

CHAPTER 40: Revelation 6 thru 12

Through John's vision we observed the Rapture take place. The saints of God have been transported up to heaven just prior to the Tribulation. So then, who does this leave on the earth? Unbelievers, those who had rejected Jesus. Satan and his army of demons also remain behind. With the saints of God, Jesus's Church removed, the Holy Spirit no longer restrains the forces of darkness. The godless are free to practice any manner of evil they can imagine. John sees a world in utter turmoil. Immorality is everywhere. Evil is out of control. The evil intentions of sinful humanity threaten to destroy the world. Thus begins the 7-year period known as the Great Tribulation.

I looked on when the Lamb [Jesus] opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a thunderous voice, "Come!" (Revelation 6:1) Immediately John hears hoof beats of a horse and we are introduced to the first of the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse." **So I looked, and here came a white horse! The one who rode it had a bow, and he was given a crown, and as a conqueror he rode out to conquer.** (Revelation 6:2) Who is this? Could this be Jesus? NO. This is NOT Jesus, but a false messiah. This is the person who will later be referred to in the story as "the antichrist." He bursts victoriously onto the scene in the guise of bringing peace on earth and good will toward men. He gains popularity with a message of peace. But woe to all those who follow him!

The second seal is broken and the command, "Come" rings out once more. **And another horse, fiery red, came out, and the one who rode it was granted permission to take peace from the earth, so that people would butcher one another, and he was given a huge sword.** (Revelation 6:4) This red horse is symbolic of war and bloodshed. The so-called peace of the first rider is short-lived. This second rider carries a large sword in his hand as he prepares to wage war. Yeah, so much for peace!

The third seal is broken. Again John hears the command, "Come." **So I looked, and here came a black horse! The one who rode it had a balance scale in his hand.** (Revelation 6:5) This black horse represents widespread death that will result from a famine over the entire earth. Food shortages will be so severe that the price of food skyrockets to eight times the normal price. And you thought inflation was bad now!

The fourth seal is broken and the last summons, "Come" rings out. A pale green horse, the color of death, gallops onto the scene. **So I looked and here came a pale green horse! The name of the one who rode it was Death, and Hades followed right behind. They were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill its**

population with the sword, famine, and disease, and by the wild animals of the earth. (Revelation 6:8)

Think about something. At the Rapture, when the saints of God departed the earth they left behind everything including their Bibles. This means the Gospel message is still accessible. Unsaved family members, friends and work associates recall the testimonies they heard from the now departed saints. Christian websites, television and radio programs are still in operation (at least for a while). Many of the people left behind realize what has taken place and are convicted of their lost sinful state. They recognize their need for a Savior and call out to God. We refer to these brand new believers as the "Tribulation saints." They can pick up any Bible, thumb through it and find the book of Revelation. There they will be able to read what is happening in their world on a daily basis. It's as though they are reading tomorrow's newspaper today! These Tribulation saints are living out the very prophecies they're reading! But life for them is difficult. They're a small minority in a totally godless society. Many of these dear Tribulation saints will become martyrs for their faith.

The fifth seal is opened. **Now when the Lamb opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been violently killed because of the word of God and because of the testimony they had given.** (Revelation 6:9) The souls of the Tribulation martyrs in heaven cry out, **"How long, Sovereign Master, holy and true, before you judge those who live on the earth and avenge our blood?" Each of them was given a long white robe and they were told to rest for a little longer, until the full number was reached of both their fellow servants and their brothers who were going to be killed just as they had been.** (Revelation 6:10-11) Judgment IS coming. But it will take place in GOD'S time. For now God extends His grace and patiently waits for millions of lost people to be saved. He will certainly get their attention.

The sixth seal is broken and natural catastrophes begin to take place. Everything is shaken. People panic as God's judgment is unleashed upon the earth. The whole cosmos responds to His wrath. There are massive earthquakes and meteor showers. The sun appears as black. The moon turns blood red. The explosions and fires produce a glow in the sky. God's terrible judgment on mankind does not discriminate. Everyone is affected. Masses of people flee into the mountains fearing the end of the world is near. But, alas, there appears to be no evidence of repentance.

