

# THE SEALS AND THE SAINTS

## Summary and Historical Background

Chapter 6 begins the seven-year Tribulation section of Revelation and it will conclude with chapter 19. The seven-year Tribulation corresponds to Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week of years (Dan 9:27). Revelation 6-19 reveals two distinctive facts. First, there are three major groups of judgments: the seals (6), the trumpets (8-9) and the bowls or vials (16) with seven judgments in each group. Second, there are a number of insets after these groups of judgments that tell of other important activities and events that are happening during these judgments.

A problem of interpretation concerns the timing of the three groups of seven judgments. Do they occur simultaneously so all the judgments happen at one time when Christ returns to earth? Or, are the seal judgments the same as the trumpet judgments and the bowl judgments? Or, do these three groups of judgments occur successively so that the seals judgments come first, then the trumpets and finally the bowls? Since there is clear evidence of progression in the judgments, it is certain that they occur successively.

First, successive evidence is found within the seven judgments of each group. There are ordinal numbers, i.e., "first seal," "second seal," "third seal," "first angel," "second angel," etc. A numbering system indicates progression. Then a natural progression of the events is seen in the trumpet judgments. The last three trumpets also are called woes and it is stated that one woe is past and two more are coming (Rev. 9:12); later it is written that two woes are past and third one is coming (Rev 11:14). This clearly shows progression. Also notice progression in the bowl judgments where the first bowl speaks of a painful sore inflicting the people in the beast's kingdom (16:2) and the fifth bowl says that these members are blaspheming God because of the pain they are suffering from these sores (16:11). When all the judgments of the seventh bowl are finished, a great voice will shout, "It is done" (16:17).

Second, there is a sequential presentation of each series: first the seals (Rev. 6), then the trumpets (Rev. 8-9), and finally, the bowls (Rev. 16) with relevant information given that separates each series.

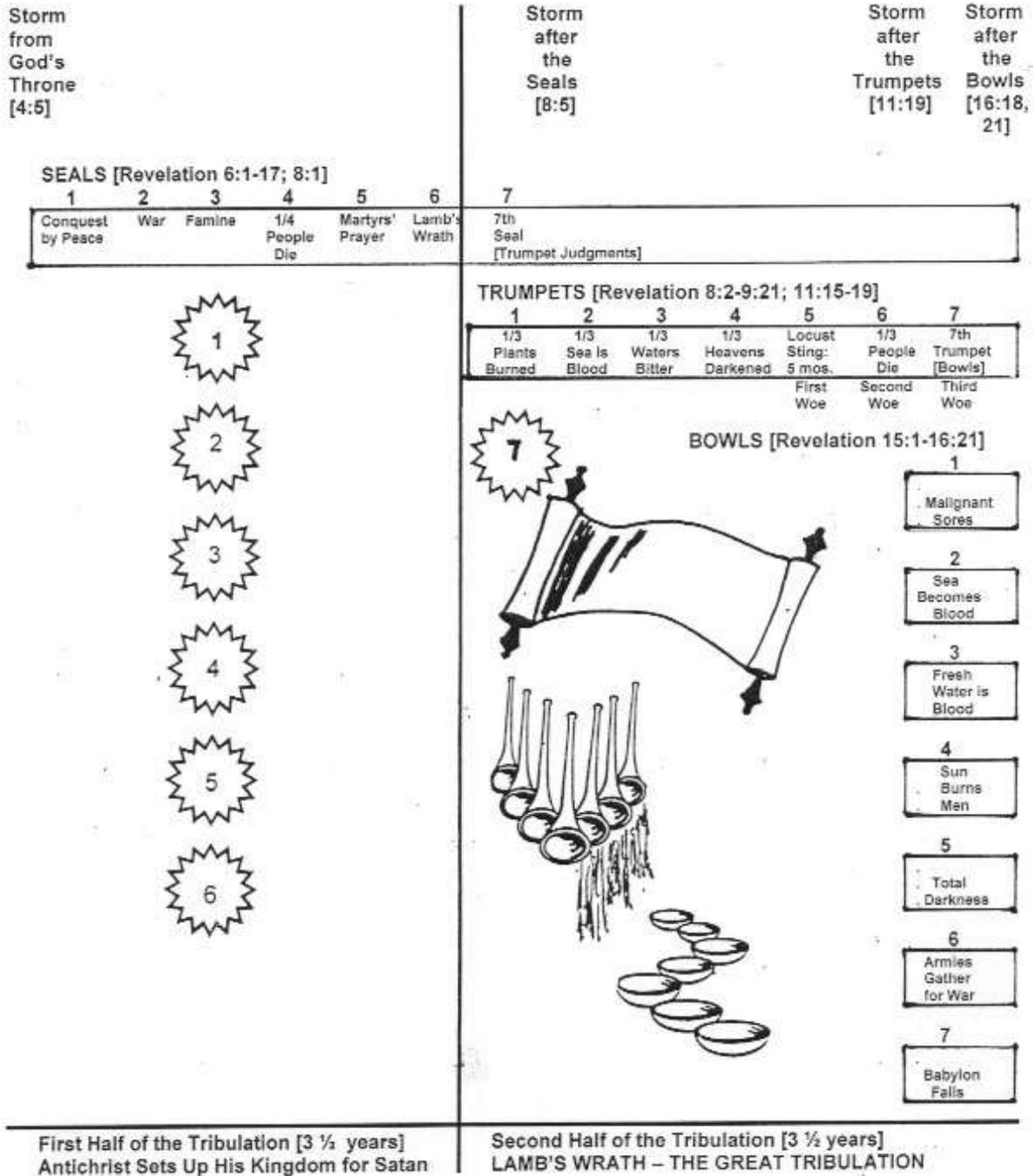
Third, there is no judgment found in the seventh seal or in the seventh trumpet, so how is this explained? The judgment of the seventh seal has all the judgments of seven trumpets (8:1-2) and the seventh trumpet has all the judgments of the seven bowls (11:14-19; 15:5-8). Since the seventh seal is the final seal on the scroll, all the judgments of the trumpets and the bowls relate to it. The progression of judgments explains why no apparent judgments are given to the seventh seal and seventh trumpet.

