

Are You Ready for the End Times? The Seven Seals

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Thousands of already fulfilled prophecies from the Bible remind us of the sovereignty of God over history and the surety of His revealed plans for the future. God inhabits eternity- He sees all time as one. No other book can boast what the Bible boasts: 100% accuracy of prophecies, no internal contradictions and archaeology that firmly backs up its' historical veracity. God is not the Author of confusion- He has given us prophecies that we may know the future and the role we play in it. The Lord boasts, "For I am God, and there is no other...Declaring the end from the beginning." (*Isaiah 46:10*).

However, hindsight is 20/20. Bible believers agree on the "big picture" of the end times- that Jesus Christ is coming back for His church and to judge the living and the dead, but there are many differing opinions on the details. This writing offers the author's opinion of a foundation built on the seven seals in *Revelation 6:1-8:1* and the corresponding Olivet discourse that Jesus gave in *Matthew chapter 24*. Based on this foundation, the question that must be answered is: "How then should we live today in light of this?"

Rev. 6: 1-2:

The First Seal: The Anti-Christ Establishes Himself as World Leader

1 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 Lamb is Jesus Christ who died as a sacrificial Lamb for the world (*Rev 5:8*). In Zechariah He appears at His second coming to the Jews as the One whose hands and feet are pierced for the sins of the world, who opens up a fountain of forgiveness for them on that glorious Day of the Lord (*Zech 12:8-13:1*). This Lamb is the One who is opening the seals and unlocking the puzzle of the end times events. He alone is worthy to open the seals, "because You were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation." (*Rev. 5:9*)

Daniel wrote of a final "week" or seven years of history that would begin with the Anti-Christ signing a covenant with Israel for peace and end with the second coming of Christ. In the middle of the seven years the Antichrist would break his covenant with Israel and persecute Israel and all who believe in Jesus Christ as he sets himself up as god in the temple. (*Dan 9:24-27*) The Anti-Christ will bring a false sense of peace and security to a world weary of war. The white horse in the first seal symbolizes victory. The bow with no arrow symbolizes military dominance without even waging war. The crown is the victor's crown. How would he accomplish such a great feat? By deception: "The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish,

because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.” (2 Thess 2:9-12) The environment for “the lawless one” is ripe in the West today as we’ve abandoned God’s law and come up with our own shifting standards of morality to suit ourselves.

Matthew chapter 24 parallels the seven seals in verse-by-verse order. When John recorded the Revelation of Jesus Christ, it is evident the parallelism throughout with Jesus’ Olivet discourse. Jesus left the temple and sat with His disciples alone on the Mount of Olives and discussed with them future events- the destruction of the temple, which occurred almost 40 years later, and the end times. The two events went hand in hand, for the temple destruction foreshadowed the end times events. Jesus Christ’s first warning to the disciples in *Matthew 24* parallels the first seal:

“Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.” (Matt 24:4-5)

Second Seal: Conflict on Earth

When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, “Come and see.” 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. (Rev 6:3-4)

“And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.” (Matt 24:6-7)

The fiery red color represents war. After 3 ½ years of the Antichrist consolidating power, he will set himself up as god in the temple. Perhaps this is the trigger to world war as described in this second seal, the red horse.¹

Third Seal: Worldwide Famine

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. 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.” (Rev 6:5-6)

“And there will be famines...” (Matt 24:7)

A denarius was a day’s wage, thus a day’s wage will be enough only to feed oneself- times of extreme famine. What produced the famine? Man’s folly at least contributed to it, which was due to following after the Antichrist and the resultant wars.

¹ Cf. Daniel 11:36-45

Fourth Seal: Death

7 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. (Rev 6:7-8)

"...pestilences and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows" (Matt 24:7-8)

Some scholars have noted that in the Greek, "beasts of the earth" could refer to viruses and disease, which would match well "pestilence". The color "pale" here is an off green- the color of disease. Disease is more prevalent in times of famine. It should have become more and more clear to mankind that this great savior, the Antichrist, who had promised so much, couldn't deliver on his promises, but because they loved their sin, they continued in the deception- and God gave them over to it- sin has consequences- death, judgment and condemnation.

The beginning of "sorrows" is Jesus' conclusion to this section. The word "sorrows" means "birth pains"- like birth pains, they increase in frequency and intensity. These signs as recorded elsewhere in scripture increase throughout the tribulation. The four horsemen are the "birth pains" that lead up to more intense events to follow and to a final joyful birth- the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our Great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. (*Titus 2:13*).

Fifth Seal: The Cry of the Martyrs

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. 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?" 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. (Rev 6:9-11)

The seven-year tribulation is a time when God's wrath is poured out only on those who are unbelievers in Christ, who follow the prince of this world, the Antichrist. Notice in this passage that it is the wrath of the Anti-Christ, not of God, that is persecuting the elect. Followers of Christ will be blamed for the woes of the world and will be hated, persecuted, martyred and then comforted and glorified in Christ.

In this fifth seal we see under the altar the souls of those believers who had been slain, reminding us of a passage in Leviticus: "And the priest shall ...pour the remaining blood of the bull at the *base of the altar* of the burnt offering." (*Lev 4:7*) The blood of the saints "under the altar" will be a "sweet sacrifice" to God that will not go unnoticed.

