels • All creatures in heaven and earth, under the earth and in the sea

All creation is rightly worshipping the Father and the Son!

After Jesus takes the scroll, He will break open the seals one by one. Jesus will personally start the Tribulation.

This is the start of how Jesus, through judgment, will become King of the Kingdom of God.

Theme of Revelation

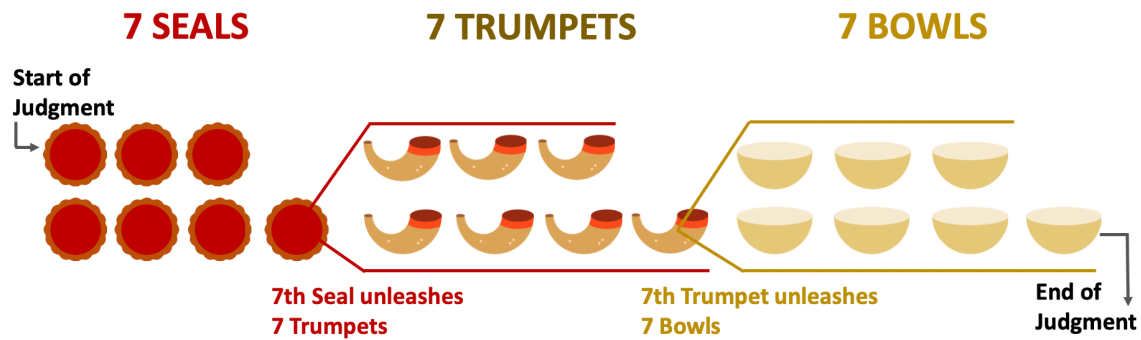
The Bible wants us to clearly understand that the Tribulation is not because Satan or evil is disrupting God's plans. Rather, God is doing this and He is giving evil the permission to throw the world into a state of destruction. He is using them to judge the world.

Three waves of judgment

Jesus' judgment on the world will come in three waves. There will be:

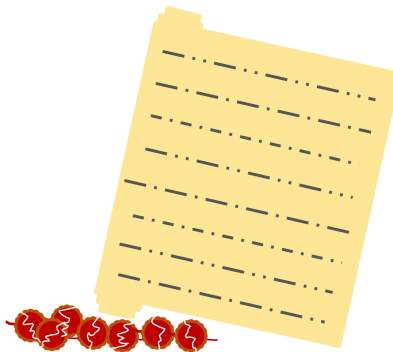
- The seven seal judgments
- The seven trumpet judgments and
- The seven bowl judgments.

These three waves of judgments happen one after another.



- The 1st seal is opened at the start of Tribulation and the first judgment begins.
- When the 7th seal is opened, we see that it unleashes 7 trumpets.
- The blowing of each trumpet brings more judgment.
- When the 7th trumpet is blown, we see that it unleashes 7 bowls.
- All the contents of the bowl judgments are poured out rapidly.
- After the contents of the bowls are poured out, God's judgment is done.

At this end point, the inheritance scroll that Jesus is opening will be completely opened!



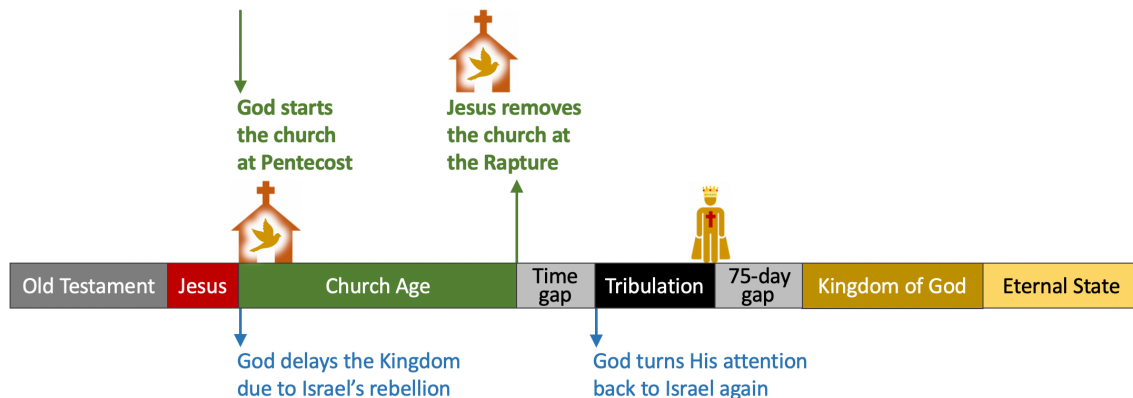
Jesus then takes His rightful place as King of the world!

For a summary chart of these judgments, refer to page 33.

Who is the Tribulation meant for? Who is Jesus judging?

i. Jesus is not judging the church.

At this stage, Jesus would have already raptured the church and they are safely in heaven with Him.



If the 24 elders do indeed represent the church, then it confirms that the church is not at all involved in the Tribulation.

ii. He is judging Israel.

In our study so far, we have seen that the Tribulation is God dealing with Israel's rebellion and unrepentance.

That's why one of the key names of the Tribulation is "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jeremiah 30:7). Jacob of course, is the original name of Israel, the man who was the father of the 12 Jewish tribes.

The fact that God is judging Israel through the Tribulation is also reflected by the other names for this event. For example:

- The 70th Week of Daniel or Daniel's 70th Week (Daniel 9:27)
- The Indignation (Isaiah 26:20 KJV)
- Time of trouble (Daniel 12:1)
- The Wrath (1 Thessalonians 5:9)
- The Day of the Lord (Isaiah 2:12)

(Note: when we see the phrase "Day of the Lord" in the Bible, we need to know that it is used to refer to different events. The "Day of the Lord" simply means any event (long or short) where Yahweh supernaturally acts to bless or punish people on earth. So we need to look at the context to see which event the Bible is referring to.)

