

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

Final Things Lesson 7: “The Tribulation”

We are in the midst of a series called “Final Things.” And our series thus far has taken use from 1) the second coming of Christ to 2) the millennium to 3) the eternal state, and 4) the New Jerusalem. We’ve also looked more closely chronologically to us at 5) the church age and the intermediate state, 6) and the rapture. Today we bring all of this together.

What bridges the rapture and the second coming of Christ? What is the last thing that happens before Christ’s triumphant return to the earth to set up his millennial kingdom? The answer is *the tribulation*.



Here’s a description and definition—The tribulation is a divinely initiated, progressively intensifying period of judgment that exposes human rebellion, preserves a remnant, and prepares for Christ’s kingdom.¹

Let me just warn you ahead of time—today’s message is not going to be fun. I hope that it’ll be informative. As always, I want it to be Biblical. I’ve prayed that God would help me to be faithful to the Scriptures and my explanation of them. **But this topic is tough. It’s emotional tough thinking about the tribulation.**

It’s tough because I can’t play the part of a politician as a pastor. I can’t promise you that things will get better and better in our world... if you’ll only vote for me. No, the reality is that our world *isn’t* going to get better. It’ll get much, much worse. But then it’ll get better. So at least I can finish with that.

Here’s what I want to cover in this lesson. I’ll give you four statements about this coming tribulation. And then after that, I’ll give you seven characteristics of this seven-year period of tribulation from Revelation 4–19. Write these down. First of all.

The Tribulation is a Future Time...

1) Of seven years—Daniel’s **seventieth week**
(Dan 9:24–27)

Turn with me to the book of **Daniel** in the OT. I know we’ve looked at this passage already. But we need to revisit it. **Daniel 9:24–27** reads,

²⁴ “Seventy weeks [or seventy sevens... the Hebrew [שבעים] can be translated “weeks” or “sevens”] are decreed about your people and your holy city [namely, Jerusalem and the Israelites], to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.

I mentioned last week that these “seventy weeks” are seventy weeks of years, namely 490 years. And this is the total timeframe that God uses to atone for iniquity, bring in everlasting righteousness, and to anoint a

¹ Derived in large measure from John MacArthur and his writings on the tribulation. See John MacArthur, *Because the Time Is Near* (Chicago: Moody, 2007), 105–211; idem, *Revelation 1–11* and *Revelation 12–22*, MNTC (Chicago: Moody, 1999–2000).

most holy place. These are references to both the first and the second coming of Christ. Christ atoned for sin in his first coming. Every thing else in this statement, as I understand it, awaits a second coming.

This is what's referred to as a "telescoped prophecy." It's a prophecy that observes multiple events in the future as if they are closely connected. But in reality there may be periods of time that are between them. And they are all smushed together in the prophecy.

And that's clearly the case here, because we even have a statement concerning 62 of the 70 weeks. And Then 69 of the 70 weeks. And then a final week in the text.

Look at **verse 25**.

²⁵ Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. And for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. ²⁶ And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed.

Just by way of review, we looked at these 69 weeks of years which totaled 483 years. And this indicates the timeframe from the time of Nehemiah (see **Neh 2:1–8**) to the time of Jesus's death and resurrection. Daniel was given, years ahead of time, the exact time reference of Christ's coming and death.

Christ Jesus is the anointed one "cut off" in **Daniel 9:26**. In fact, "Christ" in Greek means "anointed." It's the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew "messiah" which means "anointed." Christ was cut off. Satan as able to smash Christ's heel, if you will—remember **Genesis 3:15**. But that's not the end of it.

After that followed the rise of a prince who destroyed the city of Jerusalem and its sanctuary, the temple. The Roman Empire and its emperor were the firstfruits of the coming antichrist who will rule and reign once the Restrainer is removed (**2 Thess 2:6–7**). These desolations were decreed ahead of time in the time of Daniel. We might even say, the desolations were decreed before the foundation of the world by God who knows the beginning from the end.

And then, there's **verse 27**, which I believe makes explicit reference to a seven-year period of tribulation still to come.

²⁷ And he [this prince to come... i.e., the antichrist] shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator."

Now this is a bit cryptic. I admit it. But that's the nature of prophecy, especially since we're dealing with something predicted hundreds of years before it occurs. But Jesus picks up on this language. And John the Revelator in the book of **Revelation** picks up on it too. And John speaks about a 42-month period or a 1,260-day period that coincides with the half of the week in **Daniel 9**.