Why were they slain? For preaching the Word of God- for testifying of Jesus Christ to a God-hating and lawless world. The martyrs will be a great witness of the overcoming power of Christ in their lives, “They overcame [the Antichrist] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.” (*Rev 12:11*) How sweet is the aroma of their sacrifice! They fulfilled the Great Commission Christ gave us by the power of the Holy Spirit of God, not by their own power, “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (*Acts 1:8*) (The word “witnesses” here is “martyrs” from which we get the word “martyr”). They stand as an example to us of how to respond to persecution- continuing to fulfill the Great Commission by preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ even to a Christ-rejecting world, relying completely on the Spirit of God to give us the power we need to be faithful witnesses even unto death. We’re also admonished to be a sweet sacrifice to God by “presenting your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.” (*Romans 12:1*)

Jesus went into great detail in the Olivet Discourse of how His followers should handle this persecution...

“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another.” (*Matt 24: 9-10*)

The first lesson for believers is the reality of this tribulation and the hatred that will be present during those days- a reality that has existed since Pentecost but is magnified in the last days. Why such hatred? The offense of the gospel. It is a narrow road that will not be tolerated by the world stuck in lawlessness, lack of repentance and unbelief. They will seek to silence this witness, even if it requires silencing them by death. May believers, compelled by Christ’s love in saving them and burdened for the eternal destiny of unbelievers, learn the importance of sharing the gospel and boldly proclaiming their faith even unto death.

“Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.” (Matt 24: 11)

False prophets will contradict the gospel and bring forth a false gospel of acceptance for all; a gospel devoid of the need of repentance and forgiveness through the blood of Christ; a gospel of good works as the basis for salvation.

“And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.” (Mat 24:12)

In those dark times lawlessness will abound- fornication, adultery, homosexuality and all other vices will prevail as the Law of God is ignored and hidden. When God’s Laws on sexual purity are ignored, the result is “the love of many will grow cold”, replaced by lust and selfishness. We live in a world rapidly approaching this reality.

“But he who endures to the end shall be saved.” (Matt 24:13)

The call to believers is endurance, not escapism. The last message to each of the seven churches that John wrote the book of Revelation to was the need to be an overcomer in Christ in the midst of trials, tribulation, temptation and persecution. “He who overcomes will inherit all of this.” (Rev. 21:7, 2:7,11,17,25, 3:5,12,21)

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.” (Matt 24: 14)

When will the end come? When the Great Commission is fulfilled to “preach the gospel to every creature.” (Mark 16:15) Whose job is it to preach the Great Commission today? Those who have been transformed by the gospel- the body of Christ- the church. It is specifically through the church that the “manifold wisdom of God” and “the fellowship of the mystery” of the gospel is made known (Eph 3:9-10). Likewise the times of the 5th seal will be ideal times for the elect to share the gospel and be faithful witnesses even unto death as tribulation brews all over the world- there will be a great harvest of souls during that time through God’s instruments- those who will endure and continue as bold witnesses for Jesus Christ.

“Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place” (whoever reads, let him understand), 16 “then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 17 Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. 18 And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. 19 But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! 20 And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. 21 For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. 22 And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened.

23 “Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There!’ do not believe it. 24 For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 25 See, I have told you beforehand.” (Matt 24:15-25)

We see in these words the timing of the Great Tribulation- a time when the elect will be persecuted and martyred- it begins as Daniel prophesied, 3 ½ years into the seven-year period of tribulation (Dan 9:24-27), when the Antichrist will establish himself as god in the temple. This great tribulation is tied in with the 5th seal. This is the sign to the elect that will cause them to run for the hills- especially the elect that actually witness these things in Jerusalem.

The sign of the Antichrist setting himself up as god in the temple in Jerusalem is one of the clearest signs throughout scripture that the second coming of Christ is near. Paul wrote to Christians in Thessalonica (mainly Gentiles) that the Day of the Lord won’t come “until the man of lawlessness is revealed...He will oppose and exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God.” (2 Thess 2:3-4) Peter told the church that we are to be “looking for and hastening the coming of the Day of the Lord.” This Day is the most

prophesied day in history. So what is “the Day of the Lord” and how does it fit with the tribulation?

Sixth Seal: The Day of the Lord

12 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?” (Rev 6:12-17)

The fifth seal ended at *Matthew 24:25*. Jesus then warned the elect a second time about not being deceived by false Christs and then contrasted this with the coming of the true Christ on the Day of the Lord, which happens at the 6th seal:

“Therefore if they say to you, ‘Look, He is in the desert!’ do not go out; or ‘Look, He is in the inner rooms!’ do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together.” (*Matt 24: 26-28*)

Revelation 6:17 summarized this 6th seal- it is the Great Day of God’s wrath. What are the signs of that Day and how do they fit with *Matthew 24* and all other scriptures?

1. There will be a great earthquake, every mountain and island will be moved from their places (*v. 12, 14*)
2. The sun will be darkened (*v. 12*)
3. The moon will become like blood (*v. 12*)
4. Meteor showers (*v. 13*)
5. The heavens rolled up like a scroll (*v. 14*)
6. Kings and mighty men hide in caves (*v 15-16*)
7. The Great Day of His wrath has come (*v. 17*)

In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus shed additional light on the Day of the Lord and when it will come...