In fact, the Tribulation will be so devastating that the prophet Zephaniah had his own list of terrible names for this time period.

Zephaniah 1:14–16

¹⁴ “That terrible day of the LORD is near.

Swiftly it comes—

a day of bitter tears,

a day when even strong men will cry out.

¹⁵ It will be a day when the LORD’s anger is poured out—

a day of terrible distress and anguish,

a day of ruin and desolation,

a day of darkness and gloom,

a day of clouds and blackness,

¹⁶ a day of trumpet calls and battle cries.

Down go the walled cities

and the strongest battlements!

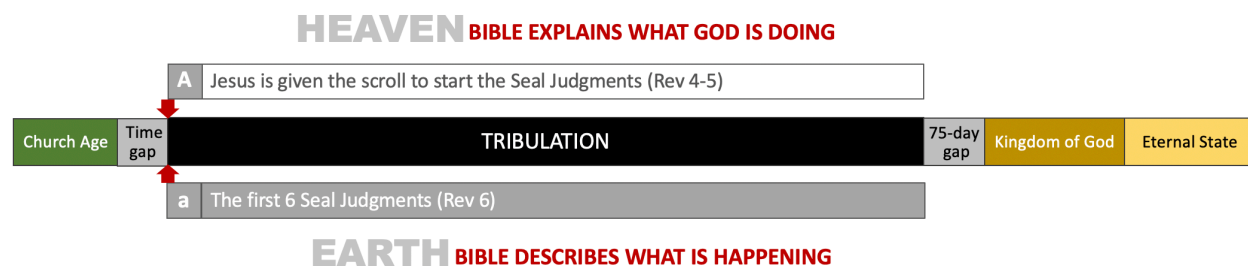
iii. Jesus is also judging the rebellious and unrepentant unbelievers on earth.

In Revelation, these people are called “those who dwell on the earth” (NKJV, ESV), “those who belong to this world” (NLT) or “the inhabitants of the earth” (NIV).

Revelation 3:10

“Because you have obeyed my command to persevere, I will protect you from the great time of testing that will come upon the whole world to test those who belong to this world.

a. The First Six Seal Judgments



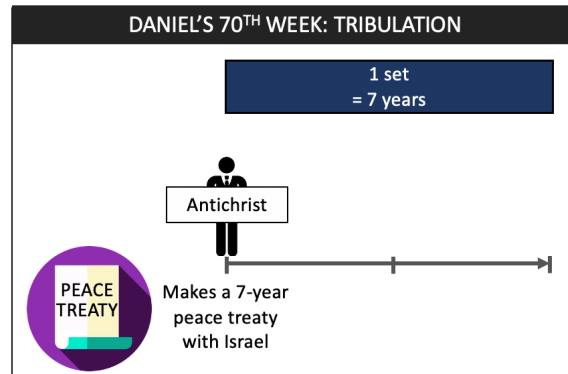
In heaven, Jesus starts the Tribulation by breaking open the first seal on the scroll that He took from God the Father.



The first broken seal in heaven causes the Antichrist to sign a peace treaty with the nation of Israel on earth.

Daniel 9:27a

The ruler will make a treaty with the people for a period of one set of seven,



The Antichrist will be treated like a great peacemaker because the treaty will give Israel and probably the whole Middle East, peace and security. However, this is when the Tribulation on earth officially begins.

This is what John recorded.

Revelation 6:1–17

¹ As I watched, the Lamb broke the first of the seven seals on the scroll. Then I heard one of the four living beings say with a voice like thunder, “Come!” ² I looked up and saw a white horse standing there. Its rider carried a bow, and a crown was placed on his head. He rode out to win many battles and gain the victory.



³ When the Lamb broke the second seal, I heard the second living being say, “Come!” ⁴ Then another horse appeared, a red one. Its rider was given a mighty sword and the authority to take peace from the earth. And there was war and slaughter everywhere.



⁵ When the Lamb broke the third seal, I heard the third living being say, “Come!” I looked up and saw a black horse, and its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand. ⁶ And I heard a voice from among the four living beings say, “A loaf of wheat bread or three loaves of barley will cost a day’s pay. And don’t waste the olive oil and wine.”



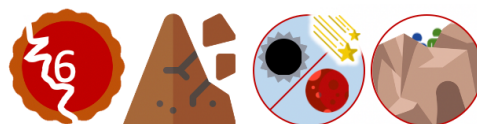
⁷ When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the fourth living being say, “Come!” ⁸ I looked up and saw a horse whose color was pale green. Its rider was named Death, and his companion was the Grave. These two were given authority over one-fourth of the earth, to kill with the sword and famine and disease and wild animals.



⁹ When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of all who had been martyred for the word of God and for being faithful in their testimony. ¹⁰ They shouted to the Lord and said, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you judge the people who belong to this world and avenge our blood for what they have done to us?” ¹¹ Then a white robe was given to each of them. And they were told to rest a little longer until the full number of their brothers and sisters—their fellow servants of Jesus who were to be martyred—had joined them.



¹² I watched as the Lamb broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake. The sun became as dark as black cloth, and the moon became as red as blood. ¹³ Then the stars of the sky fell to the earth like green figs falling from a tree shaken by a strong wind. ¹⁴ The sky was rolled up like a scroll, and all of the mountains and islands were moved from their places.



¹⁵ Then everyone—the kings of the earth, the rulers, the generals, the wealthy, the powerful, and every slave and free person—all hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains. ¹⁶ And they cried to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb. ¹⁷ For the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to survive?”