They said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of the One who is seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, because the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to withstand it?" (Revelation 6:16-17) This is quite interesting. Most of mankind evidently believes in God, but they reject Him. They would rather die than face God's wrath. So far things are pretty awful during the Tribulation period. And they will only get worse!

Right in the middle of all this chaos we observe four angels putting a temporary hold on God's judgment against the world. **After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth so no wind could blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree.** (Revelation 7:1) A quiet stillness settles over the earth. This intermission of peace is eerily similar to the tranquility in the eye of a hurricane. It's just a brief interlude of peace. An angel announces the reason for this divine timeout: **"Do not damage the earth or the sea or the trees until we have put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God."** (Revelation 7:3) God is going to place His mark on the foreheads of the Tribulation saints. This will identify them as belonging to Him.

One particular group of people who receives God's mark is no strangers to us. **Now I heard the number of those who were marked with the seal, one hundred and forty-four thousand, sealed from all the tribes of the people of Israel.** (Revelation 7:4) Then each tribe of Israel is mentioned – 12 thousand from each tribe are sealed. These are God's covenant people, the Jews. During one last great revival on the earth many Jews come to faith in Jesus Christ. They recognize Jesus as their Messiah. They become God's primary evangelists during the Tribulation period. Through God's Old Testament prophets He promised to rescue His people, to lead many to righteousness (Daniel 12). He promised He would pour out His spirit on His people in the last days (Joel 2). Centuries have passed with these promised still unfulfilled – until now. God keeps His promise to His covenant people. **HE REDEEMS ISRAEL!**

But the Jews aren't the only ones who get saved during this great revival. There are also many Gentile converts! Consider the throng of saints worshipping God around His throne. **After these things I looked, and here was an enormous crowd that no one could count, made up of persons from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb dressed in long white robes, and with palm branches in their hands. They were shouting out in a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God, to the one seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!"** (Revelation 7:9-10)

These are Tribulation saints who have recently been martyred. They are from all nations, tribes and people. Along with the angels the martyred saints praise their awesome and mighty God who continues to extend His great mercy and grace even during this terrible time.

As John watches this scene play out he is asked a question by one of the 24 elders. **Then one of the elders asked me, "These dressed in long white robes – who are they and where have they come from?"** (Revelation 7:13) This elder is referring to the large group they have been observing worshipping God. But John has

no idea who they are. **So I said to him, “My lord, you know the answer.” Then he said to me, “These are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb!”**

(Revelation 7:14) One can only imagine the terrible ordeal this group experienced. The elder assures John that God **will shepherd them and lead them to springs of living water and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes.** (Revelation 7:17)

The seventh seal is opened. Now when the Lamb opened the seventh seal there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. (Revelation 8:1) All heaven is aware of what is about to be unleashed on earth. Despite the great revival that has just taken place, the vast majority of people on earth continue in their rejection of God’s Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. So overwhelming is the thought of God’s terrible wrath that the perpetual praise and worship of millions that John saw earlier STOPS. This period of silence is the calm before the storm.

So far we have seen the seven seals being opened. We have seen a lot of judgment on the earth. There has also been a great revival. Now come the trumpet judgments... **Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.** (Revelation 8:2) These are archangels, high ranking angels. Each one is handed a trumpet to be sounded at God’s command. These announce even more judgments upon the earth.

Another “angel” enters the scene. The intercessory prayers of the saints on earth, those saved during the Tribulation, are released. Like billows of smoke they rise upward to God. These prayers are released out of the angel’s hand. This is all symbolic. The “angel” could possibly be Jesus Himself because He is **the one Mediator between God and men.** (1 Timothy 2:5) We don’t really know for sure. Whoever this is, he acts in the role of a high priest. He takes the censer (used in Jewish worship to burn incense) and casts its contents onto the earth. This symbolizes judgment and it comes in response to the prayers of those suffering Tribulation saints we heard from earlier. The time for mankind to respond to God’s grace has come and gone. Divine wrath is about to be unleashed in full fury upon the earth.

The first angel blew his trumpet, and there was hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was thrown at the earth so that a third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up. (Revelation 8:7) What an ecological disaster this is! But wait. It gets even worse!