Look at the chart here for a minute. Here we have multiple references to this seventieth week period, or more precisely, half of that seventieth week—three and a half years.

Reference	Expression	Description
Daniel 9:27	Last half of the week (3 ½ years)	The desolator on the wings of abominations
Daniel 7:25	Time, times, and half a time	Saints given into the ruler's hand
Daniel 12:7	Time, times, and half a time	Duration of shattering of holy people
Revelation 12:14	Time, times, and half a time	Woman (Israel) protected in wilderness
Revelation 11:3	1,260 days	Two witnesses prophesy
Revelation 12:6	1,260 days	Woman flees into wilderness
Revelation 11:2	42 months	Nations trample holy city
Revelation 13:5	42 months	The beast exercises authority

Those time sequences match: 1,260 days = 42 months = three and a half years. The one nuance to that is **Revelation 11:3**. That 1,260-day period is the same length of time as the others, but it cannot correspond to the other timeframes. And that's because the two witnesses who prophesy are put to death by the beast. It's actually the first reference to the beast (the antichrist) in **Revelation**. The antichrist kills these witnesses and the world celebrates. And this coincides with his great rise to power.

So when we piece this all together, we see two "three and a half year" periods. The seven-year period is broken up into two "three and a half year" segments. Both segments involve the outpouring of God's wrath. The

first three and a half years involve these two witnesses testifying to Christ. The second segment, after the killing of these witness and the abomination of desolation involves the rise and the reign of the antichrist.

Now one of the assumptions built into our eschatological understanding of **Daniel 9:27** is that these things *haven't* happened yet. **Some think they have. Some, especially within the postmillennial camp, see here accomplished references to the Roman Empire and the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in AD 70. I understand where those people are coming from.** And I'm not so sure that there aren't allusions to that here in Daniel but also in Jesus's words later.

And certainly, there is agreement among most evangelical Christians that Christ has come, and he has made atonement for sinners. **So the 69 weeks are in our rearview mirror.**

But that final week (the final seven of **Daniel 9**), is, in my estimation, *still to come*. There's a gap between the 69 weeks and the final week that we call "the church age" or the parenthesis. And the final seven years to come is the seven-year tribulational period that precedes the coming of Christ and the establishing of the millennial kingdom.

So that's how we put this all together. **Thank God for Daniel 9, and the wisdom that he gives us in this great book of the Bible.**

Write this down as #2 in your notes.

The Tribulation is a Future Time...

2) Of divine judgment on the **Gentile nations**
(Joel 3:1-2; Zeph 3:8; Zech 14:1-3; Rev 6:1-17; 11:18; 19:15)

Revelation 11:18 says, "The nations raged, but your wrath came." **In Revelation 19:15**, at the end of the tribulation, the sword coming out of Jesus's mouth strikes down the nations. That's the culmination of much divine judgment on Gentiles in the tribulational period.

Turn with me to the book of **Revelation** and let's see what the NT says about this. One of the reasons that we hold to a pretribulational rapture is because of the way that the wrath of God poured out on our world, as described in the book of **Revelation**.

And in **Revelation 6**, we have the beginning of this outpouring of God's wrath with the opening of what are called the seven seals. And notice, if you will in **6:1**, it's the Lamb of God who opens this seal and unleashes this wrath.

¹ Now I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, "Come!"

In **chapter 5 of Revelation**, there's all this bemoaning the fact that nobody was worthy to open the seals. Nobody was righteous and worthy of pouring out the wrath of God on the world. John wept over that! Except for the fact that there is one who was worthy. Christ, the lamb of God, is worthy. And Christ is willing.

And there is something *right* and *good* about God's wrath being poured out on the world. This is not displayed in the book of **Revelation** as a sorrowful thing. **"Oh, it's too bad God has to pour out his wrath."** No! This is displayed as *necessary* and *good*. People are clamoring for it!

And look down towards the end of **chapter 6 of Revelation**. Here's where the wrath of the Lamb is intensified against the people with the sixth of these seven seals. Look at **verse 12**.

¹² When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, ¹³ and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. ¹⁴ The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.

Something cataclysmic is happening here. This is unlike anything we've ever seen before.

¹⁵ Then the kings of the earth [**the Gentiles**] and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, ¹⁶ calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, ¹⁷ for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

This is a description of the eschatological day of the Lord that was prophesied in the OT (see **Joel 2-3**, **Zech 14**, et al). I believe that **Revelation 6** marks the beginning of this day of the Lord. And it marks the beginning of the seven-year tribulational period. This is the unleashing of God's wrath that was alluded to in several places in the NT too (**1 Thess 5:1-11**; **2 Thess 1:5-12**; **Matt 24:15-28**). This will be a terrifying ordeal for those Gentiles who are not raptured with the church.