Jesus had already told His disciples about these end-time events

Actually, Revelation is not the first time that Jesus describes in detail the events of the Tribulation.

During his first coming, when Peter, James, John and Andrew asked Him privately (Mark 13:3) how they would know when He would return, Jesus patiently explained the Tribulation to them.



Matthew 24:1–13

¹ As Jesus was leaving the Temple grounds, his disciples pointed out to him the various Temple buildings.

² But he responded, “Do you see all these buildings? I tell you the truth, they will be completely demolished. Not one stone will be left on top of another!”

³ Later, Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives. His disciples came to him privately and said, “Tell us, when will all this happen? What sign will signal your return and the end of the world?”

⁴ Jesus told them, “Don’t let anyone mislead you, ⁵ for many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah.’ They will deceive many.

⁶ And you will hear of wars and threats of wars, but don’t panic. Yes, these things must take place, but the end won’t follow immediately.

⁷ Nation will go to war against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in many parts of the world.

⁸ But all this is only the first of the birth pains, with more to come.

⁹ “Then you will be arrested, persecuted, and killed. You will be hated all over the world because you are my followers. ¹⁰ And many will turn away from me and betray and hate each other.

¹¹ And many false prophets will appear and will deceive many people.

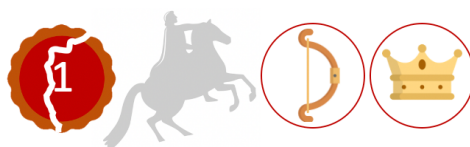
¹² Sin will be rampant everywhere, and the love of many will grow cold. ¹³ But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

What Jesus said to His disciples in Matthew 24 (also found in Mark 13 and Luke 21) is what He told John in Revelation as well.

Matthew 24 Mount of Olives Discussion		Revelation 6 The First 6 Seal Judgments	
24:4–5	False Christs	6:1–2	White Horse
24:6–7a	War	6:3–4	Red Horse
24:7b	Famine	6:5–6	Black Horse
24:9	Death	6:7–8	Pale Horse
24:9–13	Martyrdom	6:9–11	Martyred Souls
Luke 21:11	Signs	6:12–17	Signs

We will take a closer look at each seal judgment.

1st Seal Judgment



False Christ	White Horse
<p>Matthew 24:4–5 ⁴ Jesus told them, “Don’t let anyone mislead you, ⁵ for many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah.’ They will deceive many.</p>	<p>Revelation 6:1–2 ¹ As I watched, the Lamb broke the first of the seven seals on the scroll. Then I heard one of the four living beings say with a voice like thunder, “Come!” ² I looked up and saw a white horse standing there. Its rider carried a bow, and a crown was placed on his head. He rode out to win many battles and gain the victory.</p>

This rider on the white horse is the first judgment. He is the ultimate false christ, the Antichrist.

- Notice that “a crown was placed on his head”, meaning it is God who gave him permission to rule. We must never forget that God is the One in charge of this Tribulation.
- The Antichrist has a bow but no arrows. This suggests that he will conquer the world through diplomacy. Because he brings a message of “peace”, people will listen! And indeed, Tribulation starts off by him making a peace treaty with Israel (Daniel 9:27a).



Antichrist

2nd Seal Judgment



War	Red Horse
<p>Matthew 24:6–7a ⁶ And you will hear of wars and threats of wars, but don’t panic. Yes, these things must take place, but the end won’t follow immediately. ⁷ Nation will go to war against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.</p>	<p>Revelation 6:3–4 ³ When the Lamb broke the second seal, I heard the second living being say, “Come!” ⁴ Then another horse appeared, a red one. Its rider was given a mighty sword and the authority to take peace from the earth. And there was war and slaughter everywhere.</p>

The rider on the red horse brings war to the earth. While the first rider uses diplomacy to bring peace, it will not last for long because this second rider takes it away by making nations fight each other.

Paul also mentions this when writing to the church in Thessalonica.

1 Thessalonians 5:3

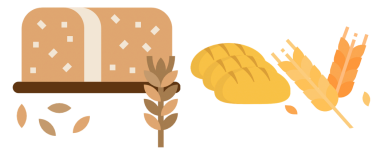
When people are saying, “Everything is peaceful and secure,” then disaster will fall on them as suddenly as a pregnant woman’s labor pains begin. And there will be no escape.

3rd Seal Judgment



Famine	Black Horse
<p>Matthew 24:7 Nation will go to war against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be <u>famines</u> and earthquakes in many parts of the world.</p>	<p>Revelation 6:5–6 ⁵ When the Lamb broke the third seal, I heard the third living being say, “Come!” I looked up and saw a black horse, and its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand. ⁶ And I heard a voice from among the four living beings say, “<u>A loaf of wheat bread or three loaves of barley will cost a day’s pay. And don’t waste the olive oil and wine.</u>”</p>

The next seal judgment is famine. Jesus mentions it in Matthew 24 but in Revelation 6 we learn the details. It will cost one day’s pay (a denarius in some translations) to buy enough good food for one person to eat for a single day. Or the same money can buy cheap food for three people for one day.



This is massive inflation (hyperinflation), where the price of food keeps going up, causing people to starve!

This worldwide inflation leading to famine will drive the peoples on the earth to demand a global solution. This prepares them for the Antichrist’s global rule.

4th Seal Judgment



Death	Pale Horse
Matthew 24:9 “Then you will be arrested, persecuted, and <u>killed</u> . You will be hated all over the world because you are my followers.	Revelation 6:7–8 ⁷ When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the fourth living being say, “Come!” ⁸ I looked up and saw a horse whose color was pale green. Its rider was named <u>Death</u> , and his companion was the <u>Grave</u> . These two were given authority over one-fourth of the earth, to kill with the sword and famine and disease and wild animals.