Fourth, there is an increase in the severity of the judgments as they progress from the first seal to the seventh seal, which includes the trumpet and bowl judgments. To make the judgments of the seals, trumpets and bowls simultaneous, it denies the mercy of God in giving sinners an opportunity to repent while He increases the intensity of the judgments in its dreadfulness.

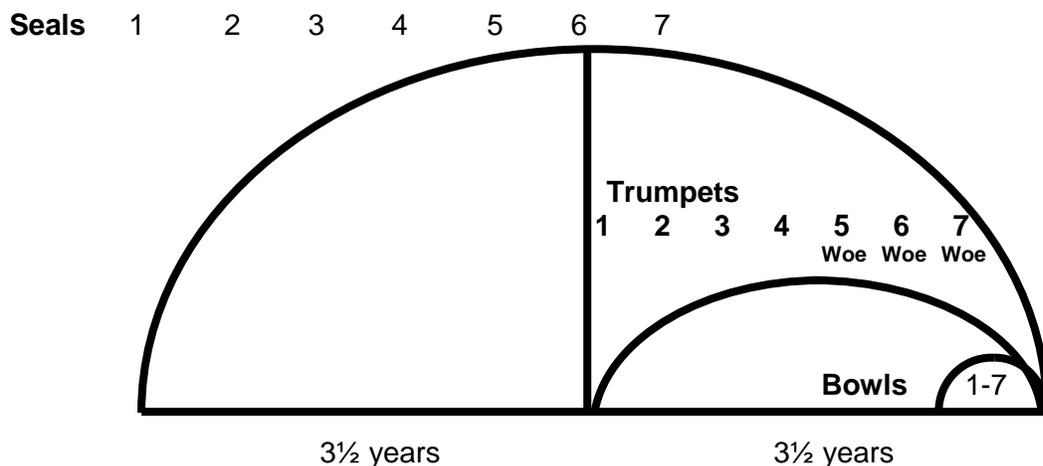
Fifth, the nature of the judgments shows progression. The first seal refers to Antichrist as he begins to establish his kingdom (6:2), while the last bowl refers to the destruction of his kingdom (16:17-21).

Therefore, it is clear that the three groups of judgments follow each other. However, the groups are connected, like a telescope. Each group is distinct, yet they are connected: the seventh seal includes all of the trumpet judgments while the seventh trumpet includes all of the bowl judgments. Since the seventh seal contains all of the trumpet judgments, it also contains all of the bowl judgments.

PROGRESSION OF JUDGMENTS UNDER THE SEALS, TRUMPETS AND BOWLS



The seven seals of God's wrath protect the title deed of the earth from Satan so he cannot change it and make himself the heir of the earth and the permanent king of its people. As Christ breaks the seals, the wrath of God is poured out on Satan and his kingdom. The intensity of God's wrath increases as each seal is broken until the seventh seal is broken and the scroll is open to show that Christ is the true heir of the earth and He is the rightful King of its people. Then Satan's kingdom under Antichrist is shredded.



