

# The Tribulation - How Long?

Many Bible reading Christians have long believed in a three and a half year tribulation. Some have believed that the church would be taken to a place of safety during those years, at the end of which those alive in the church would be changed to spirit and rise up to meet with Jesus Christ and the resurrected dead in Christ, in the clouds, before returning with Christ to help establish His Kingdom, here on the earth.

Daniel the prophet was given a great deal of information about the last days, but he said he did not understand. Daniel 12:8 "I heard but I understood not". A generation has passed since some of us gained our understanding of end-time events. Now God is revealing a deeper understanding of those events through the keeping of His true calendar which determines the Holy Days Jesus Christ kept, rather than the Hebrew Calendar kept today by the Jews, and this may indeed indicate that we have entered into that last generation (cf Matthew 24:34 "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place." , Daniel 12:9 'And he said, "Go *your way*, Daniel, for the words *are* closed up and sealed till the time of the end.').

In Daniel 9:27 we see mentioned a period of time called a week. In the middle of the week "he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease." Daniel 12:11 shows that from then to the end, the return of Christ to establish His Kingdom, is 3½ years + 30 days. We can work out from this that the whole week must be in the region of seven 7 years.

The last 3½ year period is mentioned many times in the Bible, but the significant point is that it is preceded by the sealing of the servants of God (Revelation 7:3, "saying, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.") by which they are preserved from the opening of the 7<sup>th</sup> seal, with it's 7 trumpet plagues (Revelation 8) soon after to be poured out upon the earth.

The church is also pictured as a woman in Revelation 12:14 ' But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.' Only a part of God's people are protected by being taken "into her place" for 3½ years. A remnant is left behind who go through the Great Tribulation - Revelation 12:17 'And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.' Matthew 24:21 "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."

If the saints are sealed in the middle of the week and thereby protected somewhere for 3½ years from the plagues of the 7<sup>th</sup> seal, we can conclude that seals 1-6 must occur before the last 3½ years, and last a roughly equal amount of time, 3½ years, making a total of 7 years for the whole seven seals !

In Matthew 24 Jesus' disciples asked, "What shall be the sign of thy coming and the end of the [age] " v3. Jesus then gave them a list of events that would reveal that the end of the age had arrived and His return was imminent. He went on to say - verses 33-34, "So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you. This generation [the one that sees these events take place] shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled."

Did you get that ? All these events will take place inside one generation, not over thousands of years!

That backs up what we learned from Daniel and Revelation, and now we can examine the first six seals so that we will recognise them when they commence!

**1<sup>st</sup> Seal** - Revelation 6:2-3, '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. When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come and see."

The true gospel of Jesus Christ returning to rule here on the earth (the gospel of the Kingdom of God) has not yet gone out to all the world. So far we have seen only a false gospel **about** Jesus Christ published but this will change , Matthew 24:14 "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."

Luke 21:8 adds that this event takes place when "the time draweth near", ie in that last generation! That same gospel message is described in Revelation 14:6-7 but here we are also told there that it occurs at " the hour of his judgment", - at the very end of the age! All this tells us that we have yet to see the start of the first seal!

**2<sup>nd</sup> Seal** - Revelation 6:3-4 '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.'

There is a great world-wide war to come, which will follow on the preaching of the true gospel, during which all the events leading up to Christ's return will be explained to the world. It is the "wars and rumours of wars" of Matthew 24:6.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Seal** - Revelation 6:5-6, '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." Famine follows this war as a direct result.

**4<sup>th</sup> Seal** - Revelation 6:7-8, 'When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come and see." 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.' Death quickly follows for ¼ of the world's population from violence, hunger, disease and wild beasts, as civilization breaks down worldwide.

Never have we seen such worldwide tragedy and death on such a huge scale from such a horrifying series of events, but there is more to come!

**5<sup>th</sup> Seal** Revelation 6:9-11, '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.'

Matthew 24:9-10 "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."