But it's not just Gentiles. Write this down as a third statement about the tribulation.

The Tribulation is a Future Time...

3) Of divine discipline for **Israel** to bring her to **repentance**
(Jer 30:7; Dan 12:1; Zeph 1:16–18; Ezek 36:18–32; Mal 4:5–6; Zech 12:10–14; 13:8–9; Rom 11:25–27)

Jeremiah 30:7 speaks about a future time called “Jacob’s trouble.” Turn with me to the book of **Jeremiah**, and let’s take a look at this.

¹ The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: ² “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Write in a book all the words that I have spoken to you. ³ For behold, days² are coming, declares the Lord, when I will restore the fortunes of my people, Israel and Judah, says the Lord, and I will bring them back to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall take possession of it.” ⁴ These are the words that the Lord spoke concerning Israel and Judah: ⁵ “Thus says the Lord: We have heard a cry of panic, of terror, and no peace. ⁶ Ask now, and see, can a man bear a child? Why then do I see every man with his hands on his stomach like a woman in labor? Why has every face turned pale? ⁷ Alas! That day is so great there is none like it; it is a time of distress for Jacob; yet he shall be saved out of it.

Now Jeremiah’s prophecy here has both a near and a far fulfillment. This is another example of telescoped prophecy. Because the nation of Israel actually reconvened in the promise land after Jeremiah’s prophecy. They were taken into captivity in Babylon for seventy years. And then they returned albeit humbly in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah.

But **verse 7** alludes to something more cataclysmic than that.

⁷ Alas! That day is so great there is none like it; it is a time of distress for Jacob; yet he shall be saved out of it.

That’s a reference to something more than just Israel returning to the land 2,500 years ago. There is, I think, a far reference as well to the time of the end when the nation of Israel will be reconstituted in the Promised Land.

And they will eventually make a covenant with “the desolator.” Remember the language of **Daniel 9**? And they will be recipients of God’s wrath just like the Gentiles until they repent. And a remnant of those Jewish people will be saved out of the tribulation. In other words, they will be saved out of the outpouring of God’s wrath. **Zechariah 12:10** says that they will finally look on him whom they have pierced—Jesus! In **Romans 11**, Paul says that all Israel will be saved (**11:26–27**). Something in the tribulational period will bring about mass conversion among the Israelites! And this happens in spite of the wrath of God being poured out and the antichrist rising!

The clearest example of this “salvific work” in the book of **Revelation** is the 144,000 (see **7:1–8; 14:1–5**). These 144,000 will be converted to Christ. And they are sealed and protected in this tribulational period. Despite all the death that surrounds them, despite the pouring out of God’s wrath, and despite the execution of believers by the antichrist and the false prophet, there will be a preserved remnant of Israel. They will be a preserved remnant to enter into and populate the millennial kingdom.

And they’ll need preserving. Because, write this down as a fourth statement about the tribulation.

It’ll be a future time...

4) Of unprecedented human **suffering** in the **world**
(Matt 24:15–28; 1 Thess 5:1–11; 2 Thess 1:5–2:12; Rev 4–19)

² Charles H. Dyer, “Jeremiah,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1985), 1167–8: “Jeremiah’s use of ‘the days’ was significant because it described two different periods of time. The first “day” to which Jeremiah pointed was the day of destruction when God would judge Judah for her sin (cf. 5:18; 7:32; 9:25; 19:6). This day was fulfilled when Judah fell to Babylon. However, the second “day” to which Jeremiah pointed was a day of restoration when God will bring the nations of Judah and Israel into a new relationship with Him and when He will set straight His accounts with the Gentile nations (cf. 3:16, 18; 16:14; 23:5, 7, 20; 30:3, 24; 31:27, 29, 31, 33, 38; 33:14–16; 48:12, 47; 49:2, 39; 50:4, 20; 51:47, 52). This day has an eschatological perspective. It is the day when God will fulfill the blessings of restoration promised in Deuteronomy 30:1–10. However, as in all prophetic material one must keep in mind the principle of ‘foreshortening.’ That is, though Jeremiah saw all these predictions as one continuous series of events, they were fulfilled over a long period, with intervening gaps of time. Thus, for example, prophecies about the suffering Messiah and the ruling Messiah appear together though they describe two different Advents of Christ (e.g., Isa. 9:6–7; 61:1–2). In the same way Jeremiah described the restoration of Judah after the Babylonian Captivity and the still-future restoration of Judah within some of the same passages. Therefore one should be cautious in interpreting the various parts of Jeremiah’s predictions concerning “the coming days.”