Insets. The insets give background information that helps the reader to understand God's total operation during the Tribulation. There are three sets of insets. The **first set** (Rev 7) reveals God's grace in two ways after the sixth seal is opened. One, God seals 144,000 Israelites, and two, He saves a multitude of Gentiles from all nations. The **second set** (Rev 10-14) begins with the mighty angel that reveals God's sovereign control of the Tribulation events, which is followed by Antichrist's evil activities during the last half of the Tribulation and closes with a series of events promising that God will be victorious. This information "sets the stage" for the bowl judgments which will destroy Antichrist's kingdom (15-16). The **third set** (Rev 17:1-19:10) gives more detail about the destruction of Babylon, the religious, economical and political aspects of Antichrist's kingdom. The fall of Babylon will cause great rejoicing in Heaven. Then Christ will return at the end of the Tribulation to destroy Antichrist's army, cast him and the False Prophet into the Lake of fire and imprison Satan in the abyss (bottomless pit) so He can establish His Millennial Kingdom in righteousness (Rev 19:11- 20:6).

Purposes. One purpose of the Tribulation is to enable Christ to break Satan's tenacious hold on the earth as the place for his kingdom. When Adam yielded to Satan's temptation and ate of the forbidden tree, he was conquered by Satan and he took control of the earth. Jesus paid the penalty for that sin and all sins emanating from it when He died on the cross. Then on the very day that His Father raised Him from the dead, He promised His Son that He would rule all nations as His heritage (Ps 2:7-9; Acts 13:33-34).

A second purpose of the Tribulation is the conversion of Israel. Even though Jesus Christ defeated Satan on the cross by paying for the sins of Israel (and the whole world), God will not allow His Son to claim His heritage until Israel is willing to receive Him as her Savior and Messiah. When Israel makes a peace covenant with Antichrist for seven years, He will give His Son permission to begin the seven-year Tribulation. The first six seals represent the judgments that come upon the earth during the first half of the Tribulation when Antichrist is protecting Israel, but this will change in the middle of the Tribulation. Antichrist will break his covenant with Israel and will attempt to destroy every Jew. This will "set the stage" for Christ's supernatural judgments during the second half of the Tribulation. The combination of Christ's judgments and Antichrist's attempt to destroy the Jews will bring Israel's leaders to repentance toward Jesus Christ and they will be cleansed (Zech 12:10-13:1).

Christ's judgments on Antichrist's kingdom will end Satan's rule of the earth. Israel's repentance and Satan's defeat will allow Jesus Christ to set up His Kingdom and He will govern the earth on behalf of His Father for one thousand years.

Another purpose of the Tribulation will show the grace and mercy of God in saving those who will repent and come to Him during the Tribulation (Rev 7:9-17; 12:13-17; 14:13; 20:4; cf. Mt 25:31-40). The Church will be taken to Heaven in the Rapture before the Tribulation, but God's grace and mercy will continue to save souls through the Gospel of Jesus Christ during the Tribulation.

## I. The Seals of the Tribulation – 6:1-17

### A. First Seal: Deceit – 6:1-2

6:1 – The Lamb is the only one worthy to open the seals on the scroll and He breaks the first seal – cf. 5:1-7. As a result there is the noise of thunder. Thunder announces the approach of a storm. This storm will come from the throne of God (cf 4:5). It is the first judgment of God's wrath against rebellious sinners during the Tribulation. Then one of the four living beings that John saw close to the throne of God called out, "Come and see." Some Greek texts do not have the words, "and see." It is either an invitation for John to come and see what is about to happen, or it a command for the white horse and its rider to come forth and begin the first judgment.

6:2 – The first four seals deal with horses and relate to events perpetrated by Antichrist. It is important to interpret the clear statements in these visions first and then proceed to the less clear. The rider in seal one cannot be identified as Christ (cf. 19:11) for several reasons even though both riders are on white horses. First, Christ's reign will not bring prolonged war, famine and death as does the rider in this chapter. Second, Scripture presents Christ as riding a white horse at the conclusion of the judgments (Rev. 19:11), not at the beginning of the judgments. Third, He is pictured as the Lamb in the court of heaven breaking these seals, not on the earth. Fourth, this rider only has a crown of a victor (*stephanos*) while Christ will wear the crowns of a sovereign (diadems; Rev. 19:12). This horseman is best identified as Antichrist who will come in the name of Christ to deceive the Jews (Mt. 24:5; 2 Thess. 2:3-12).