Pale green is the colour of decomposing flesh! So Death is riding on a death-coloured horse and following right behind him is the Grave, who walks behind to swallow up all the dead people. In fact, one quarter of the people on the earth will die from this.

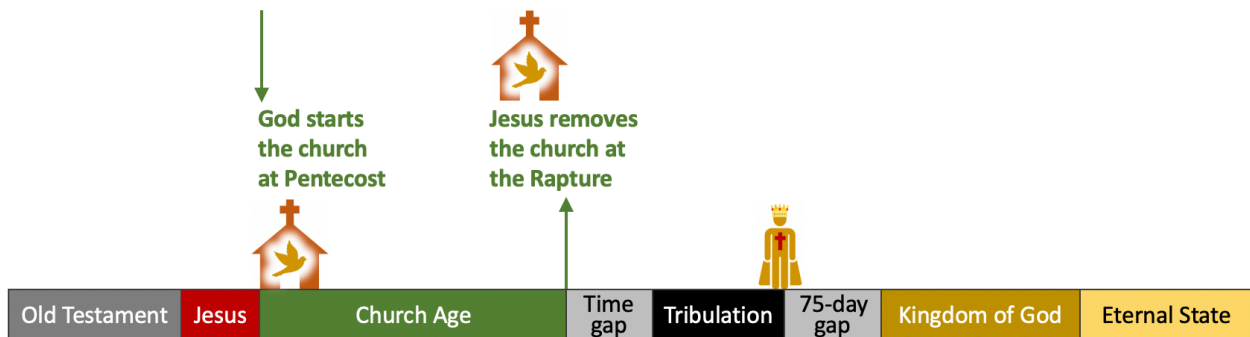
Notice that all the riders are “given authority” to do what they are doing by Yahweh. God is in complete control of all of this.

5th Seal Judgment



Martyrdom	Fifth Seal
Matthew 24:9–13 ⁹ “Then you will be <u>arrested, persecuted, and killed</u> . You will be <u>hated</u> all over the world because you are my followers. ¹⁰ And many will turn away from me and betray and hate each other. ¹¹ And many false prophets will appear and will deceive many people. ¹² Sin will be rampant everywhere, and the love of many will grow cold. ¹³ But the one who endures to the end will be saved.	Revelation 6:9–11 ⁹ When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the <u>souls of all who had been martyred for the word of God and for being faithful in their testimony</u> . ¹⁰ They shouted to the Lord and said, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you judge the people who belong to this world and avenge our blood for what they have done to us?” ¹¹ Then a white robe was given to each of them. And they were told to rest a little longer until the full number of their brothers and sisters—their fellow servants of Jesus who were to be martyred—had joined them.

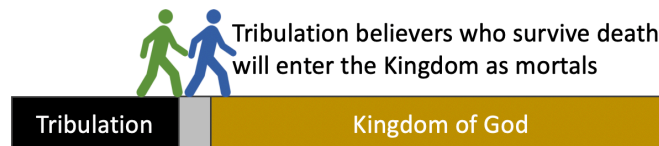
The fifth seal judgment is about martyrdom. Tribulation-age believers will be killed for their faith in Jesus (these are not church-age believers because the church is already in heaven).



But how can believers being killed be a type of judgment? Is this seal a judgment on believers? No, all the judgments are upon Israel and the unbelieving nations. Then why is the martyrdom of believers being called a judgment? Here are two possible reasons:

1. Perhaps as the believers are killed, even more judgment will be poured out on the earth for killing them (Revelation 19:2).
2. Or perhaps when believers are killed, the salt and light of the world is being removed, leaving the rest with less and less testimony about Jesus.

However, Jesus says that believers who can endure this terrible time will be saved. In this context, we believe He means being saved from physical death. This means that they will enter the Kingdom as mortals.



This is in contrast to the martyred, tribulation believers who will enter the Kingdom in their glorified bodies.

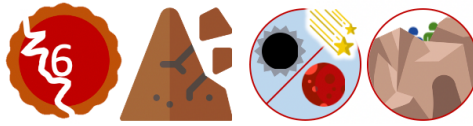


This is what John saw at the end of the Tribulation.

Revelation 20:4

... And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony about Jesus and for proclaiming the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his statue, nor accepted his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They all came to life again, and they reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

6th Seal Judgment



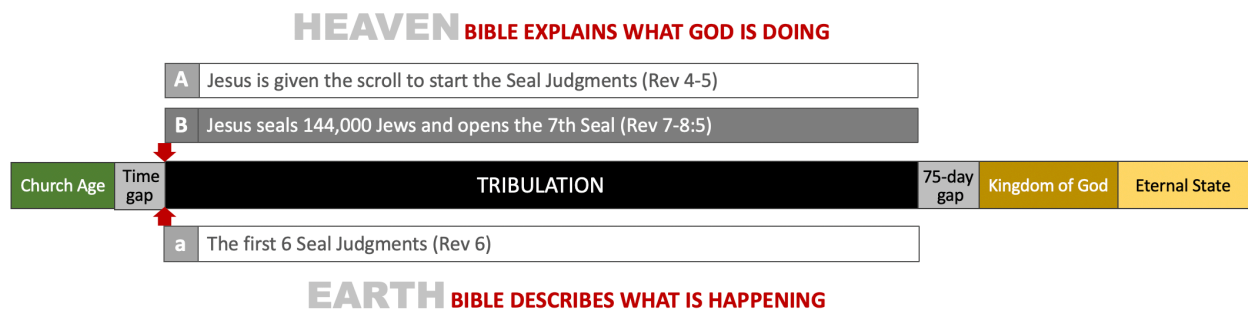
Signs	Sixth Seal
<p>Luke 21:11 There will be great earthquakes, and there will be famines and plagues in many lands, and there will be <u>terrifying things and great miraculous signs from heaven.</u></p>	<p>Revelation 6:12–14 ¹² I watched as the Lamb broke the sixth seal, and there was a great <u>earthquake</u>. The <u>sun</u> became as dark as black cloth, and the <u>moon</u> became as red as blood. ¹³ Then the <u>stars</u> of the sky fell to the earth like green figs falling from a tree shaken by a strong wind. ¹⁴ The <u>sky</u> was rolled up like a scroll, and all of the <u>mountains and islands were moved</u> from their places.</p>