This is why some of the views out there in the Christian world don't make sense to me. Yes, there have been terrible things that have happened in our world. **The twentieth century was the bloodiest century of all!** Yes, there have been atrocities and wars and tragedies that are absolutely horrific in our world. But when you read **Revelation 4–19**, that time period that precedes the second coming of Christ... **we haven't seen anything like that.**

And it's not just **Revelation**. Jesus speaks of the tribulational period too. Turn with me to **Matthew 24**. The disciples asked Jesus in **Matthew 24:3**, "What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" "**When's the end going to come, Jesus?**"

That question launches Jesus into his Olivet Discourse in the next two chapters (**Matt 24–25**). And Jesus gives some amazing specifics concerning his return starting in **verse 15**. And he links it to **Daniel 9**.

Look at **verse 15** with me. And let's put this all together.

¹⁵ "So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), ¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

I can just see the disciples getting excited at this point, now that they realize that Jesus is going to give them signs for the end of the world. But then he says cryptically, "**When you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel,**" that's your signal. "**What's exactly is that, Jesus? Could you flesh that out for us a little more?**"

This "abomination of desolation" (or "the abomination that makes desolate") is referenced by Daniel three times in his prophetic writings—**Daniel 9:27; 11:31 and 12:11**. Now the reference in **Daniel 11:31** is clearly a prophetic foretelling of an event that took place in 167 BC by a Syrian ruler named Antiochus IV or Antiochus Epiphanies.

After a humiliating defeat in Egypt, this Antiochus took his frustrations out on God's people. He profaned the temple by sacrificing a *pig* on the temple altar. **That's horrifying for a kosher society.** He also abolished burnt offerings and restricted Jewish practices like circumcision, Scripture-reading, and the celebration of Jewish feasts. Additionally, he erected an idol, a statue of Zeus, in the temple of the Lord. Each or all of these events Daniel prophesies as "an abomination that causes desolation."

But the other two references in Daniel to an abomination of desolation, **Daniel 9:27 and 12:11**, do not clearly coincide with the event involving Antiochus Epiphanies. This is another example of telescoping. Daniel's prophecies combine "near-future events" with "distant-future events." The near-future events are telescoped with the distant-future, so they look like the same event from Daniel's vantage point.

I say all this because I believe that Jesus's second coming will involve *another* "abomination of desolation," a future abomination that will immediately precede the second coming of Christ. Jesus says as much in **Matthew 24**.

Jesus never specifies in this passage what this future abomination will look like. It will probably resemble the abomination that took place in the time of Antiochus Epiphanies. **Now many scholars think that Jesus was describing here the destruction of the temple in AD 70 in these verses. That's possible, especially since the destruction of the temple was a catastrophic event involving the desecration of the temple. The Romans were excessively cruel towards the Jews and the people ran for their lives. Read Josephus on that. It's horrific!**

But I believe that Jesus is describing more than just the destruction of the temple in these verses. He's describing a future, end times' event, that correlates with Daniel's end times' prophecies. The abomination may resemble some of the events that took place in 167 BC with Antiochus Epiphanies and in AD 70 with the Roman Emperor Titus. But it will be *even more devastating* and traumatic for the Jewish people than those previous events. It may even involve a future temple in Jerusalem, as some have conjectured.

And Jesus tells his disciples, "**When you see this unspecified abomination of desolation, head for the hills.**" Look at **verse 16**.

¹⁶ then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

Get as far away from Jerusalem as you can!

¹⁷ Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, ¹⁸ and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak.

In other words, **“Don’t hesitate or look back! Don’t pull a Lot’s wife! Just take off running. Don’t go back for supplies. Don’t go back for a cloak. Just get going.”**

The cloak was especially important to Jews for travel. It was an expensive outer garment that would keep a person warm during cold weather. It could also be used as a pillow for sleep at night. It was unthinkable to travel or take off running without your outer cloak.

¹⁹And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! ²⁰Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath.

Travel is especially difficult on women who are nursing or pregnant, obviously. Jesus encourages the disciples (the Jewish people, at large?) to pray (whether pregnant or not) that their travel would not be impeded by winter weather or Sabbath.