Then the second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain of burning fire was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea became blood, and a third of the creatures living in the sea died, and a third of the ships were completely destroyed. (Revelation 8:8-9) Whatever this is “mountain of burning

fire” is (giant meteor, volcanic eruption or something else entirely), it strikes the ocean. It is so cataclysmic that it heats up the waters of the sea enough to throw the eco-system in complete disarray. One-third of all the fish, whales, sharks, dolphins and other aquatic life are killed. The surging tidal waves caused by this gigantic fireball destroy a third of all the ships killing thousands of sailors and passengers.

Then the third angel blew his trumpet, and a huge star burning like a torch fell from the sky; it landed on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. (Revelation 8:10) This falling star contaminates one-third of the earth’s water supply leaving behind a bitter taste. The result of the tainted water is that many more die.

Then the fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened. And there was no light for a third of the day and for a third of the night likewise. (Revelation 8:12) This is like a total eclipse of the sun, only bigger. It covers a third of the earth for 8 hours in addition to the normal hours of darkness.

Then I looked, and I heard an eagle flying directly overhead, proclaiming with a loud voice, “Woe! Woe! Woe to those who live on the earth because of the remaining sounds of the trumpets of the three angels who are about to blow them!” (Revelation 8:13) As bad as the first four trumpet judgments were, the last three are going to be even worse!

Then the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the abyss. He opened the shaft of the abyss and smoke rose out of it like smoke from a giant furnace. The sun and the air were darkened with smoke from the shaft. Then out of the smoke came locusts onto the earth, and they were given power like that of the scorpions of the earth. (Revelation 9:1-3) Satan releases the demonic forces of darkness from the bottomless pit, also called “the abyss.” A large swarm of creatures rises up out of the abyss.

From a distance this swarm appears to be smoke. But as John moves in closer he can see that is really a swarm of demonic beings!

John describes the grotesque appearance of these demonic creatures. **Now the locusts looked like horses equipped for battle. On their heads were something like crowns similar to gold, and their faces looked like men's faces. They had hair like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth.** (Revelation 9:7-8) They had armor and wings and stingers like scorpions. Here we see the unmasking of evil!

Their sole mission is to injure people. They have a field general, a king. He has been given the name Destroyer. This is Satan's number one demon. He carries out his boss's commands, but only to the extent that God allows.

Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a single voice coming from the horns on the golden altar that is before God, saying to the sixth angel, the one holding the trumpet, "Set free the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates!" Then the four angels who had been prepared for this hour, day, month, and year were set free to kill a third of humanity. The number of soldiers on horseback was two hundred million; I heard their number. (Revelation 9:13-16) The four angels are four generals that lead an army of 200 million evil soldiers. Their mission is to kill a third of all mankind. They ride on horse-like creatures and wear breastplates that are fiery red, bright blue and yellow like sulfur. The horse-like creatures have heads like lions and kill by emitting fire, smoke and sulfur. In addition they have tails like serpents. They sound a lot like dragons! But these are demon-like evil spirits that came out of the abyss.

We are three and a half years into the Tribulation period at this point – about halfway. I've heard people make comments like, "the first half of the Tribulation won't be all that bad. The second half will be a lot worse." My response is for them to go back and read Revelation 6 thru 9 again. It's ALL really bad! Halfway through the Tribulation 50% of the world's population has been killed!

Now, do you think the people still living on the earth are ready and eager to repent? No! There will not be another great revival. Sin runs rampant. People continue in their evil practices of idolatry, murder, sorcery, immorality and theft – just like it was back in the days of Noah! Sadly, after all the terrible judgments on the earth, most people are unchanged.

There is another interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpets. God again graciously provides a brief period of peace before the last trumpet is sounded.

Then I saw another powerful angel descending from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun and his legs were like pillars of fire. He held in his hand a little scroll that was open, and he put his right foot on the sea and his left on the land. (Revelation 10:1-2) This scroll is the title deed to the earth. John saw it earlier in his vision of heaven. Notice that the scroll has been opened. That's because all seven seals have been broken and most of God's judgments unleashed. God prepares to take back what is rightfully His – the entire earth, both land and sea.

The voice of God speaks from heaven. It is very loud, like seven peals of thunder. God says something, but John is instructed NOT write it down.

Then the angel I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven and swore by the One who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, and the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, “There will be no more delay!” (Revelation 10:5-6) The angel tells John that very soon the seventh trumpet will sound. It will end the window of opportunity for salvation. So then, time is quickly running out on sinful humanity.