Luke recorded for us more details about what Jesus said about the Tribulation. When Jesus breaks open the sixth seal, that judgment will be geophysical catastrophes on the earth and in space! The world has never seen such a disastrous judgment before.

Just as the global Flood reshaped the earth for the kind of planet we now live in, it's possible that the Tribulation judgments will alter the geography of the earth for the coming Kingdom.

B. Jesus Seals 144,000 Jews and Opens the 7th Seal

While the seal judgments are happening on earth, Jesus also does something else.



The sealing of the 144,000

Revelation 7:1–3

¹ Then I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds so they did not blow on the earth or the sea, or even on any tree. ² And I saw

another angel coming up from the east, carrying the seal of the living God. And he shouted to those four angels, who had been given power to harm land and sea, ³ “Wait! Don’t harm the land or the sea or the trees until we have placed the seal of God on the foreheads of his servants.”

The Bible uses highly symbolic language to describe what is happening here.

- The four angels are stationed around the globe (“four corners of the earth”).
- They are holding back the four winds which have the ability to harm the land and the sea. The wind probably symbolises the judgments that are yet to come.



- A fifth angel carries the seal of God. He needs to seal God’s faithful servants before the further judgments arrive. This mark will be on their foreheads.



What does the sealing mean?

- Typically, sealing is a sign of **ownership**. In this case, God is placing His mark of ownership on these believers.
- Sealing indicates **protection**, where God will protect what He owns.
- It symbolises **power**, where God has power over what or who is sealed.
- It also indicates a **promise** in that God keeps His promise to those whom He has sealed.

Who and how many are being sealed?

Revelation 7:4

And I heard how many were marked with the seal of God—144,000 were sealed from all the tribes of Israel:



The Number of Servants From Each Tribe of Israel			
Judah	12,000	Simeon	12,000
Reuben	12,000	Levi	12,000
Gad	12,000	Issachar	12,000
Asher	12,000	Zebulun	12,000
Naphtali	12,000	Joseph	12,000
Manasseh	12,000	Benjamin	12,000

The tribes mentioned by John are not the typical ones we find when the 12 tribes are listed. For example:

- Dan isn't on this list. (We aren't sure why but do note that in the distribution of the Promised Land during the coming Kingdom, Dan has a share. See Ezekiel 48:1).
- Levi who is listed here, is typically not listed among the 12 tribes because the Levites minister to God while living among the other tribes.
- The tribe of Ephraim is also not on the list but we see the tribe of Joseph. The Bible does not tell us why this is so. (Note: Joseph had two tribes named after his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh.)

However, the specific number and the list of tribes tells us that these 144,000 are Jews who come to faith in God during the Tribulation. And now, God is specially sealing them and setting them aside to do His work.

They will be protected by God and will survive as mortals throughout the Tribulation judgment. How do we know this? John said that he saw all 144,000 standing triumphant with King Jesus on Mount Zion in Jerusalem at the end of the Tribulation.

Revelation 14:1–4

¹ Then I saw the Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with him were 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.

² And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of mighty ocean waves or the rolling of loud thunder. It was like the sound of many harpists playing together. ³ This great choir sang a wonderful new song in front of the throne of God and before the four living beings and the twenty-four elders. No one could learn this song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.

⁴ They have kept themselves as pure as virgins, following the Lamb wherever he goes. They have been purchased from among the people on the earth as a special offering to God and to the Lamb. ⁵ They have told no lies; they are without blame.

Other translations make it clear that these 144,000 are men.

Revelation 14:4a (NKJV)

These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins.

The Bible does not say what kind of work these 144,000 will be doing for God.

Perhaps they will be similar to Jesus' 12 disciples. For example, the 12 apostles were all Jewish men, all sealed by the Holy Spirit to take God's gospel to all people. And they had an incredible impact on the world.

Now perhaps these 144,000 Spirit-sealed Jewish, tribulation believers will do the same. They will share the gospel with the world. Why do we suspect this?

It is because right after John sees and hears the instructions to seal the 144,000 for God, he sees a great multitude!

A great multitude from every nation

Revelation 7:9, 13–14

⁹ After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands.



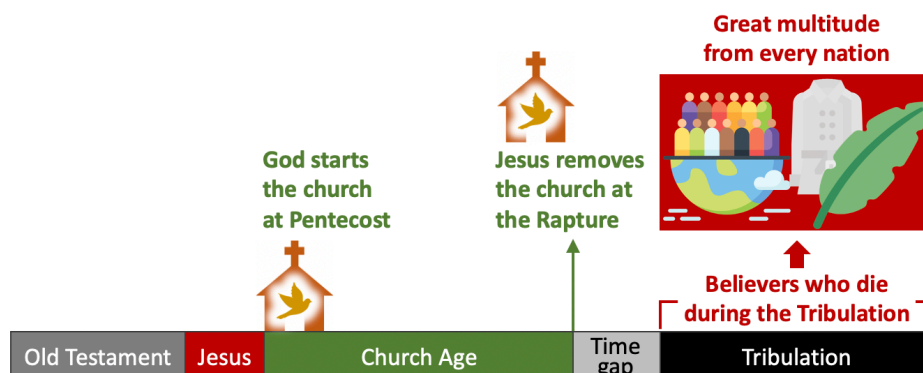
¹³ Then one of the twenty-four elders asked me, "Who are these who are clothed in white? Where did they come from?"