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days...” (Matt 24:29)

The tribulation of what days? The days just spoken of in the previous verses- the first five seals, *Matthew 24:4-28*. So what will happen *after* the tribulation? Jesus taught,

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” (Matt 24:29-31)

Notice the signs matching those of the 6th seal- the moon turning blood red, the skies darkened, the stars falling from heaven- these are during the 6th seal, and they happen immediately after the tribulation, not during the tribulation. At this time we see the rapture of the elect on that same Day.

Joel and other Prophets and the Day of the Lord

The first mention of the “Day of the Lord” chronologically in the Bible is in the book of Joel around 850 B.C. Like any introduction of a new concept, the book of Joel introduces this concept with a loud bang. Joel wrote of a locust plague, using the army of locusts as a picture of the Great Day of the Lord when the nations will gather in the Valley of Jehoshaphat near Jerusalem to surround the holy city and to destroy the Jews.

“A day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness” (Joel 2:2)

“The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble; the sun and moon grow dark, and the stars diminish their brightness.” (Joel 2:10)

“I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth; blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord.” (Joel 2:30-31)

Once again, the Day of the Lord is pinpointed in time. The immediate sign of the dawning of the Day of the Lord is that the moon will be turned blood red, the sun turned dark and lots of smoke and clouds.

The sixth seal will begin with specific signs in the heavens. The Day of the Lord doesn’t start at the first seal but rather the 6th seal. Joel gave more signs of what will happen on the Day of the Lord,

“I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will enter into judgment with them there.” (3:2, cf. 3:11-12)

Joel then reiterated what will happen on that Day when the nations will gather in that valley,

“Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the Day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will diminish their

brightness. The Lord also will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; the heavens and earth will shake...It will come to pass on that Day that the mountains shall drip with new wine, the hills shall flow with milk...A fountain shall flow from the house of the Lord and water the Valley of Acacias... Judah shall abide forever...for I will acquit them of the guilt of bloodshed, whom I had not acquitted; for the Lord dwells in Zion.”” (Joel 3:14-16, 18-21)

So in that Day, so many things will happen, including the Second Coming of Christ and the establishment of His millennial kingdom on earth! The Lord Jesus Christ will destroy the armies of the nations and establish His earthly kingdom in Zion- Jerusalem, all on that Day.

Why does scripture call it “that Day” (singular)? Is it a single Day? Some theologians have trouble with this and try to extend the Day of the Lord into a period of seven years to suit their theology. In my opinion, this is like trying to explain away the six days of creation and making it billions of years. The word “Day” in “the Day of the Lord” is “Yom”, and is singular- always. The Lord prophesied through Zechariah,

“Behold, the Day of the Lord is coming...I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem...Thus the Lord my God will come, and all the saints with You. It shall come to pass in that day that there will be no light; the lights will diminish. It shall be one day which is known to the Lord- neither day nor night. But at evening time it shall happen that it will be light. And in that day it shall be that living waters shall flow from Jerusalem...” (Zech 14)

It’s a single day when all these events happen. Every passage in scripture that explicitly uses the phrase the “Day of the Lord” has signs which match the signs we see in the 6th seal of Revelation- they are clear markers- let’s review in greater detail the signs, as if to establish the firm borders of a jigsaw puzzle that cannot be moved once locked in place:

1. The Sun and Moon are darkened. Joel placed this sign immediately before the Day of the Lord- it is a sign of the dawning of the Day of the Lord and continues on during the Day of the Lord (Joel 2:30-31). It will be a day that begins in darkness and ends with the light of the Messiah as Jesus Christ splits the clouds over the Mount of Olives and establishes His kingdom. Jesus clarified that the sun and the moon will do this immediately after the tribulation (Matt 24:29). Isaiah, Ezekiel, Joel and Zechariah connect this sign with the Day of the Lord and with Armageddon and the beginning of Christ’s reign (Isa 13:3-13, 24:23, Ezek 32:7-8, Joel 2:10-11, 3:9-18)
2. The Great Earthquake: We see this not only at the 6th seal, but at the 7th bowl (16:18, 20) and the 7th trumpet (11:13,19), which is one of many evidences that the seal, trumpet and bowl judgments aren’t chronologically one after another but rather happen concurrently, just as the three dreams of Daniel about future events happen concurrently (Daniel chapters 2, 7 and 8). Another example of this view of chronology is the Euphrates River drying up at the 6th bowl (Rev 16:12-16)

and the 6th trumpet (*Rev 9:13-19*) to prepare for the kings of the east to cross over immediately before the Day of the Lord.

During the 7th bowl, “there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth...then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And great hail from heaven fell upon men...” (*Rev 16:18,20*) This is the same Day as the 6th seal—the Day of the Lord.