The weapon of this rider is a bow, a weapon of war, but no arrow is mentioned. It may suggest that his blasphemy against God (Dan 7:8; 11:36) will be no less caustic against national leaders. Some will surrender to his threats without a battle. He will uproot three larger horns, i.e., conquer three larger kings (Dan. 7:8, 20, 24) and seven other kings will surrender to him, bringing ten kings under his control (Rev 17:12-13). He will develop a minor political nation (a little horn) into a major power before the Tribulation so that he will gain the trust of the Jews. They will make a seven-year treaty with him to protect them from their enemies (Dan. 7:8, 25; 9:27; Mt 24:5-6). A victor's crown (*stephanos*) is given to him for his conquests. It is a symbolic crown, like the wreath given to victorious athletes at the Greek Olympics.

He will go forth conquering and will continue to conquer. This refers to his progressive military victories. He will rise to world power, but at a great cost of lives, which is the subject of the next three seals.

### B. Second Seal: Destruction – 6:3-4

6:3-4 – When Christ, the Lamb of God, breaks the second seal, a second living being gives his invitation or command to come (cf. 6:1). The second horse was red, which symbolizes bloodshed. Antichrist will begin with political negotiations for peace (1 Thess. 5:3), but that will not give him world power. When peaceful negotiations lose their effectiveness, Antichrist will turn to war (Mt. 24: 6-8). He will change his tactics from deceitful words to a deliberate war to be the most powerful ruler of the world. He will use his great military ability to accomplish his purposes. A great sword is given to him, which is a way of saying that he will cause great bloodshed through the battles that he initiates through his army.

But war invites opposition. Ezekiel and Daniel give some important details about a war against Israel, Antichrist's ally, during the first part of the Tribulation (Ezk 38-39; Dan 11:40-12:1). This is at the same time as the bloody war under the second seal. To stop Antichrist's aggression, it appears a coalition of nations that hate Israel is formed at this time, led by the king of the north. The king of the north and some of his allies will attack Israel, Antichrist's ally, and they will win the battle. This is probably the time when Antichrist is killed by the sword (Rev 13:12, 14). Then the king of the north will go down to Egypt to plunder it, where he is joined by two more of his allies. While in Egypt, he hears bad news that makes

him tremble. Did he learn that the foe he had killed, Antichrist, had come back to life? He has no choice, but to fight in Israel once again. This time he is killed by God. This will open the way for Antichrist to rule the whole world. More about this will be revealed in chapter 13.

### C. Third Seal: Dearth – 6:5-6

6:5 – When the third seal is broken, a third living being gives his invitation or command to come (cf. 6:1) and a black horse comes on the scene. This horse represents the suffering due to the famine and starvation that are the natural consequences of war (Jer. 14:2-6; Lam. 4:8-9; Ezek. 4:16-17).

The rider on the black horse has a pair of balances in his hand. A balance was used for weighing commodities and indicates that food will be rationed because of its scarcity. Antichrist will control the distribution of food in his part of the world. This will be necessary because his military will have first claim to men, money and food. The surest way of controlling people is to control their food. Antichrist will ration food because the wars have destroyed many crops and his armies need a large share of the food.

6:6 – A voice from the midst of the living beings tells how devastating the famine will be. A measure (*choenix*, a little less than a quart) of wheat will be worth a *denarius*, a day's wages for a common laborer in New Testament times (Mt. 20:2, 9). A common laborer will have to work one whole day for one quart of wheat, which will barely keep him alive. He could get three quarts of barley for a day's wages, but barley was not as nutritious as wheat. A man will be able to choose one meal of wheat each day or a couple of meals of barely. He could eat more barley, but it was an inferior grain to eat. Those with children will need to share their sparse amount of food with them. Oil and wine are staple foods for an ordinary meal, but they were forbidden to hurt the oil and wine. They could not even consider using these commodities. The price of grain will exhaust a man's earnings so that he will not be able to buy other necessities. Only the rich will be able to buy oil and wine during this famine.

### D. Fourth Seal: Death – 6:7-8

6:7 – When the fourth seal is broken, the fourth and final living being issues the word to come.

6:8 – This horse is a yellowish-green horse, the color of a corpse. The rider's name is Death, which is the logical progression from the previous seals. Hell (*hades*), the place of the dead, follows with him. This judgment represents wholesale death, which will be accomplished by four means: (1) the sword, a symbol of war; (2) hunger, caused by natural and forced famines; (3) death, caused by the pestilence of rampant disease associated with war; (4) beasts, wild animals that will devour people in search of food.

