

**Great Tribulation**  
**Matthew 24:9—28**

With the Tribulation looming, Jesus was giving the Disciples the information they would need to come through the Tribulation without wavering and be the help and encouragement that the Little Flock of believers would need. Obviously the prophesied Tribulation did not happen because this Age of Grace was introduced through the Apostle Paul. Once this age comes to a close at the Rapture of the saints, everything Jesus told the Disciples will now apply to those who will be going into the Tribulation. After the Rapture the world will be devoid of any believers and it seems that it will be at this time that God sends the Two Witnesses to earth to call sinners to repentance and baptism, the same message that Peter preached in early Acts called the Gospel of the Kingdom (Matthew 24:14). These Two Witnesses will be stoned to death at the midpoint of the Tribulation (Revelation 11:3—11) but will be brought back to life.

In answering the Disciple's questions about the end times, Jesus lays out Tribulational events. He warns them not to worry when they see wars and rumors of wars or when kingdoms are fighting. He says that earthquakes and famine will come but the end is not yet come (Matthew 24:9—14). However, when they see the Abomination of Desolation (Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14; Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11) then they will know that the end is near. The last 3.5 years of the Tribulation is called the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:21) and indicates an intense time of suffering and distress, days of vengeance (Luke 21:22) for Israel and the world. The Abomination of Desolation is also tied to the time that Jerusalem will be surrounded by armies (Luke 21:20; 19:43).

According to Luke 21:22 all these things are to happen in fulfillment of prophecy. This obviously means that these are things that have been written about in the Old Testament and will be fulfilled during this time of Tribulation. We are now living in a time of Mystery. This age was not revealed to mankind until God revealed it through the Apostle Paul. According to Ephesians 3:8 the message Paul preached is unsearchable meaning it cannot be traced back into the Old Testament. His message was a new, unannounced message of Grace. We are not living in a prophetic age and therefore we are not seeing the fulfillment of any prophecy that has been given to Israel.

The Great Tribulation will last for half of the Tribulation, a total of 1260 days (Revelation 12:6). Most of the book of Revelation concentrates on this last half of the Tribulation and dovetails with many Old Testament books of prophecy and with Matthew, Mark and Luke.

People interpret the book of Revelation in many different ways. Some allegorize the whole book making it a book of symbols that we need to interpret in light of our current situation. This system will cause the book of Revelation to change in its meaning depending upon current feelings or experiences. This is often done because of particular belief systems that will not allow a literal interpretation including Roman Catholics, Lutherans and many Covenants.

I believe that Revelation is meant to be interpreted literally when at all possible. There are obvious prophetic pictures, symbols and figures of speech used throughout Scripture but they all relate to some concrete, literal interpretation. We understand these in our everyday life. "Break a leg," "I have an hour to kill," "It's raining cats and dogs," "falling in love," "one foot in the grave," "kicked the bucket," and "eats like a bird" are all very common figures of speech that cannot be taken literally. However, they have a very literal meaning behind them and we understand that when we communicate. Revelation is written in this manner with concrete, literal meanings behind the symbolic language.

### **Linear seals, trumpets and bowls**

The most prevalent way dispensationalists interpret Revelation is to see the seal, trumpet and bowl judgments as being poured out on the earth in a linear progression. First the seven seals then the seven trumpets and finally ending with the seven bowls. The seventh seal reveals the trumpets and the seventh trumpet reveals the bowls. This seems to be the natural way to understand his book from our point of view. With this view, Revelation 6:12 marks the middle of the Tribulation when everything intensifies and the beginning of the Great Tribulation has begun.

### **Parallel seals, trumpets and bowls**

Another but much less common view of Revelation is to understand that the seals, trumpets and bowls are different views covering the same period of time. The seals are a summary of the entire Tribulation while the trumpets and bowls each give different details about the last half of the Tribulation.

This is consistent with the way John writes. Instead of writing in a linear manner (the type of logic we're use to) John writes in a circular manner. As he circles around two or three thoughts, he moves forward in his thinking by adding details and additional thoughts. When we try to apply linear reasoning to circular writing it becomes more difficult to understand the true meaning.

One clue that supports this idea is at seal 6 in Revelation 6:12—17. A careful reading shows that when it is opened that there will be a great earthquake, the sun will become black, the moon will become like blood and the stars of the sky will also fall from the sky. Matthew 24:29—31 likens these events to the time just after the Tribulation at the Second Coming.

Revelation 6:14 continues with the sky splitting apart. Verse 16 makes it clear that it is split when Christ comes to earth. As men are watching and experiencing this they hide themselves in caves hoping that the rocks will fall on them to hide them from the One who sits on the throne (the Father) and from the wrath of the Lamb (the Son). They are so fearful because they see Christ at His Second Coming.

The Old Testament is also loaded with references that support the sixth seal as being the Second Coming. The great earthquake is found in Isaiah 2:10, 17—19, 21; Isaiah 13:6—13; Joel 3:15—16; Zechariah 14:4—7 and Matthew 24:29. The sun becomes black in Isaiah 13:6—13; Joel 3:15—16; Zechariah 14:4—7 and Matthew 24:29. The stars falling to the earth in Matthew 24:29. The sky split apart in Isaiah 34:1—4. Men terrified and hiding in caves in Isaiah 2:10, 17—19, 21. These all related to that great day of wrath or the day of the Lord.

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