Isaiah referred to this Day of the Lord as the gathering together of the nations at Armageddon as the sun is darkened and the moon turned blood red. (*Isa 13:3-13, cf. Isa 24-25, Hag 2:6-7, 21-22*)

1. Meteor Showers “even as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind” (*Rev 6:13*)- this is a direct reference to Isaiah 34:4 which is at the Battle of Armageddon. Chapter 34 of Isaiah also mentioned the heavens being rolled up like a scroll on that day, it is conjectured, to reveal Jesus Christ and His saints above the Mount of Olives, which certainly would cause kings and all men gathered at Armageddon to seek to hide in the caves.
2. Isaiah 2 described these men: “Enter into the rock, and hide in the dust, from the terror of the Lord and the glory of His majesty...the Lord alone will be exalted in that day.” (*Isa 2:11, cf. 2:17*) In the previous five seals, the Anti-Christ was worshipped and exalted, but not on the Day of the Lord, when the Lord’s wrath is poured out on unbelievers. The Antichrist and those who have allied themselves with him against God will be humbled and God alone will be exalted on that Day!

Picture a miracle comeback. The Colts are behind by 2 touchdowns and there is one minute left in the game and the opposing team has the ball. All appears lost, but then a fumble occurs and is recovered by the Colts. The Colts score, then retrieve and on-side kick and score again and go on to win the game. The Day of the Lord is likewise the turning point in this grand game of the tribulation. Throughout the tribulation followers of Christ have been persecuted and killed. On the Day of the Lord, everything changes. The saints are raptured and join the Lord Jesus Christ to prepare for the final battle of Armageddon in which the Anti-Christ and the enemies of God drink of the full fury of the wrath of God.

The Gathering of the Elect

We’ve looked at all of the events of *Revelation chapter 6:12-17*, however, the 7th chapter continues with the 6th seal. We don’t get into the 7th seal until *8:1*. Our first assumption must be that all the events of *chapter 7* also occur on the Day of the Lord unless there is evidence otherwise, since these all are part of the 6th seal.

“After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree.” (Rev 7:1)

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon...then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven...” (Matt 24:29-30)

So this is the second coming. The result of this?

“...and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn.” (v. 30)

Zechariah specifically speaks of the mourning of the Jews on that Day when they come to realize that Jesus Christ, the One they have rejected, is Lord, “They will look on Me, the One they have pierced, and they will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only child.” (Zech 12:10) In Matthew 24:31, we see the rapture of the elect:

“And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

This corresponds to the description of the four angels holding the four winds in Revelation 7:1- this is the gathering of the elect at the Rapture.

Matthew 24:31 references trumpets with the rapture of the elect. Trumpets were used in battle. In Joel 2:1 it is prophesied, “Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the Day of the Lord is coming, for it is *at hand*.” (Joel 2:1-2)

Now let’s take a look at passages that instruct the church about the rapture of the church...

1 Corinthians 15 and the Last Trumpet:

“Behold, I tell you a mystery: we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed- in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the *last trumpet*. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed...So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?’” (1 Cor 15:50-54)

Paul quotes *Isaiah 25:8*- when is death swallowed up in victory? At the 2nd Coming! Billions will die during the tribulation and on the Day of the Lord, so we hardly can say that Death has been swallowed up in victory before the 2nd Coming! *Isaiah 24-25* refers to the Day of the Lord and the dawning of the Kingdom age. *Isaiah 25:8* says, “He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces.” *Revelation 7:17* also refers back to *Isaiah 25:8*, “the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” This is fulfilled at the end of the Day of the Lord

as the Kingdom Age begins. In *1 Cor. 15:54*, Paul quotes *Hosea 13:14*. *Hosea chapter 13* refers to the judgment and then deliverance of Israel. When does the deliverance of Israel take place? On the Day of the Lord- the Day of Christ's 2nd Coming- the same Day that the church will be delivered as Paul makes clear in *1 Cor 15*!

What about the last trumpet that Paul mentioned in *1 Corinthians 15*? Note already that Joel mentioned that trumpet in *2:1* and Jesus made reference to it in *Matt 24:31*, "And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds." The last of the seven trumpets in Revelation also fits with this- as written earlier, the trumpets and bowls are concurrent with the events of the seals. The last trumpet is the Day of the Lord: "But in the days of the sounding [of the Last Trumpet] of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets." (*Rev 10:7*) What is that mystery? Paul spoke of that in *1 Cor 15:51-52*, "Behold, I tell you a mystery...at the *last trumpet*. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." Also in Revelation at the last trumpet we read, "Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!'" (*Rev 11:15*) Thus the trumpet in 1 Corinthians 15 is on the Day of the Lord- the day of Christ's 2nd Coming. The church will be raptured after the tribulation.

1 Thessalonians 4-5 and the Last Trumpet

Paul also talks about this Last Trumpet and the Day of the Lord in *1 Thessalonians 4-5*:

"16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

1 But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. 2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the Day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. 3 For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. 4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. 5 You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. 6 Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. 8 But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. 9 For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.

11 Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

Does this passage match the 7 seals and thus fit with the Day of the Lord- the Day of Christ's 2nd Coming? Let's compare 1 Thessalonians 4-5 with the Olivet Discourse in Matthew, Mark and Luke:

Event	1 Thess 4-5	Olivet Discourse
Coming from heaven	4:16	Matt 24:30
Angels	4:16	Matt 24:31
Trumpet	4:16	Matt 24:31
Catch up the Living	4:17	Matt 24:31
Thief in the Night	4:17	Matt 24:31
Don't Sleep	5:6	Mark 13:36
Don't Get Drunk	5:6-8	Luke 21:34
Watch for His Coming	5:6	Mark 13:35-37
Wrath for unbelievers	5:9	Rev 6:17

Paul definitely had Jesus' Olivet discourse in mind as he wrote 1 Thessalonians 4-5. Notice that the Lord descended with a shout and a trumpet- this is hardly a quiet campaign to whisk away believers to heaven before the tribulation, but rather a military triumph, for on the same Day that believers are raptured victorious the wicked will be judged- not seven years later.