God instructs John to take the scroll out of the angel’s hand and eat it. This is the same figurative language used in Jeremiah 15 and Ezekiel 3 where those prophets “ate” God’s Word. They took it in. They consumed it. They internalized it. That’s the basic idea. John does the same thing here. He goes to the angel, takes the scroll and eats it. He describes it as sweet to the taste but bitter to the stomach. The imagery here is very important. There’s something sweet about delving into God’s Word. However, its truth can sometimes be a bitter pill to swallow, especially when it reveals our own sins to us.

Then [the angel] told me: “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings.” (Revelation 10:11) And this is precisely what John does. He carries out God’s instruction by writing down what he’s been told and what he’s been shown. His prophecies are for everyone to read. The book of Revelation is God’s full disclosure through His servant John about how it’s all going to end.

Then a measuring rod like a staff was given to me, and I was told, “Get up and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and the ones who worship there.” (Revelation 11:1) This measuring rod represents judgment. The temple spoken of here is the temple in Jerusalem. It’s where the Jewish people today worship and it will continue to be their place of worship during the Tribulation period. John is told to measure the altar and those worshipping there. God’s judgment is coming against the Jews. Why is that? Because despite all the light these future Tribulation Jews have received – in the Old Testament writings, in the New Testament teachings of Jesus and the apostles, in the testimony of the 144,000 SAVED Jews we saw earlier – despite all of this, the Jewish people continue to reject Jesus as their Messiah. Sure, 144,000 Jews DID respond in faith to Jesus back in Revelation 7. But a far greater number of them will NOT believe or embrace Jesus as their Messiah.

Next, God calls two witnesses to prophesy. They are, in fact, referred to as prophets. Their mission is to preach God’s message to primarily the unbelieving Jews. God desires that ALL Israel be saved. So He extends grace to His covenant people. He allows them additional time to be saved right to the very end! These two prophets are filled with the Holy Spirit and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They resemble God’s mighty prophets of old – bold and possessing miraculous powers from God. For a while God will protect them from any harm.

At a certain point, however, God allows these two prophets to be killed. There is great rejoicing by all the people who hate God and who reject Jesus. Those troublemakers, those preachers of righteousness are finally dead! Their bodies are placed on public display in Jerusalem for everyone to view. **And those who live on the earth will rejoice over them and celebrate, even sending gifts to each other, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth.** (Revelation 11:10)

The media has a field day with this grisly event. The whole earth watches as this whole scenario plays out. The so-called experts in the media speculate as to what happened and why. They interview guests, even the antichrist himself (we will talk more about him later). Everyone chimes in with their opinion about the situation. They say something like, "Isn't it a terrible thing that happened to these two preachers?" The whole world will witness their tragic deaths.

Then something happens that shocks everyone.

But after three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them [the two prophets], and they stood on their feet, and tremendous fear seized those who were watching them. (Revelation 11:11) The two prophets come back to life!

Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them: "Come up here!" So the two prophets went up to heaven in a cloud while their enemies stared at them. (Revelation 11:12) Right up to the very end God is trying to get the attention of unbelievers, even the most skeptical of the skeptics. In effect what happens here is God replays the whole scenario of the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus right before the world's eyes! The two prophets had preached about this while they were alive. But they had been dismissed as a couple of religious nuts.

Just then a major earthquake took place and a tenth of the city [Jerusalem] collapsed; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. (Revelation 11:13) Right to the end God is trying to get the people's attention. Some, even though terrified, give glory to God. Sadly, there is no indication that anyone repents.

The urgent message to be saved intensifies during the Tribulation. "Hurry! The last trumpet is about to sound! The last woe that ushers in the end of the age is close at hand..." **Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven saying: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign for ever and ever."** (Revelation 11:15)

John watches as the scene shifts briefly back to heaven. There is jubilation and thankful worship as the heavenly host gathers around the throne of God exalting Him as King. God is about to reclaim rightful ownership of the earth that He created.