This worldwide persecution of the saints takes place at a time of betrayal and apostasy in the church , 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 'Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition,'

**6<sup>th</sup> Seal** Revelation 6:12-17, '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. 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. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. 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, 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! "For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

Matthew 24:29, "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 heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

Revelation 14:15, 'And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, "Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe."

Matthew explains that this event follows "the tribulation of those days" ie the previous 5 seals, all coming over some 3½ years or so, as the scriptures reveal.

This is the **return of Christ** for the firstfruit harvest of His saints. He comes in the clouds and his angels gather the saints to him (Matthew 24:30-31) while mankind hides in fear from the sight of Christ on His throne, (Revelation 6:16) because they remember the warnings they were given with the true gospel, about the coming wrath of God. Revelation 14:18-19 'And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, "Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe." So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw *it* into the great winepress of the wrath of God. 'This is the event we also read of in Rev 12:14 ' But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.'

In the symbolism of the Holy Days, which picture God's Plan, this event is pictured by the firstfruit barley harvest, which takes place in Israel from Passover to Pentecost some six months before the Feats of Trumpets. So there would indeed be about 3½ years between Christ arriving to claim his firstfruit harvest, and his final return with the saints some 3½ years later to establish His rule here on the earth!

These events come suddenly!

Matthew 24:42, "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.

Luke 21:34-35, "But 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.'

1 Thessalonians 5:2-3, ' For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. 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.'

Matthew 24:37-39, "But as the days of Noah *were*, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be "For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, "and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.'

Which other end time event arrives suddenly and with great impact?

Revelation 18:2,8,10

2 'And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!'

8 "Therefore her plagues will come in one day—death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong *is* the Lord God who judges her.

10 "standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.'

Look to our article entitled What is Babylon? To find out what and where the biblical 'Babylon' is today.

Now you can learn from the Bible when this great event will take place, an event so enormous that it will trigger "the tribulation of those days", the awesome events of the first 6 seals which see the destruction of one quarter of the worlds population.

None of us can escape this tribulation, for it takes place some three years before the 6<sup>th</sup> seal. We can only prepare for it by making sure we are right with God, Psalm 91:3-11

' Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler  
And from the perilous pestilence.

4 He shall cover you with His feathers,  
And under His wings you shall take refuge;  
His truth *shall be your* shield and buckler.

5 You shall not be afraid of the terror by night,  
Nor of the arrow *that* flies by day,  
6 Nor of the pestilence *that* walks in darkness,  
Nor of the destruction *that* lays waste at noonday.

7 A thousand may fall at your side,  
And ten thousand at your right hand;  
But it shall not come near you.

8 Only with your eyes shall you look,  
And see the reward of the wicked.

9 Because you have made the LORD, *who is* my refuge,  
Even the Most High, your dwelling place,

10 No evil shall befall you,  
Nor shall any plague come near your dwelling;

11 For He shall give His angels charge over you,  
To keep you in all your ways.'

The only sign that it is about to come is found in Revelation 14:6-8 'Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people— saying with a loud voice, "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water." And another angel followed, saying, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication."

It is immediately preceded by the preaching of the gospel to all nations! We don't know exactly how this will happen, but it will be unmistakable when it does.

Many of God's people have become complacent, thinking that the events of the last 3½ years, starting with those events around Jerusalem (Daniel 12:11) will give them plenty of time to put themselves right with God. If they are here on the earth to see those events take place, it will be because they have been left behind (Revelation 12:17) after Christ came for His firstfruit harvest at the sixth seal, when, because they were expecting to see the events of the last 3½ years first, they were caught totally unprepared. (Matthew 25:1-13).

Most will pay with their lives for their error, in the Great Tribulation, Revelation 3:17-18 "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked — "I counsel you to buy from Me **gold refined in the fire**, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see."

The answer then, in conclusion, is that the tribulation covers the whole 7 seals. The first six seals (the tribulation of those days, Matthew 24:29) last roughly 3½ years. The Great tribulation, or 7<sup>th</sup> seal, lasts about another 3½ years - 7 years in total.

To find out where Christ takes those firstfruits - to a place specifically named in the Bible, and what major event they take part in there, read our soon coming article "The Sea of Glass".