In *1 Thessalonians 5:2*, we're told that the Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night to whom? To those unprepared- to those not sober or asleep. Verse four tells us that the Day of the Lord will not surprise believers: "But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness." We won't be surprised one bit- for we will see the clear signs and be ready for the rapture.

Luke 21 and the Rapture

The destruction of Jerusalem is the near-term fulfillment of prophecy that sets the stage for what will happen on the Day of the Lord. Jerusalem was surrounded by the Gentile Roman army and destroyed in 70 A.D., giving us a picture of the gathering troops of the nations at Armageddon (*Luke 21:20-24*)

After this Jesus again mentioned the signs of the Day of the Lord,

"And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken." (*Luke 21:25-26*)

Clearly this matches up with the 6th seal. Then Jesus said,

"Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when you see these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near." (v. 28)

What *things* is Jesus referring to in *verse 28*? The signs of the beginning of the Day of the Lord that He just spoke of in *verses 24-26*. In *verses 34-37*, once again there are warnings about getting drunk- for to those who aren't ready, that Day will come like a thief in the night.

"Take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth." (Luke 21:35)

The church will be raptured on the Day of the Lord *before* all the destruction that is poured out on that Day and then the destruction will fall. It will be a snare to all who aren't raptured. Jesus went on to say,

"Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man." (Luke 21:36)

We're in the midst of tribulation, and we're raptured out of it before the wrath of God is poured out on the Day of the Lord.

Revelation 7:2-8 Sealing of the 144,000

2 Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, 3 saying, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." 4 And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed: 5 of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand were sealed...of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand were sealed.

The word "sealed" throughout the New Testament refers to the moment that we trust in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our hearts. "In Him [Jesus Christ] you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having *believed*, you were *sealed* with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession." (Eph 1:13-14) One who is sealed belongs to the Lord as His possession and cannot be torn from the Lord's hands. These 144,000 Jews came to a place of believing in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and receiving the Holy Spirit into their hearts.

The passage makes clear these 144,000 are Jews literally. Paul wrote, "Blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.'" (Romans 11:25-27) When does the fullness of the Gentiles come in? In Rev 7:9ff, a great multitude that can't be numbered is seen. It is noted that they were those who came out of the Great tribulation (Rev 7:9ff), so thus this passage of Rev. 7:1-8 must be after the tribulation (after the fullness of the Gentiles comes in)- it occurs on the Day of

the Lord when Jesus Christ is revealed in glory to the Jews.

Around 520 B.C. Zechariah spoke of this Day as the Day that the Jews “will look on Me whom they have pierced” (*Zech 12:9*). Many Jews will repent on the spot in mourning over their unbelief in their Messiah, resulting in eternal life, “In that Day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness ... Two-thirds shall be cut off and die, but one-third shall be left in it: I will bring the one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested. Then they will call on My name, and I will answer them...Behold, the Day of the Lord is coming...I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem.” (*Zech 13:8-9,14:1-2*)

A remnant of Israel will be protected by the Lord from the Antichrist during the Great Tribulation as they flee from Jerusalem (*Matt 24:16*) into the mountains of Petra in the wilderness to the east in present day Jordan. There God will allure her (the Jewish nation) (*Hosea 2:14, 3:5*), evangelize her and protect her miraculously from the Antichrist who will turn on her and seek to destroy her (*Rev 12:6,13-16*).

Are You Sealed?

My friend, are you sealed in the Holy Spirit? Are you born again by the Holy Spirit? Do you know that the blood of the Lamb of God who was sacrificed in your place forgives your sins? Have you experienced His forgiveness and assurance of salvation? Does your life square with your faith? God says that when we believe in Christ that we become a new creation (*2 Cor 5:17*) and go from being spiritually dead to being set free from sin and adopted into God’s family (*Eph 2:1-9*). Do you (and those around you) see this reality in your life?

Jesus warned that on the Day of Judgment many will say that they prayed in His name and did many wonderful ministries in His name, but will be condemned to hell because they never repented and entered into faith in Christ (*Matt 7:15-27*). They gave God lip service and played the game of religion, but were hypocrites. In Revelation 9 we’re given a dreadful picture of deceived unrepentant sinners, “But the rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues... did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.” (*Rev 9: 20-21*) Today the “church” in America is filled with fornicators, adulterers, homosexuals, the covetous and all other idolaters who have made their own lustful desires more important than living for Christ, yet claim to belong to Christ. Their idolatries are the same as worshipping demons (*1 Cor 10:19-21, Eph 5:5*). Jesus repeatedly warned those who would follow Him that a person can’t have two masters- you will either serve Him or serve sin and the devil. Are you living for Jesus Christ? If you were on trial for being a follower of Christ, would people have ample evidence to convict you?