Now this statement about Sabbath has tripped up a lot of people. They have wondered how the Sabbath could be such an obstacle at the end of the Christian era when Sabbath regulations were not observed.

But what’s interesting is that a lot of “Sabbath regulations” have been enforced in Israel since it became a nation again in 1948. As a matter of fact the Israeli airline “El Al” does not land or take off from Israel on Saturdays. You can’t get a flight in and out of Tel Aviv with El Al on Saturdays. Also train and bus services are limited on Saturday. So you can imagine how difficult it would be to escape from Israel during a time of impending persecution.

You might ask, **“Why will everyone be trying to get out of Judea? What’s the sense of urgency?”** Well the answer to that is found in the following verses. Because this *great abomination* is followed by *great tribulation*.

²¹For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.

Not just “a great tribulation” but “great tribulation.” This is that three and a half years that immediately precedes the second coming of Christ. God will allow, for a short time period, Satan to persecute and oppress his people.

And all of this is recorded in **Revelation 4–19**. This world is going to get bad... really, really, bad. It’ll get worse before it gets better. That’s clear in **Revelation**.

But when it gets better (**Rev 20–22**) it’s going to be fantastic. It’ll be seven years of absolute misery, the last three and a half being especially bad. But then it’ll be a thousand years of Christ reigning in peace followed by the new heavens, new earth, and New Jerusalem.

Look at **verse 22**.

²²And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

These days are cut short so that the elect aren’t forced to suffer more than they can bear.³ After reading the extensive suffering that the people of God endure in the book of **Revelation**, you begin to wonder if anyone will survive it. Everyone is dying! There is judgment after judgment unleashed upon the earth. And the antichrist is killing people everywhere. The death and devastation are immense.

But thankfully God cuts it short. This “great tribulation” is a short and unrelenting season of suffering. Yet in the grand scheme of things, it’s only a speck of time—just 42 months.

Look at **verse 22**.

²³Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. ²⁴For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. ²⁵See, I have told you beforehand. ²⁶So, if they say to you, ‘Look, he is in the wilderness,’ do not go out. If they say, ‘Look, he is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it.

Wildernesses and inner rooms were notorious locations for false messiahs, even in the time of Jesus, in the first century world. Inner rooms are secret haunts where people gather to follow some clandestine messiah, like a cult. Jesus is warning the people to watch out for these kinds of charlatans, even if they are wonder-workers.

Let me say it this way—in the tribulational period, there will be Joseph Smiths and David Koreshes everywhere. And some of them (**unlike David Koresh**) will be able to do demonically-induced signs and wonders that blur the lines between the spiritual and the natural world. And these false messiahs will mesmerize the crowds. Jesus says, **“watch out for that!”**

³ *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 1173.

This great deception will include, but will not be limited to, the activities of the antichrist. Jesus said there will be many false christs and false messiahs at this time, not just one. But eventually, one particular false messiah will emerge. The book of **Revelation** tells us that the second beast, the false prophet, will use “signs” to deceive people into worshipping the first beast, the antichrist (**Rev 13:13–14; 16:13–14; 19:20**).

Jesus says in **verse 25**, “See, I have told you beforehand.” **“Pay attention. Be vigilant. Don’t be bamboozled by these guys. This is not the second coming of Christ.”**

“Well, okay Jesus, what is, then?” What is your second coming?

²⁷ *For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.*

Jesus’s second coming will be absolutely unmistakable. That’s what Jesus is saying here! It’ll be like lightning that lights up the sky from east to west. It’ll be visible and powerful and obvious to the entire world! **It won’t be some guy cloistered in some secret location telling people, “Hey I’ve got a secret... I’m the Messiah!”** It’s not going to be like that. It’ll be *obvious*. It’ll be *conspicuous*. It’ll be *instantly recognizable*, this coming of the Son of Man. Think **Revelation 19!**

²⁸ *Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.*

It will be as public and obvious as the circling of vultures over a dead and putrefying carcass. The coming of the Son of man will be *unambiguous*.

So, that’s the tribulation! This is what’s to come after the rapture and before the millennium.

Now before we conclude. Let’s take a closer look at this tribulation which is described in detail in Revelation 4–19. We don’t have time to go verse-by-verse through that section of the NT. I’ll have to save that for another time. But let’s fly over this section of Scripture in a helicopter and assess the main features of the text. I’ll give you seven.

And to that you might ask why just Revelation 4–19? What makes that section so special?

Well the book of Revelation is given a clear structure in the first chapter of the book. The angel tells John to “Write therefore [(1)] the things that you have seen, [(2)] those that are and [(3)] those that are to take place after this” (1:19).