Antichrist's empire, which commenced with peaceful negotiations, will suddenly turn into a massive graveyard. One-fourth of the earth's population will die. If there are seven billion people on earth, it means 1,750,000,000 people will die. This is equal to all the people that live in North and South America and all of Europe, including all of Russia and Turkey. This is difficult to imagine, but this is just the beginning of judgments (cf. Mt. 24:7-8). No one can offer lasting peace except the Lord Jesus Christ. He has promised to establish permanent peace when He sets up His Kingdom on the earth (Jer. 23:3-8).

### E. Fifth Seal: Disciples – 6:9-11

6:9 – When Christ broke the fifth seal, the scene returns to Heaven where John saw under the altar the souls of martyred believers. The altar was the golden altar that burned the incense, which symbolized the believers' prayers ascending to God (cf 8:3-5; 9:13). These believers are martyred sometime during the breaking of the first four seals and their murderers were still alive (6:10). The reason for their martyrdom was their loyalty to the Word of God, even the testimony of Christ. The "and" (*kai*) should be translated "even," which occurs between the Word of God and testimony (cf Rev 1:2, 9). This translation of "*kai*" defines the Word of God. It was their steadfast testimony of Jesus Christ that caused their death.

6:10 – The martyrs cry out with a loud voice asking God how long He will wait to avenge their blood on those who dwell on the earth. They put their request in the form of a question instead of a demand, because they respect His sovereignty. They call Him, Lord (*despotes*), a title referring to His absolute power. They also describe Him as "holy and true." He is holy and cannot tolerate sin; He is true and will

avenge their blood. The ones who “dwell on the earth” is a technical term in Revelation for the unbelievers. Most of them are loyal followers of Antichrist and passionately hate the followers of Jesus Christ (cf notes for Rev 3:10). They are the ones that caused their death. The martyrs request to avenge their blood agrees with God’s holy hatred for wicked men that are set in their sin.

6:11 – God responds to their request in two ways. First, He gives them white robes as a reward for their faithfulness. The white robes indicate that they are true believers. Second, He tells them to rest for a little longer until the full number of believers is martyred. Many believers will be martyred during the last half of the Tribulation, when Antichrist rules the world (Rev 7:9-14; 12:12; 13:4-7). His promise to avenge their blood in due time is the judgment of the fifth seal (6:11). The suffering of God’s saints will accomplish His purpose.

#### **F. Sixth Seal: Doomsday – 6:12-17**

**1. Sinners’ Calamity – 6:12-14.** When Christ broke the sixth seal on the scroll, five catastrophic events will strike terror in the hearts of rebellious men. One, a great earthquake will terrorize them (cf. Mt. 24:7). There will be two more earthquakes later in the Tribulation (11:13; 16:18-19). Two, the sun will be blackened. This darkness will make them realize that God is judging them for their sin. Three, the moon will become as blood, an eerie appearance in the night sky. This may be caused by the dust, debris and smoke that rise into the atmosphere after the strong earthquake. Four, the stars of heaven will fall on the earth. John used the simile of a fig tree that would drop its unripe figs in a mighty wind to describe the appearance of these falling stars. This will be a meteor shower that will strike the earth. In line with the other judgments, these meteors will have a destructive effect, creating panic in the hearts of the people. Five, the heavens will depart as a scroll when it is rolled together. This will leave the notion that the heavens are breaking up and the universe is coming to an end. Six, every mountain and island will be moved out of their places. Probably a hyperbolic statement to indicate that many mountains and islands will be disturbed—possibly by the earthquake. These will cause significant geological changes.

**2. Sinners’ Cry – 6:15-16.** The cosmic and geologic upheavals will strike terror in the hearts of God’s enemies from kings to slaves. Instead of repenting, however, these sinful men will attempt to hide from the presence of God in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They will cry out to the mountains and rocks to fall on them and hide them from the face of God and the wrath of the Lamb. They would rather die than repent.

**3. Sinners’ Conclusion – 6:17.** These unbelievers sense that the day of God’s wrath has come and no human will be able to stand against Him and His Son. In one sense they are right. Unbelievers will not be able to stand against them. The end of the world has come for them. In another sense they are wrong. Believers, who repent of their sins and trust in the Lamb’s sacrifice to remove their sins, will stand with God and the Lamb when their wrath is poured out on sinners. The earth will not come to an end for them. Christ will establish His Kingdom on the earth for 1000 years and believers will be in it.