If the Holy Spirit hasn’t sealed you, then you will face an eternity under God’s wrath in hell. The judgment poured out on the Day of the Lord is just a shadow of the agony of hell. Jesus told of a rich man in hell who pleaded for just a drop of water (*Luke 16:24*). I

plead for you to repent and receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, to be sealed until that Day of Redemption. Repeatedly the Bible warns that sin is so seductive. It is so easy to say, "I'll worry about my afterlife and my relationship with God later", but the heart that doesn't repent only gets harder and harder toward God, so the Lord warns that today is the Day of salvation.

Revelation 7:9-17 A Great Multitude Before the Throne

9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, 10 and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" 11 All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying:

*" Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom,
Thanksgiving and honor and power and might,
Be to our God forever and ever. Amen."*

13 Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?"

14 And I said to him, "Sir, you know."

So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. 16 They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; 17 for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Who are these people and when and where does this take place? We've seen that everything thus far in the 6th seal matches the Day of the Lord. Does this match also? The Day of the Lord ends with Jesus Christ's 2nd coming, destroying His enemies and setting up His kingdom in Jerusalem at the temple. So the temple described here is not heaven, but rather the temple in Jerusalem. Does this match other scriptures?

1. They are waving palm branches in their hands, which indicates the Feast of Tabernacles (*Lev 23:34,40*), which is celebrated during the Millennium (*Zech 14:6-9*).
2. They're wearing white robes (*7:9*). The bride (the church) wears a white robe at the Second Coming of Christ (*Rev 19:7-8*) and is called "a great multitude" (*Rev 19:1*)
3. They are worshipping before the Throne in the Temple, [*Rev. 7:15*]. This is the Millennial Temple described by Ezekiel in chapters 40-44. Ezekiel specifically stated that God's Throne would be moved to the Millennial Temple, [*Ezek. 43:1-9*]. Daniel also described the throne of the "Ancient of Days" moving to earth at the time when the "Son of man came with the clouds of heaven," [*Dan. 7:9,13,14,21,22, see also Jer. 3:16,17, Mk 14:62*].

4. God has come to dwell among His people, not the other way around, [*Rev. 7:15*]. Compare this to: *Ezek. 43:7,9, Joel 3:17, Zech. 2:10-13*, all Millennial settings.
5. *Rev. 7:16,17* is a clear quote from *Isa. 49:10 and 25:8* which are describing the Millennium.
6. *Rev. 7:17*- "Living waters" come from millennial passages. David, Ezekiel, and Zechariah, all describe a river of living water flowing from the Millennial Temple, [*Psalms 46:6, Ezek. 47:1-10, Zech. 14:8*].

So who are these saints? "These are they which came out of great tribulation"- the focal point has been endurance to the end. God has been glorified through the saints who have come out of the Great Tribulation. They are the bright shining stars of the light of Christ in this blockbuster movie- but the cast includes all the saints throughout history who have endured to the end. As Paul wrote shortly before being martyred, "I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing." (*2 Tim 4:6-8*) Oh, we have such a "Great cloud of witnesses" (*Heb 12:1*). So "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin." (*Heb 12:1-4*)

Tribulation vs. Wrath

Some paint the tribulation as a time of wrath for all that are on the earth, and so the logic goes that the church can't possibly be going through the tribulation. While the Day of the Lord- the Day that Christ returns and judges the world, is a day of wrath, the rest of the tribulation is just that- tribulation. Tribulation is wrath for the unbeliever and growth, sovereignly guided by the hand of our Lord Jesus Christ, for the believer. The church always shined most brilliantly the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ during times of intense tribulation and persecution. One example of this is the martyrdom of Stephen, "Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria... As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison." (*Acts 8:1-3*) What was the end result of this intense tribulation? "Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word." (*Acts 8:4*) The result was obedience to the Great Commission and an explosive growth of the church that was stuck in Jerusalem before the persecution.

Of the seven churches that the book of Revelation was addressed to, there were only two that Jesus had no words of rebuke for: Smyrna and Philadelphia. Jesus encouraged the church at Smyrna, "I know your works, *tribulation*, and poverty (but you are rich)... do

not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have *tribulation* ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.” (Rev 2:8-11)

To the church in Philadelphia, Jesus said, “I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name... Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.” (Rev 3:8-10) How these messages inspire us as we see the world quickly spiraling into more intense persecution and tribulation in 3rd world countries! The believer will be spared from the wrath of the Lamb that is poured out on that Day of the Lord, raptured immediately before it occurs. But during the time of tribulation, the encouragement of the Lord is that He knows our weaknesses and will give us sufficient strength to overcome and endure tribulation even unto death. The last days will be days when we will realize as believers the glory of the Lord through us as He does the impossible, making us martyrs for His cause. The angels and the whole world will look on and know that Christ is Lord as they see His faithfulness to keep His own strong even unto death. Through their witness, many will be saved.

God will protect the sealed 144,000 Jews *and* the church during the tribulation. Jesus’ promise to believers is just as valid during the tribulation as it is during the rest of the church age. In the Garden of Gethsemane moments before being arrested, Jesus prayed, “I pray for them... Holy Father, protect them by the power of Your Name... While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that Name you gave Me. None has been lost... *My prayer is not that You take them out of the world but that You protect them from the evil one.*” (John 17:9-12,15) In those days we will see the miracle of saints who in weakness are protected supernaturally from the Antichrist and the devil to the praise of Christ’s glorious grace.