(1) Chapter 1 records the things that John has “seen.”

(2) The statement concerning the church is the things “that are.” That involves chapters 2 and 3 with reference to the seven churches.

(3) And the things that “are to take place after this” are chapters 4 and following. That’s why in Revelation 4:1, a voice tells John, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.” After the church, if you will.

And as we’ve seen already, Revelation 20 is a description of the millennial kingdom. And Revelation 21–22 describe the eternal state. So you have statements about the church (or the churches) in Revelation 2–3. And you have the millennial kingdom in Revelation 20. What’s in between the church and the millennial kingdom? The seven-year tribulation! Hence, Revelation 4–19.

So, with that understanding in mind, write these down.

Seven Characteristics of the Seven-Year Tribulation (Rev 4–19):

1) God’s **wrath** will be poured out in **waves**

First, there are the seven *seals* (**Rev 6:1–8:1**). Then there are the seven *trumpets* (**Rev 8:2–11:19**). And then, there are the seven angels with seven plagues, also called the seven *bowls* (**Rev 16:1–21**). God’s judgment will come upon the earth in wave after wave after wave. And these judgments will escalate. The world, as I understand it, will be sent back to the stone age by the time these seven years are completed. And just when it couldn’t get any worse for God’s enemies, Christ will return in glory in **Revelation 19**.

As an example of this escalation throughout the tribulation. The worst of the seven seals is what we’ve seen already in **chapter 6** when people run and hide in caves (**6:15–17**). That’s the sixth seal.

The worst of the seven trumpets is probably the sixth as well where in **Revelation 9:15**, a third of mankind is killed. However the fifth trumpet, before that, which involves demonic torment that feels like scorpion stings, is no picnic either (**9:3–11**). It says that people will want to die because this torture is so bad, but they won’t be allowed to (**9:6**). That’s gruesome! And by the way, we’ve never seen anything like this. We’ve seen tribulation. But nothing like this. This is still to come.

The worst of the bowl judgments is probably the seventh which produces the worst earthquake in history (16:18). And as part of this, there will be great hailstones that weigh about a hundred pounds each falling from the sky at this time (16:21). **If you thought the hail that fell on Egypt during the plagues was bad, you ain't seen nothing yet. And this hailstorm is global. It's not just localized in Egypt.**

And that seventh bowl signals the completion of God's wrath in **Revelation 16**. And it sets up the dramatic showdown between "the unholy trinity" (antichrist, false prophet, and Satan) in Babylon and Christ (see **Rev 17–19**).

Speaking of the antichrist, here's a second characteristic of the tribulation.

2) The antichrist will **rise** and **rule**

Turn with me, if you would, to **Revelation 13**. Let's examine this text.

When you read **Revelation 4–19**, there's this wild juxtaposition. There is concurrently the pouring out of God's wrath on our world and the rise of a wicked, God-defying ruler. **And you might think to yourself, wouldn't the pouring out of God's wrath cause people to turn to God and repent? No, not really. Some do. Most don't.**

Which is not really that surprising if you are familiar with the rest of the Scriptures. And I think this is especially true in the tribulation because there is widespread deceit and delusion among humanity. And in the pretrib view, the church is gone! The church has been raptured. And the Spirit's work through the church is gone. So that's part of the reason that rebellion and deceit are so widespread.

I heard a political commentator say once that he just can't wait till the church is less influential in our world. He can't wait until the voice of Christians to be silenced in our world. Careful what you wish for!

Now in terms of the antichrist, this is something that's been burgeoning for centuries. The spirit of the antichrist has been active since the beginning of the church age according to **1 and 2 John** (see **1 John 2:18; 4:3; 2 John 7**). But as we saw last week, the removal of the Restraint makes it possible for a human, antichrist figure to emerge. This is the man of lawlessness from **2 Thessalonians (2 Thess 2:3–7)**. This is the desolator from **Daniel 9 (9:27)**. This is the beast described in **Revelation**.

And the beast is differentiated from Satan. The beast is not Satan. But he is satanic. He's a satanically induced and empowered world leader.

I was talking about this yesterday with Alastair. And he asked me, "Do you think the antichrist will be an A.I. bot that takes over the world?" It was an interesting question. But my answer to him was, "No. The antichrist will be a real human being, empowered by Satan." Could he use A.I. technology and other technology as part of his rise to power? Sure. I don't know why not. But I hesitate to speculate.