Many Jews and Gentiles will be saved after the Rapture of the Church. The next chapter will reveal that 144,000 Jews will stand with Christ in the day of His wrath (7:1-8) and a great multitude of Gentiles from all nations will stand with Him as well (7:9-17). Many believers will be martyred, but some will live through these days of wrath and will enter into the Kingdom of Christ in their natural bodies (Mt 25:32-40).

The six seals will be opened during the first half of the Tribulation. It is a time when God’s wrath is poured out on the earth through the wars started by Antichrist. One-fourth of the world’s population will die as a result of his wars. The seventh seal will be broken at the middle of the Tribulation and then God will intensify His wrath against Antichrist’s kingdom. This wrath is described in chapters 8-19.

<b>PROGRESSION OF THE JUDGMENTS: THE SEALS</b>																													
<p>Storm from God's Throne [4:5]</p> <p><b>SEAL JUDGMENTS [Revelation 6:1-17; 8:1]</b></p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Conquest by Threats</td><td>War</td><td>Famine</td><td>1/4 People Die</td><td>Martyrs' Prayer</td><td>Lamb's Wrath</td><td>7th Seal</td> </tr> </table>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Conquest by Threats	War	Famine	1/4 People Die	Martyrs' Prayer	Lamb's Wrath	7th Seal	<p>Storm after the Seals [8:5]</p> <p>Storm after the Trumpets [11:19]</p> <p>Storm after the Bowls [16:18, 21]</p> <p>[Trumpet Judgments and Bowl Judgments]</p> <p><b>TRUMPETS JUDGMENTS [Revelation 8:2-9:21; 11:15-19]</b></p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1/3 Plants Burned</td><td>1/3 Sea is Blood</td><td>1/3 Waters Bitter</td><td>1/3 Heavens Darkened</td><td>Locust Sting: 5 mos.</td><td>1/3 People Die</td><td>7th Trumpet [Bowls]</td> </tr> </table> <p>1<sup>st</sup> Woe 2<sup>nd</sup> Woe 3<sup>rd</sup> Woe</p>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1/3 Plants Burned	1/3 Sea is Blood	1/3 Waters Bitter	1/3 Heavens Darkened	Locust Sting: 5 mos.	1/3 People Die	7th Trumpet [Bowls]
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<p style="text-align: center;"><b>SEAL JUDGMENTS</b> [Revelation 6:1-17; 8:1-6]</p> <p>1<sup>st</sup> SEAL: White Horse: Antichrist Conquers By Threats (6:1-2)</p> <p>2<sup>nd</sup> SEAL: Red Horse: Great War Destroys Peace (6:3-4)</p> <p>3<sup>rd</sup> SEAL: Black Horse: Great War Brings Famine (6:5-6)</p> <p>4<sup>th</sup> SEAL: Pale Green Horse: One Fourth of the People on Earth Die (6:7-8)</p> <p>5<sup>th</sup> SEAL: Martyrs Pray for God to Judge Antichrist (6:9-12)</p> <p>6<sup>th</sup> SEAL: Lamb's Wrath Is Prepared for Antichrist's Kingdom (6:12-17)</p> <p>7<sup>th</sup> SEAL: Are the Trumpet Judgments (8:1-6)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>BOWL JUDGMENTS</b> [Revelation 15:1-16:21]</p> <table style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: right; padding-right: 10px;">1</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;">Malignant Sores</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right; padding-right: 10px;">2</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;">Sea Becomes Blood</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right; padding-right: 10px;">3</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;">Fresh Water Becomes Blood</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right; padding-right: 10px;">4</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;">Sun Burns People</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right; padding-right: 10px;">5</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;">Total Darkness</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right; padding-right: 10px;">6</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;">Armies Gather For War</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right; padding-right: 10px;">7</td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;">Babylon Falls</td> </tr> </table>	1	Malignant Sores	2	Sea Becomes Blood	3	Fresh Water Becomes Blood	4	Sun Burns People	5	Total Darkness	6	Armies Gather For War	7	Babylon Falls														
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<p>First Half of the Tribulation [3 ½ Years] Israel Trusts Antichrist for Help, Not Christ</p>	<p>Second Half of the Tribulation [3 ½ Years] LAMB'S WRATH is on Antichrist's Kingdom: Great Trib.</p>																												