Jesus earlier that night at the Last Supper prepared the disciples for tribulation, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have *tribulation*; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

Is it not to His glory that His bride shine in the midst of tribulation? Of the 12 apostles, history records that 11 died martyr’s deaths. The 12th apostle, John, many would say, had it much harder than the other 11, for he had to live a long 60 or so years of persecution rather than die a martyr’s death. Paul wrote from prison in Rome what we should heed regarding times of tribulation, “For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in my flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless *to*

remain in the flesh is more needful for you.” (Phil 1:19-24)

Yes, to depart and be with Christ- how glorious! Don't we all long for that day to see our Lover face to face? But Christ has work for the church, especially in the tribulation when a multitude will be saved!

Tribulation is not the equivalent of wrath! Paul wrote in Romans the benefit of tribulation in the life of a believer- tribulation that is sovereignly controlled by our gracious and loving Father to bring glory to Himself through His children. The Father knows what we can handle in Christ and by the power of His Spirit and won't allow into our lives that which we can't handle, “We also glory in *tribulations*, knowing that *tribulation* produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.” (*Romans 5:3-4*)

Tribulation has opposite effects on the believer and the unbeliever. Paul wrote to the strong Thessalonian church which was persevering under tribulation and growing, “We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your *persecutions and tribulations* that you *endure*, which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; since it is a righteous thing with God to *repay* with *tribulation* those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us...” (*2 Thess 1:3-7*) When will He give believers rest? Let's finish the sentence, “And to give you who are troubled *rest* with us *when* the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, *when He comes, in that Day*, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe.” (*2 Thess 1:7-10*)

Preparation for that Day is one of continual self-examination. “Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and to fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (*2 Thess 1:11-12, 2 Pet 1:10, 2 Cor 13:5*) We rely on the power of God's grace found in the Spirit and encourage and pray for one another. In our humility, brokenness and weakness, we press on in the Great Commission and cry out to the Lord and He gives us His strength.

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall *tribulation*, or distress, or *persecution*, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that [nothing]...shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our

Lord.” (*Romans 8:35-39, cf. Rom 12:12, 2 Cor 1:4, 7:4, 1 Thess 3:4, Rev 1:9, 2:9-10, 22*)

Are you, like the Apostle John, a “brother and companion in the *tribulation* and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ?” (*Rev 1:9*) If you aren’t, then are you on the same team as Jesus Christ? Endurance, persecution, tribulation, evangelism and holiness- seem to be avoided subjects in the Western church today. Some promises in scripture aren’t too encouraging, “In fact, *everyone* who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus *will be persecuted*, while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.” (*2 Tim 3:12-13*) Jesus told us that if we wanted to be His disciple, we needed to count the cost. Have you counted the cost? If you have to go through the Great Tribulation, will it be too steep a cost for you to bear? If so, are you really a believer? We must examine ourselves.

The Great Tribulation is God’s Super Bowl to show off to the angels the glory of Jesus Christ working through saints whose frail bodies (*2 Cor 4:7*) are broken, yet they remain sold out to Him.

Recall Job’s story. The Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.” (*Job 1:8*) May that be said of each of us as we fix our eyes not on what is seen- the world going to hell all around us, but fix our eyes on what is unseen, for what is unseen is eternal. The church in the West this last century has been in a spiritual decline. She has resisted the Lord’s commandments to set herself apart in holiness and to fulfill the Great Commission. By doing such, she has avoided persecution and tribulation. She has departed from the basic Biblical principles of evangelism, offering a watered down gospel and “seeker sensitive” methods of sharing the gospel that leave out words like repentance, hell and Judgment Day or redefine those words in a more palatable way to the sinner. Slowly the noose has tightened on the Western church as the world has told the church to keep its’ message to itself and be politically correct. It is in these days that we must step out in faith, build our spiritual muscles in Christ and share the gospel with every creature as we’ve been commanded. A great harvest awaits us.

Pastor Richard Wurmbrand was jailed and repeatedly tortured in communist Romanian prisons for many years before being released and sharing his story to with the world, including the U.S. Congress. Congressman Frank Wolf on October 9th, 1997 wrote a letter to Pastor Richard Wurmbrand who started the ministry of “Voice of the Martyrs” (VOM)- a ministry to support the persecuted church throughout the world. He wrote, “Worldwide persecution and martyrdom of Christians has increased and intensified to such an extent that more Christians have died for their faith in the 20th century than in all prior 19 centuries combined.” The Western church has lived in a bubble the last century or so. We have become lukewarm in our luxuries and waning in our love for Jesus Christ as evidenced by our lack of love for the lost which is demonstrated by our lack of evangelism and the results of evangelism: persecution. The church of Christ is exploding in China, India and elsewhere outside the West. Michael Haverluc wrote an article for VOM in February, 2006 that spoke of the tremendous persecution and blessing that the

Chinese church has been experiencing, “God’s plan of salvation is being worked out through suffering, which has the effect of refining the afflicted for Christ, encouraging other Christians, and attracting unbelievers to the gospel. Not until the chains were tightened around Christians in China in the latter half of the 20th century did the church really start to grow. There were only 834,000 evangelicals in 1949, when one could freely evangelize, while around 100 million house-church believers exist today under great persecution... With unregistered churches reporting four to eight million baptisms per year, China has the highest conversion rate in the world. Its church growth since 1977 is unparalleled in history.” What believer in Christ can read this and not stand in awe at the grace of God poured out in the midst of tribulation?