And by the way, let me get something off my chest. I get really annoyed by all these Christians running around saying, "That guy's the antichrist!" Or "That lady's the antichrist! I just know it!"

Look, my view is that we, as the church, are going to be long gone before the rise of the antichrist. So how would we know now who he is? So calm down, everybody! Let's be more shrewd than that. Don't give fuel to that fire, to people who are running around "chicken-little-ing other" Christians.

Here's what **Revelation 13** says. Remember now, this is in the seven-year period, and we, the church have been raptured. Look at **verse 1**.

¹ And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. ² And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon [**Satan**] gave his power and his throne and great authority. ³ One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast. ⁴ And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?" ⁵ And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months.

There's that reference to 42 months or 1,260 days or three and a half years. Something happens at the halfway point of the seven years that propels this antichrist into a place of unrestrained power and authority. **Daniel 9:27** said that "on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate."

Some have suggested that the temple in Jerusalem is rebuilt and the antichrist makes an offering there to himself or maybe even to Satan. That *doesn't* sound farfetched to me when you put these texts from **Daniel**,

Revelation, and others together. And that's not unlike what we see with Antiochus Epiphanes in the OT. That precursor to the antichrist sacrificed a pig on the altar in Jerusalem. He set up an idol to Zeus in the temple! That was called an abomination that causes desolation. That, in my mind, was a precursor to what the true and better Antiochus Epiphaneas, the antichrist, does in the tribulation.

Here's a third characteristic of the tribulation.

3) There will be global **activity** and **distress**

Now we've already talked about the global distress that comes about through the wrath of God poured out on the world. That's clearly presented in **Revelation**. But part of that also involves the empowering of the antichrist. He, as you can imagine, makes our world worse than ever.

Look at **Revelation 13:6**.

⁶ It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. ⁷ Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, ⁸ and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain. ⁹ If anyone has an ear, let him hear: ¹⁰ If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

Part of this "global activity and distress" is the work of the false prophet who is likewise empowered by Satan. Here's a fourth characteristic of the tribulation.

4) There will be global **deception** through the false **prophet**

John calls this "false prophet" a second beast. Look at **Revelation 13, verse 11**.

¹¹ Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. ¹² It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. ¹³ It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, ¹⁴ and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. ¹⁵ And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain. ¹⁶ Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, ¹⁷ so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. ¹⁸ This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.

So, in the tribulational period, whoever doesn't receive this number on the right hand or the forehead will be unable to buy and sell. The Christians who turn to Christ during this time, both Jews and Gentiles (**more on that in a second**), are impoverished and excluded from the global economy. They have to survive in a time of great plight. And most of them die. That's why we have actual martyrs of the tribulation mentioned in the book of **Revelation** (see **6:9–11; 7:13–14**).

As I understand it, these seven years of tribulation will be unpleasant from start to finish. But the last three and a half years, the 42 months at the end, will be especially unpleasant for Christians and non-Christians alike. This is what Jesus described as the "great tribulation" (**Matt 24:21**).

Here's a fifth characteristic of the tribulation.

5) The midpoint will be the **abomination** of **desolation**

I'll be quick with this one, because I've already alluded to it in **Daniel 9**. This is the event that takes place in the middle of the seven years. Whatever that event was, it dramatically escalated the power of the antichrist in our world. And it was a great blasphemy against the Lord.

Now people see that clearly in **Daniel 9**. But it's harder to identify in **Revelation**. Probably the event in **Revelation 13:15** is what correlates.

¹⁴ and by the signs that it [the false prophet] is allowed to work in the presence of the beast [the antichrist] it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. ¹⁵ And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain.

Now there have been extensive speculations as to what this is—the image of the beast being made to speak. I hesitate to speculate. But whatever this is, this is probably that which is described in **Daniel 9:27** as the abomination that causes desolation in the middle of the seventieth week.

Notice too, that the antichrist is wounded. He's wounded by a sword. Again, this is a human being! This is a demonically empowered human being, but he is still able to receive wounds. But that wound doesn't kill him. Not yet! Jesus will take care of that at his second coming!

Here's a sixth characteristic of the tribulation.

6) Many people will be **saved** and **martyred**

Some will be saved and *not* martyred. They will go right on into the millennium. But many will be *saved and martyred*.

As God's wrath is poured out in the tribulation, the majority of the people's hearts will be hardened. **Revelation 9:20** says, that the people not killed by plagues will not repent. They will instead worship demons and idols. And as part of that, the outpouring of God's wrath may give rise to the one-world leader we call the antichrist. The people will pursue him and embrace his deception rather than repent and submit to the Lord.