Some events that will take place near the middle of the Tribulation give a divine backdrop for the display of God's wrath in the next chapters and ends when Christ casts Antichrist into the Lake of Fire. The bloody war that kills one-fourth of the people on earth during the first half of the Tribulation plus the five catastrophes of the sixth seal will make unbelievers think that the world is coming to an end. They know that they cannot overcome the wrath of God and of the Lamb in their own strength. Those that refuse to repent will look to Satan as their only hope for victory. First, there is good evidence that Antichrist is killed by the king of the north (Russia?) when he attacks Israel and is victorious (Ezk 38:8-16; Dan 11:40-41; Rev 13:12, 14). Second, Satan is desperate keep control of the earth, so he attacks Heaven (to destroy Christ?), but he is defeated and is cast down to earth (Rev 12:7-9). Now he is full of wrath, knowing that he has only a short time to work out a plan to defeat Christ during the last 3½ years of the Tribulation. Third, he brings Antichrist up from the abyss (with God's permission) to serve him (Rev 11:7; 12:17-13:1; 13:3, 12, 14; 17:8). Satan possesses Antichrist and gives him his power and authority to make an all-out attempt to stop Christ from gaining control of the earth during the last half of the Tribulation (Rev 13:2, 5). Fourth, after the king of the north attacks Israel, he plunders Egypt of her riches. It is there that he hears devastating news north and east of Egypt, which is Israel. The news he hears must be the return of Antichrist to life. He is trapped in Egypt, so he returns to Israel to fight another battle, but this time he and his allies are destroyed (Dan 11:43-12:1; Ezk 38:18-39:5). Fifth, Antichrist apparently takes control of the countries destroyed by God, which are rich in oil, and makes his capital in Babylon, Iraq. Babylon is the focal point of God's attack during the second half of the Tribulation until it falls (Rev 14:8; 18:2, 10, 21). Sixth, when Antichrist takes control of the Middle East, he breaks his covenant with Israel and attempts to destroy Israel so Christ cannot come to Jerusalem to rule the world as His Father promised in Psalm 2:6. Seventh, the world will worship Satan and Antichrist for 42 months (Rev 13:3-5). An image of Antichrist will be set up in the temple of God for people to worship him. Those who do not worship him will be killed; those who do will receive his mark so they can buy and sell. He will control the world's economy (by his control of oil and by his army). Eighth, two witnesses for God will resist Antichrist during the last half of the Tribulation (Rev 11:3). Ninth, 144,000 Israelites are sealed for protection from Satan and Antichrist as they witness for God and the Lamb during the last half of the Tribulation (Rev 7 and 14).

## II. The Saints of the Tribulation – 7:1-17

This chapter provides two insets, which reveal the grace of God in two ways during the second half of the Tribulation. It reveals that 144,000 Israelites are sealed by God so they do not suffer martyrdom and it tells of a great multitude of Gentiles rejoicing before God for their salvation, who do suffer martyrdom.

### A. Defended Saints – 7:1-8

#### 1. Interval in God's judgments – 7:1-3

7:1 – The first inset begins with four angels standing at the four corners of the earth holding back the four winds of the earth. The repetition of "four" speaks of a universal factor. The four corners of the earth refer to the whole earth, i.e., north, south, east and west, not to a flat earth with four corners. It is a figure of speech. The four winds refer to the divine storm that will come upon the whole earth during the last half of the Tribulation (Rev 4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18-21). The four angels are holding back this storm of judgment until permission is given to release it.

7:2-3 – A fifth angel appears, having the seal of the living God. He commands the four angels not to hurt the earth, the sea or the trees until the servants of God are sealed. God's judgments on the earth, sea and trees will occur when the first three trumpets are blown (8:7-11). The seal is the name of the Father and of the Lamb and it is written on the servants' foreheads (14:1). The seal shows that God owns them and He will protect them from Antichrist's persecution of Jews. When Antichrist breaks his covenant with Israel in the middle of the Tribulation (Dan 9:27), he will be possessed of Satan to make an all-out war against God and His people, the Jewish nation (Rev 12:6, 17).

## 2. Identity of the Sealed Witnesses – 7:4-8

7:4 – God seals 144,000 Israelites, 12,000 from each of the tribes of Israel, except Dan (Levi replaces Dan). These will be bold witnesses for God (Rev 12:17). He will protect the sealed Israelites from the destructive winds of His wrath and from Satan's attacks to kill every Israelite that keeps the commandments of God and testifies for Jesus Christ. A great number of Israelites will trust Christ and be cleansed (Zech 12:10- 13:1). Many of these will be martyred (12:11; 13:15), but the sealed Israelites will not be killed. What would be the sense of the seal, if they could be killed by Antichrist? They will be spared to continue their bold witness for Christ to the end of the Tribulation. It appears that the sealed Israelites will draw many Gentiles to confess faith in Christ as well. Satan will kill many of these converts (cf 7:9-17; 13:15). After the Tribulation, the sealed witnesses will meet with Christ on Mount Zion and enter His Kingdom in their natural bodies (14:1).