¹⁴ And I said to him, "Sir, you are the one who knows."

Then he said to me, "These are the ones who died in the great tribulation. They have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and made them white."

This great number of people are believers who die during the Tribulation! They aren't believers when the church is raptured. But it is likely that:

- Some time during the Tribulation, they will become believers.
- Then they die during the Tribulation, perhaps while the seals are being opened.



This is an incredible message of hope! God still saves people in the midst of this judgment! And not just a handful, but a countless number! How great and merciful is our Lord!

Why did God allow John to see the 144,000 followed by this great multitude?

	The 144,000	The Great Multitude
Number	144,000	Too great to count
Ethnicity	Jews	All nations, tribes, peoples, languages
Place	Earth	Heaven
Situation	Facing danger	Safe in heaven with Jesus

The Bible doesn't say, but perhaps this great number of people come to faith because of the 144,000 Jews. Perhaps these Jews will share the gospel with them, leading them to believe in Jesus as their Saviour! Maybe this is why both groups are mentioned together.

The Bible tells us that many of these new believers will be killed (either by war, famine or persecution). However, when they die, they are not resurrected immediately. They first go to heaven and with just their spirits, they see their Saviour face to face and worship Him! This is what John sees them doing:

Revelation 7:10

And they were shouting with a great roar,

“Salvation comes from our God who sits on the throne
and from the Lamb!”

After all this, John sees Jesus turn to the seventh seal.

Jesus breaks the 7th Seal

Revelation 8:1

When the Lamb broke the seventh seal on the scroll, there was silence throughout heaven for about half an hour.



This 30 minutes of silence in heaven is unusual because throughout the rest of Revelation, heaven is not silent! It's filled with the joyful and noisy worship from the angels, the 24 elders, the tribulation believers and the four living creatures!

So what is this silence about?

Maybe it is the sense of awe because Jesus has just opened the last seal of the scroll. Is this the moment He will return to earth as King?

Or perhaps it will be a shocked silence because the breaking of the seventh seal reveals seven trumpet judgments!



The seven trumpets contain more judgments that will occur before the second coming of Christ.

Revelation 8:2–4

² I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and they were given seven trumpets.

³ Then another angel with a gold incense burner came and stood at the altar. And a great amount of incense was given to him to mix with the prayers of God's people as an offering on the gold altar before the throne.

⁴ The smoke of the incense, mixed with the prayers of God's holy people, ascended up to God from the altar where the angel had poured them out.



The scene here is very much like the Tabernacle or Temple worship on earth.

- The Jewish temple had a golden altar of incense that was a symbol of the people's prayers.
- During the morning and evening sacrifices, the priests offered incense as the people gathered to pray in the courtyard outside.
- Prayer is pictured as sweet-smelling incense going up like perfume to Yahweh.

smoke of incense and prayers of God's people



What John is seeing is prayers in heaven being mixed with the prayers of believers from the earth.

What are the people praying about?

Perhaps they are praying:

1. For the Kingdom of God to come

Matthew 6:9–10

⁹ Pray like this:

Our Father in heaven,

may your name be kept holy.

¹⁰ May your Kingdom come soon.

May your will be done on earth,

as it is in heaven.

During the Tribulation, it is highly likely that at this time more than ever, people will be asking God to bring back the Kingdom.

2. For vengeance for God's people

Revelation 6:9–10

⁹ When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of all who had been martyred for the word of God and for being faithful in their testimony. ¹⁰ They shouted to the Lord and said, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you judge the people who belong to this world and avenge our blood for what they have done to us?"

Right after these prayers are offered to God, something dramatic happens.

Revelation 8:5–6

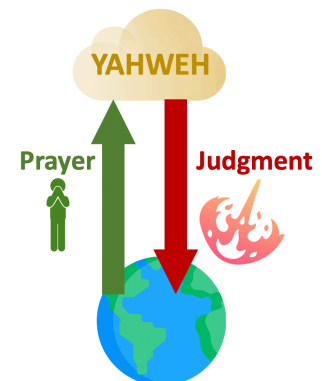
⁵ Then the angel filled the incense burner with fire from the altar and threw it down upon the earth; and thunder crashed, lightning flashed, and there was a terrible earthquake.

⁶ Then the seven angels with the seven trumpets prepared to blow their mighty blasts.

In this scene, John is shown how believers' prayers are connected to God's judgment!

- **Believers' prayers go up to heaven.** Here, the believers pray for God to bring His Kingdom to earth and to avenge their deaths.
- **God's judgments come down from heaven.** The silence in heaven ends when the angel throws the incense down. God's judgment comes in answer to the believers' prayers!