When I think of the possibility of being in the Great Tribulation, a hundred thoughts come over me- both selfish and spiritual. One thing is certain- I will not be able to overcome by my own power. I have to cling to God’s promises by faith that the Holy Spirit will produce miracles in and through me to sustain me. He’s done His miracles in the past in my life, redeeming my soul from the pit of hell and step by step conforming me to the image of Jesus Christ, and I must believe He will give me what I need to endure and be an over comer. He will do the same for every believer who trusts Him. Ponder with me this amazing promise in Joel about the power of the Holy Spirit unleashed in believers in those last days, “And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth; blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (*Joel 2:28-32*)

The Lord will save a Great Multitude, and the Lord will use believers in Christ- the faithful church, the church like Smyrna and Philadelphia, the church like today’s church in China- to spread the glorious gospel in the midst of a blood bath of persecution. That multitude will stand in wonder as they did at Stephen’s martyrdom as they see the glory of the Lord shining on his face and his last words to those who were stoning him to death, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” (*Acts 7:60*)

The Great Falling Away

Second Thessalonians two warns of a great falling away in the last days as persecution tightens- it will be one of the sure signs that the end is near. “Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first.” (2 Thess 2:3) The great falling away is during the 5th seal- the persecution of the church will have two effects on those who claim to be followers of Christ.

One benefit of tribulation is that it exposes false converts who are more concerned with their own life and comfort than following Jesus Christ and will depart from the faith when the heat gets turned up. In the parable of the Sower and the Seed, Jesus spoke of

false converts such as these, “These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when *tribulation or persecution* arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble.” (*Mark 4:16-17*) The main reason so few Christians are active in evangelism is because of the fear of persecution. In the continuous persecution of the Great Tribulation, false converts will not associate with believers out of fear of persecution and will be exposed for who they are- wolves in sheep's clothing.

Paul also talked about how things would be in the last days, “In the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers...unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control...lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power...For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (*2 Tim 3:1-7*) Such is the state of much of the Western “church” today. There are those who seem more concerned with prosperity doctrines than with living for Christ regardless of tribulations and persecution. Most televangelists focus on appealing to the felt needs of the listeners rather than the glory of God that comes from faithful obedience to Christ. Other church members are sucked into immorality rather than living for Christ. Yet others put on a good show at church and then live for the world when away from the church. Yet others think they're saved because they go to church and were baptized or receive the sacraments. Tribulation will quickly weed out these who have a form of godliness but are just going through the motions- they've never given their hearts to Jesus Christ. They have a knowledge of Christ but not a relationship with Christ.

Preparation of the Church: 2 Peter 3

Now that the duration and timing of the Day of the Lord has been established, we can see how it relates to the church and her preparation for that Day.

“Scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming?’ ...The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

But the Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming Day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.” (*2 Peter 3:3-13*)

God is so patient, so longing for sinners to come to repentance- and He has commanded His children to get the word out to a perishing world that Judgment is coming- are you sharing the warnings of judgment and the hope of eternal life to every creature? Are you pursuing a life given over to the Lord Jesus Christ- is living for Christ really the central goal of your life?

As the church, we are looking for that Day- we'll see the signs and be raptured on that Day. That Day will bring about the new Kingdom Age- the new heavens and new earth. God is delaying that Day because of His desire, through our evangelism, to share the gospel with people that all sinners appointed to salvation are to be brought to repentance and faith. Those times of sharing the gospel will be marked with plenty of scoffers. The call for believers in preparation for those days is quite clear- we're to conduct ourselves in godliness and hasten that day through evangelism. He who endures to the end will be saved.

It is time for self-examination: are you eagerly sharing the gospel with every creature? Are you avoiding evangelism because of improper motives, to avoid persecution? Are you watering down the message of the gospel by avoiding the tough topics of sin, righteousness, hell and Judgment Day and instead focusing on what Christ can do to make the person's life better? Are you warning those who call themselves brothers or sisters in the Lord that have a continual pattern of sin in their lives?

The message of the end times is clear: nothing but faith in Jesus Christ will prepare us for times ahead. Such a message humbles me- does it humble you? It makes me cry out to the Father to change me, to remove the dross from my life and to conform me to the image of His Son by the power of the Holy Spirit that dwells within me. The signs of the times are around us. In times of bewilderment, thank God we have such a merciful and gracious God! When Jesus said some hard sayings to His disciples about complete commitment, at "that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more." (*John 6:66*) But the grace of God kept those who belonged to Him. "Then Jesus said to the twelve, 'Do you also want to go away?'" But Simon Peter answered Him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'" (*John 6:67-69*) When tribulation comes, there will be two responses to Christ: some will continue in Him, some will depart. Which one will you be? Let us make our calling and election sure (*2 Peter 1:10*) and run with perseverance the race Jesus Christ has called us to.

In Christ's Love,
Mike Porter