Lightning, thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm are seen around the temple of God in heaven. The symbolism here is important. In the Old Testament the Ark of the Covenant was a sacred treasure of Israel. It signified victory and the presence of God. Here God is showing Israel, symbolically, that He intends to keep His covenant with His people and redeem Israel unto Himself. God's divine purpose WILL be fulfilled. The lightning, thunder, earthquake and hail indicate God's judgment on the world as a whole. The time for the Gentiles to get saved is over. But God extends grace to the Jews a little while longer. This is what this mysterious vision is all about.

Then a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and with the moon under her feet, and on her head was a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was screaming in labor pains, struggling to give birth.

(Revelation 12:1-2) This vision offers John a flashback to the past. The woman here represents the nation of Israel. She gave birth to a son. His name was Jesus. From the time of Abraham when God made His covenant with Israel until Jesus was born, the nation cried out and longed for His coming. This is symbolically portrayed here.

A red dragon, Satan, enters the scene. Then another sign appeared in heaven: a huge red dragon that had seven heads and ten horns, and on its heads were seven diadem crowns... So that huge dragon – the ancient serpent, the one called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world – was thrown down to the earth, and his angels along with him. (Revelation 12:3 and 9). This vision is also a look back to the past, to thousands of years ago when Satan rebelled against God and one-third of the angels of heaven joined him. Satan and those who followed him in his rebellion were kicked out of heaven and sent to earth. God then gave Satan certain power and freedom. But since the rebellion Satan has been God's enemy. And as such he is also the enemy of God's covenant people Israel.

This vision shows how the dragon (Satan) tried to kill the woman's (Israel's) baby. Satan tried through the evil actions of King Herod to have the infant Jesus killed. Do you remember that? Herod told the wise men after they found the newborn king of the Jews to return to him so that he too could go worship him. But the wise men double-crossed the king and returned home without telling him. So Herod got angry and ordered that all the baby boys in Bethlehem be killed. But an angel warned Joseph in a dream and he took his wife and baby to Egypt. So Jesus survived. He grew up and eventually carried out His redemptive mission.

Just a side note here. The huge dragon (Satan) is said to be the “ancient serpent.” So now we can make a connection in our story back to the serpent in the garden. Now we know who that evil serpent in Genesis 3 really was. It was Satan in disguise. The devil has always been a master of deception.

John sees a vision of spiritual warfare taking place between God’s good angels and the diabolical forces of Satan and the fallen angels. This indicates the constant spiritual warfare that has been taking place unseen by human eyes throughout history. It often seems like the forces of evil are winning, but God always beats them back.

Satan knows that he has only a short time to disrupt God’s plan to redeem fallen humanity. He ramps up his persecution of Tribulation saints. But they refuse to wilt under the pressure. They hold fast to their faith even to the point of death. They overcome Satan, not by their own goodness or by church work, but by the blood of the Lamb and by the words of their testimony. These Tribulation saints follow a long line of martyrs for the Christian faith throughout history – Paul and Peter (1st C), Polycarp (2nd C), William Sawtrey (14th C), Jan Hus (15th C), William Tyndale (16th C), Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Jim Elliot (20th C), and more recently Cassie Bernall (killed in 1999 at Columbine HS) and Kayla Mueller (killed by ISIS in 2015), just to name a few.

When Satan sees that he is unable to defeat the Tribulation saints he changes his strategy. He begins to focus more attention on harming Israel. Even though most Jews still refuse to accept Jesus as their Messiah, God protects Israel. In John’s vision he sees the woman (Israel) finding a safe haven in the desert. There she is aided by Gentile nations. Even the godless people living on earth during the Tribulation period will not allow a repeat of the mass genocide of the Jewish people that occurred during the Holocaust.

Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea. It had ten horns and seven heads, and on its horns were ten diadem crowns, and on its heads a blasphemous name. (Revelation 13:1) This beast is the antichrist. The description here is symbolic. He’s a person (human). He will be given great power by Satan. He will act a lot like the leaders of so many kingdoms and godless nations throughout history who exalted themselves as God and encouraged their subjects to worship them.

The power that the antichrist receives from Satan will make him appear God-like. Like Satan, the antichrist will deceive many people. The vision of the antichrist that John describes in the next several chapters is similar to Daniel’s vision (Daniel 7). Who is the antichrist? He’s not named. But everybody has an opinion; and nobody really knows. We’ll talk more about him and his reign of terror next.