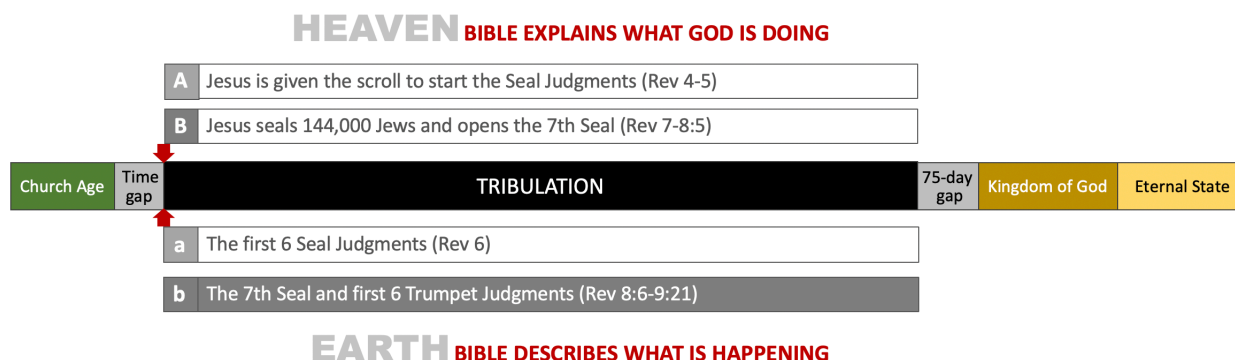
The incense burner is from the Tabernacle and Temple. The people's prayers are pictured as incense rising up to God. Just as smells have a strong effect on our memory and emotions, our prayers are described as incense that have an impact on God. What an encouragement that believers' prayers are like perfume to God!



What an encouragement that our prayers mean a lot to God!

And what an encouragement that God acts on our prayers!

In the next lesson, we will see what happens on earth when the seven angels blow their trumpets.



What is the War of Gog and Magog and when during the end time does it happen?

In the Bible, there is one end-time event that is hard to place in the overall timeline. This event is the war of Gog and Magog.

The prophet Ezekiel prophesied about this great war. Gog (a leader) and Magog (the nation), will lead an alliance that will attack Israel while it is at peace.

The nations who form an alliance in Ezekiel 38:1–6 will be located in what is now areas of the Middle East, North Africa, Russia and Turkey. (Later, we will see that there is another battle with the same name at the end of Revelation.)



More...

Ezekiel 38:3, 8–11

³ Give him this message from the Sovereign LORD: Gog, I am your enemy! ⁸ A long time from now you will be called into action. In the distant future you will swoop down on the land of Israel, which will be enjoying peace after recovering from war and after its people have returned from many lands to the mountains of Israel.

⁹ You and all your allies—a vast and awesome army—will roll down on them like a storm and cover the land like a cloud.

¹⁰ “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: At that time evil thoughts will come to your mind, and you will devise a wicked scheme. ¹¹ You will say, ‘Israel is an unprotected land filled with unwallled villages! I will march against her and destroy these people who live in such confidence!’

However, at that time, God will supernaturally rescue Israel!

Ezekiel 38:18–23, 39:4, 21–22

¹⁸ But this is what the Sovereign LORD says: When Gog invades the land of Israel, my fury will boil over!

¹⁹ In my jealousy and blazing anger, I promise a mighty shaking in the land of Israel on that day.

²⁰ All living things—the fish in the sea, the birds of the sky, the animals of the field, the small animals that scurry along the ground, and all the people on earth—will quake in terror at my presence. Mountains will be thrown down; cliffs will crumble; walls will fall to the earth.

²¹ I will summon the sword against you on all the hills of Israel, says the Sovereign LORD. Your men will turn their swords against each other. ²² I will punish you and your armies with disease and bloodshed; I will send torrential rain, hailstones, fire, and burning sulfur!

²³ In this way, I will show my greatness and holiness, and I will make myself known to all the nations of the world. Then they will know that I am the LORD.

⁴ You and your army and your allies will all die on the mountains. I will feed you to the vultures and wild animals.

²¹ “In this way, I will demonstrate my glory to the nations. Everyone will see the punishment I have inflicted on them and the power of my fist when I strike.

²² And from that time on the people of Israel will know that I am the LORD their God.

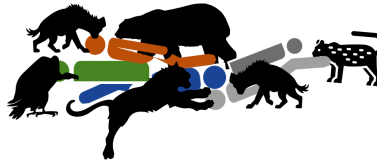
God will totally win this war for Israel!

Ezekiel then goes on to say that:

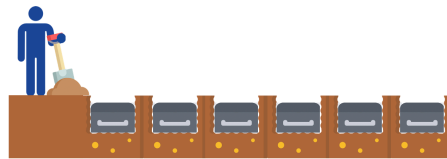
- The Jews will gather all the weapons of war and burn them for fuel. There will be so much it will last for seven years (Ezekiel 39:9)!



- God will call on the birds and wild animals to feast on the bodies of the dead enemies (Ezekiel 39:17–20).



- It will take seven months for the Jews to bury their dead enemies (Ezekiel 39:12).



The Bible doesn't state precisely when this war will occur. Studying the details, it seems possible it will occur in the early part of the Tribulation. One reason is that if Israel will be burning enemy weapons for seven years, it's unlikely this burning will continue into the Kingdom era where God says everything will be renewed and restored. So this leads Bible scholars to think this war has to happen near the beginning of the Tribulation.

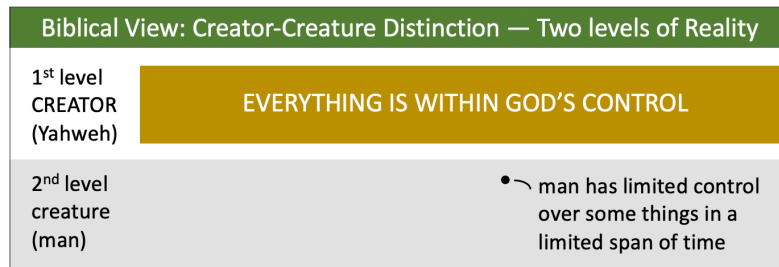
If this is correct, then perhaps the deaths of the political and military leaders who attacked Israel will make room for the Antichrist to gain global power.