7:5-8 – There are three problems indicated in the enumeration of the tribes. First, Levi is considered among the twelve tribes. This is not normal because their priestly functions separated them from the other twelve. Second, the tribe of Dan is omitted. Two reasons are offered for this. One, Dan allowed the worship of a golden calf in its city of Dan (1 Kgs. 12:28-29). Two, many rabbis have taught that Antichrist would come from the tribe of Dan (Gen 49:16f). Third, Joseph is mentioned instead of Ephraim. Joseph usually constitutes both Ephraim and Manasseh, but here only Ephraim. Some believe Ephraim's name was omitted because that tribe allowed the worship of a second golden calf in its city of Bethel (1 Kgs 12:28-29).

At any rate, Scripture is clear that both Ephraim and Dan will have an inheritance in the Millennial Kingdom (cf. Ezk. 48:1, 5). These Scriptures clearly indicate that God has not cast away His people; He has a future program for Israel (Rom. 11:1ff). Dan, however, will have no part in the 144,000 who witness for Christ during the Tribulation when many Israelites and Gentiles are saved.

### B. Distressed Saints – 7:9-17

#### 1. Identification of the Gentiles – 7:9

7:9 – There is another group in this chapter that is distinct from the 144,000 (7:1-8). Notice these contrasts. (1) Instead of 144,000, this group is simply called a great multitude, which no man could number. (2) Instead of being gathered from one of the 12 tribes of Israel, this group is gathered from all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, which shows they are Gentiles. (3) Instead of standing on earth, this group is standing before the throne of God in Heaven.

Since they are wearing white robes, they are saved—saved Gentiles. Since they have palm branches in their hands, they are ready to celebrate the rule of Christ in His Millennial Kingdom on earth. Palm branches were a symbol of Christ's Kingdom. They were used to make booths in the Feast of Tabernacles, which is a type of the Millennial Kingdom.

#### 2. Their adoration – 7:10-12

7:10-12 – The Gentile martyrs praise God and the Lamb for their salvation from sin and persecution. Their praise causes the angels, the elders and the four living beings to fall on their faces and worship God, telling Him that He is worthy of blessing (praise), glory (splendor), wisdom, thanksgiving, honor (esteem), power (supremacy) and might (strength). This doxology is bracketed with "Amen," (so be it).

#### 3. Their origination – 7:13-14

7:13-14 – An elder asks John two questions of these martyrs: Who are they? Where did they come from?

When John did not know the answer, the elder said that they come out of the Great Tribulation. This is the last 3½ years of the Tribulation (cf. Dan. 12:1; Jer. 30:7; Mt. 24:21-22). These are not Church saints, because Church saints will be saved from this hour of God's wrath (1 Th. 1:10; 5:9-11; Rev. 3:10). These Gentile martyrs will be saved during the Tribulation, probably through the witness of the 144,000. Their robes are washed in the blood of the Lamb and made white. Antichrist killed these Gentile believers, but he will not be able to kill all believers in the short amount of time that he has. Some will enter the Kingdom without dying (Dt 30:1-9; Mt. 25:14-40). After the Tribulation these martyrs will be resurrected with the Old Testament saints to enter Christ's Kingdom (Dan. 12:12-13; Rev. 20:4, 6).

#### 4. Their recompense – 7:15-17

7:15-16 – For the faithfulness of these martyrs, they will be permitted to come before the throne of God and will serve Him day and night in His temple. Three blessings are given to them. (1) God will dwell among them. (2) They will never hunger or thirst anymore. (3) They will not suffer from the sun or any other heat.

7:17 – These three blessings are provided by the Lamb, who is in the midst of the throne. He will feed them and lead them to the living springs of water (cf Ps 23:2). Water was a significant part of the celebration at the Feast of Tabernacles; water is a symbol of the Holy Spirit (Jn 7:2, 37-39). All of the trials and tests of the Tribulation will forever be removed and replaced with the sufficiency of Christ. All tears will be wiped from their eyes. This is a marvelous illustration of the grace of God that saves sinners that repent against the backdrop of His judgment that destroys sinners that rebel.

#### 144,000 ISRAELITES SEALED

Revelation 7:1-8



#### MULTITUDES OF GENTILES MARTYRED

Revelation 7:9-17