But there will also be salvations during this time. I mentioned already the two witnesses who will be miraculously preserved during the first three and a half years of the tribulation (**Rev 11:3–12**). They testify to Christ, and they are put to death by the antichrist when he rises to power. Additionally the antichrist makes war with "the saints" to overcome them (**Rev 13:7**). Who are those saints? Maybe these are people converted by the ministry of the two witnesses.

We also have reference to a number of people who trust Christ and become believers during this time. There are those who don't take the mark of the beast, the infamous "666" (**Rev 13:16–17**). There are those who are martyred during this time and cry out for vengeance (**Rev 6:9–11**). **Revelation 14:13** says "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord" during this time.

If you are a posttribber, you see this as those in the church who are killed during the tribulation. If you are a pretribber, these are those who are saved after the rapture of the church. Again, the two witnesses may figure prominently in these mass conversions.

You also have the mysterious 144,000 Jews who are protected during this time (**Rev 7:1–8; 14:1–5**). These people are shielded from God's wrath and they are shielded from antichrist and death. They are at least some of those who survive the tribulation and populate the millennium (**Rev 20:4–6**).

As we've seen already, everyone who populates the millennium is a believer. Everyone else is dead. But in the millennium after centuries of procreation, some of the children of those who first populate the millennium join in Satan's rebellion at the end of the millennium (**Rev 20:7–9**).

Also, you have this interesting statement concerning "the ones coming out of the great tribulation" in **Revelation 7:9–14**. This is worth quoting in full.

John says starting in **chapter 7, verse 9**. I'm going to read all the way to **verse 14**.

⁹ After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" ¹¹ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." ¹³ Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" ¹⁴ I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

And notice if you will, this *great* multitude coming out of the *great* tribulation includes people from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. So it's not just Jews saved in the tribulation, it's Gentiles too.

And these martyred saints *aren't* brokenhearted about dying! They go right into the throne room of God and start worshipping the Lord. "Yeah, I died in the tribulation. Whatever! Let's worship God!"

So, many people will be saved and martyred in the tribulation, Jews and Gentiles both. And finally, here's a seventh characteristic of the tribulation.

7) It culminates in the **return** of **Christ**

I know we're examining **Revelation 4–19**, but let's finish by turning to **Matthew 24**. Let's let the Lord Jesus have the last word on this matter.

If you remember, we started this series in **Revelation 19** weeks ago. We saw Jesus coming down from heaven riding on a white horse. He had a sword coming out of his mouth. He had King of Kings and Lord of Lords tattooed on his thighs. That's definitely the end of the tribulation. From then on out it's Christ reigning over the earth—reigning during the millennium (**Rev 20**) and then reigning during the eternal state (**Rev 21–22**).

Coincidentally, that's not the only time that Jesus's return is described in the NT. Look at **Matthew 24:29**.

²⁹ *"Immediately after the tribulation of those days*

Interesting turn of phrase by Jesus here, right? "The tribulation of those days!" It's almost like Jesus anticipated a future tribulational period!

²⁹ *"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ³⁰ Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, 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. ³¹ And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*

This is Jesus's version in **Matthew 24** of what John records in **Revelation 19**. Jesus's return is unmistakable, visible, and global!

When you read the Bible, one of the most hilarious statements in the Bible is 2 Thessalonians 2 where there were people going around saying that the Day of the Lord has already happened. It's like chicken little got loose in Thessalonica and people are saying, "It's already over. We missed it." And Paul has to reassure them, "No, no, no. It hasn't happened yet. Trust me. It's going to get much worse before it gets better."

And then there were these people in Ephesus that were saying that the resurrection of the dead has already happened, and the church missed it (see 2 Tim 2:18). And Paul's like, "No, no, no. You haven't missed it. Trust me, no one has missed it. It's still to come."

And then are those who say in our day, "**Christ has already come!**" Are you sure? Cause I don't remember this! I don't remember **Matthew 24** taking place!

Or "**Christ isn't coming again.**" Or, this is especially popular, "**Christ is coming back again in our hearts! It's just in our hearts.**" No. No. No. No! Christ *is* coming back again. It's going to be cosmic. It's going to be visible. It's going to be bodily. It's going to be unmistakable. **Matthew 24. Revelation 19. Nobody is going to miss it... especially not the enemies of Christ.**

So make sure you are on the right side of that at his return. Make sure you are on his side at his return. Amen, pray with me.

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