Despite not knowing the exact time when this event takes place, it's clear no such war has happened yet. We believe that it will therefore be in the future along with the other end-time events.

Later on, when we get to Revelation 20, we will see that there is a second war with the same name ("Gog and Magog"). But that is a different event. We will study that in detail in an upcoming lesson.

Yahweh is Never Thwarted

Yahweh's sovereignty is never hindered. The events of Revelation show that all events on earth—the wars, famine, epidemics, earthquakes and more—are fully under God's control and directed by Him. Mankind has been given free will but God's plan to bring in His Kingdom will not be stopped by mankind nor Satan.



In facing the future, sometimes our view is focused only on what we can see with our own eyes. Sometimes, we might even feel that God is not interested in what happens on earth.

But what the apostle John records for us in Revelation shows us that God is intimately involved with what's happening in the world! God's sovereign control interacts with both good and evil spiritual forces. And His sovereign control interacts with mankind's actions and the prayers of believers around the world!

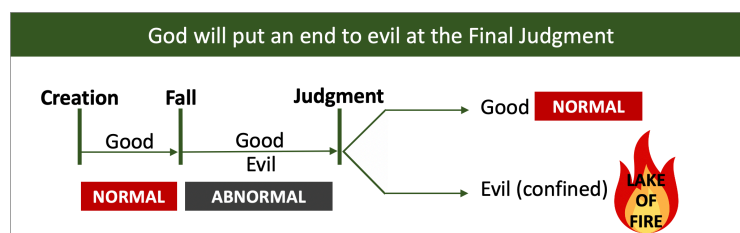
God uses all these things (the actions of spirit beings, the actions of mankind, the prayers of believers) to direct history towards His ultimate end. There is an interplay between God's sovereign control (1st level) and His creatures' actions (2nd level).

As human beings, we must not have a fatalistic attitude and think that our actions and prayers don't matter to God. That is not correct.

What we see in Scripture is that God includes and interacts with our actions and prayers as He works out history. At the end of history, when we look back at how everything played out, we will see how our actions and prayers fit together with God's sovereign control.

As we see the world getting into position for the Tribulation, we know things will get harder, messier and more evil. This is all part of the preparation for the Tribulation.

So we must not lose hope. What is happening in the world today is part of God's plan to destroy evil permanently and remove it from His creation. God's Kingdom cannot start until all evil is removed. And He will make sure of that!

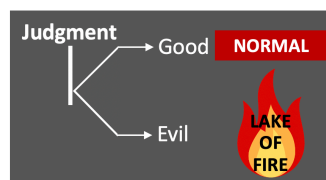


As with the Holy War that God declared on Canaan during the Conquest period to clear all evil from the Promised Land, now we see Yahweh declaring war on all of evil mankind and the spirit realm during the end times, to clear all evil from the earth so He can begin the Kingdom of God.



The Holy War...

...is a picture of...



...the Final Judgment

Discussion Questions

Discuss the following questions as a group or use them for personal reflection.

1. In Scripture, we see many aspects of God's character through the events He recorded for us to study. We have seen His holiness, righteousness, wrath and sense of justice. How is Revelation impacting your understanding about God?
2. What are your thoughts on the study's approach to figuring out who or what the symbols and characters represent?
3. Revelation presents how God concludes this period of history where good and evil are mixed. How do you feel or what are your thoughts now that we are seeing just how God is starting to bring an end to this mix of good and evil?



Pre-reading for next lesson: Ezekiel 3:1–10; Zechariah 4; Revelation 8–11 (whole chapters)

Appendix: The Judgments of Revelation

7 SEALS



Antichrist unleashed
Revelation 6:1–2



War on earth
Revelation 6:3–4



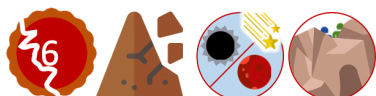
Famine
Revelation 6:5–6



1/4 of population killed
Revelation 6:7–8



Martyred believers
Revelation 6:9–11



Great earthquake; Sun, moon & stars fail
Revelation 6:12–17



7th seal unleashes the rest of the judgments
Revelation 8:1–2

7 TRUMPETS



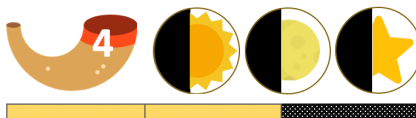
1/2 world's vegetation destroyed
Revelation 8:7



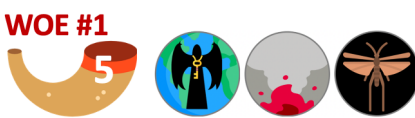
1/2 world's oceans destroyed
Revelation 8:8–9



1/2 world's fresh water polluted
Revelation 8:10–11



1/2 world's day and night darkened
Revelation 8:12



Torture unbelievers for 5 months
Revelation 9:1–11



1/2 world's people killed
Revelation 9:13–21

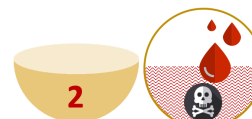


Messiah's Second Coming Announced
Revelation 11:15–19

7 BOWLS



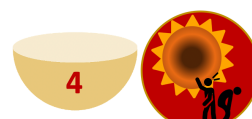
Sores on Antichrist worshippers
Revelation 16:2



Blood in the sea
Revelation 16:3



Blood into all fresh water
Revelation 16:4–7



Scorching sun on people
Revelation 16:8–9



Darkness on Antichrist's kingdom
Revelation 16:10–11



Euphrates dried up
Revelation 16:12–16



Thunder, great earthquake, hailstorm
Revelation 16:17–21