

# **The Book of Revelation**

## **Session 4 - Great Tribulation on the Earth (Chapters 6-7)**

### **Book Overview**

The Book of Revelation can be divided into five sections:

1. Introduction: Establishing Context and Conflict (Revelation 1-5)
2. Action: The Main Story - Focus on God's Perspective (Revelation 6-11)
3. Action: The Main Story Retold - Focus on Satan's Schemes (Revelation 12-14)
4. Action: The Main Story Retold - Focus on Mankind's Sinfulness (Revelation 15-19)
5. Ending: Resolution (Revelation 20-22)

Chapter 6 begins the main action of the story, as Jesus confronts sin and darkness on the earth. The story pauses in chapter 7 as we're given insight into how God will protect His people in this time.

It's important we consider all we have learnt so far about the book as we approach this new section:

1. This book was given to us so that we might know Jesus better (Revelation 1:1)
2. This book is meant to be understood (Revelation 1:1,3)
3. This book is concerned mostly with literal, future events (Revelation 1:1,2,7,19)
4. This book centres around the literal return of Jesus when He will establish His kingdom on the earth and bring an end to sin and death (Revelation 1:5-6,7,18)
5. This book was given to encourage us in the midst of trial and hardship (Revelation 2:2-3,9-10,14-15,20,25, 3:11,18)
6. This book was given to give us greater understanding of the rewards of heaven (Revelation 2:4,7,10-11,17,26-27, 3:4-5,12,21)
7. This book outlines God's overarching purpose in creation - to bring heaven and earth to unity through Jesus Christ (Revelation 4:11,5:11-14)

It's also vital to keep checking that our understanding of the Book of Revelation agrees with the rest of scripture. Matthew 13:24-30,36-43 and Matthew 24:1-35 are useful passages to help us understand this section of Revelation.

## **Chapter Overview**

These two chapters can be divided into two sections:

1. Increasing Sin and Darkness (Revelation 6:1-8)
2. The Cry of Creation (Revelation 6:9-17)
3. God's Faithfulness to Israel (Revelation 7:1-8)
4. God's Salvation (Revelation 7:9-17)

Chapter 6 begins to give us more details of what will be going on in the earth in the time preceding Jesus' return. It will be a time of intense darkness and wickedness, but this is part of God's plan to prepare the earth for the return of Jesus. Chapter 7 goes on to give us vital insight into how God will prepare and protect His people in these times of great trouble. We're reminded of God's faithfulness to Israel, and of the glorious prize that awaits us who remain faithful to Him.

### **Increasing Sin and Darkness (Revelation 6:1-8)**

*Verse 1:*

*"I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, 'Come!'"* - Jesus has been given full authority by the Father, and even the living creatures obey Him. Their desire is for the glory of God to be known in the nations.

*Verse 2:*

*"There before me was a white horse!"* - This rider has the appearance of good but is in fact a deceiver (Matthew 24:4-5, 11, 23-25).

*"He was given a crown"* - This spirit is given a measure of authority for this specific time. Just as God summoned and used wicked empires such as Babylon and Assyria for His purposes (Isaiah 5:26, 7:18, Jeremiah 5:15), He will summon these four horses to serve Him for this specific purpose of bringing His kingdom to earth.

*"He rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest"* - The earth has seen many conquerors and power-hungry kings throughout history, but this deceiving spirit will increase in influence in the earth as we approach Jesus' return, culminating in the ultimate conqueror - the Antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, Daniel 8:23-25, Revelation 13:5-7).

*Verse 4:*

*"Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make people kill each other. To him was given a large sword"* - This spirit of war and destruction is also given a measure of authority for this specific time, and its influence on the earth will increase as we approach Jesus' return, culminating in great war and violence (Matthew 24:6-7, 21).

*Verse 5:*

*"I looked and there before me was a black horse! Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand"* - This spirit brings famine and poverty - a natural result of war (Matthew 24:7).

Verse 6:

*"Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures, saying 'Two pounds of wheat for a day's wages, and six pounds of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!'"* - This spirit is also given a measure of authority for this time to increase poverty across the earth. But this spirit can not exceed the instruction given to it - it is still operating under the authority of heaven.

Verse 8:

*"I looked and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him"* - The fourth spirit to be summoned is death itself.

*"They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth"* - Death and Hades are given authority to kill a quarter of the earth - under heaven's instruction. All these horses are separate and distinct and yet we can see how they all work together - conquest brings about war, which brings about famine, which brings about death. These spirits will influence humanity to walk in unprecedented levels of wickedness and sin (Matthew 13:24-30,36-43).

## **The Cry of Creation**

Verse 9:

*"I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God"* - John sees many martyrs underneath the altar (Revelation 8:3). Their lives and their cries are sweet incense to the Lord, mingling with the prayers of heaven.

Verse 10:

*"How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"* - The cry of the martyrs is for Jesus to return and bring justice to the earth. Through all these events Jesus is bringing forth a cry from His people for Him to return. He will refine and test us through hardship (2 Thessalonians 1:4-7) so we can partner with Him in this time (Matthew 24:9).

Verse 11:

*"Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters, were killed just as they had been"* - Just as God has measured out the level of violence there is to be on the earth, He has measured out the amount of persecution that God's people will suffer. It is for a purpose - to refine and prepare Jesus' bride (Ephesians 5:26-27).

Verse 12-14:

*"There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black... the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth... The heavens receded... every mountain and island was*

*removed from its place*" - John sees huge natural disasters befalling the earth - earthquakes, meteor showers and great darkness (Matthew 24:29, Acts 2:19-20, Luke 21:25-26). Creation itself joins the growing cry of 'Come Lord Jesus' across the earth (Romans 8:18-22).

*Verse 15-16:*

*"Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves... 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb'"* - We now understand that this is a time of judgement upon the wicked - especially the proud and powerful - as God's wrath is revealed against humanity (Isaiah 2:12-21). His judgements will only increase as the day of His return draws nearer. He who sits on the throne and the Lamb (Revelation 5:13) will be known among the nations. We are to fear God not the devil.

*Verse 17:*

*"For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?"* - John prompts us to consider how anyone will survive these days (Matthew 24:21-22). But God has a plan for His elect.

### **God's Faithfulness to Israel (Revelation 7:1-8)**

*Verse 1-2:*

*"I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree"* - God's end-time judgements upon the earth will centre around bringing devastation to the natural world (Luke 21:25-26, Haggai 2:6-7).

*"Who had been given power to harm the land and the sea"* - Like the four horses, these angels have been given authority from heaven to bring this devastation on the earth.

*Verse 3:*

*"Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God"* - There will be a supernatural deliverance in the midst of these judgements for God's servants, just as there was for the Israelites in Egypt (Exodus 8:22-23, 9:4,6,26, 10:23, 11:7).

*Verse 4-8:*

*"Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel"* - This does not represent the full number of people sealed, nor does it represent the full number of Jews that God will save. But God specifically highlights that he will preserve a remnant from His people Israel (Genesis 45:7, 2 Kings 19:30-31, Isaiah 11:11,16, Jeremiah 23:3-6, Romans 11:1-5,12,25-32).

### **God's Salvation (Revelation 7:9-17)**

*Verse 9:*

*“There before me was a great multitude... from every nation, tribe, people and language... wearing white robes... holding palm branches in their hands”* - God has preserved for Himself a remnant from every nation. This multitude has overcome and remained faithful to God through all the tribulation on the earth.

*Verse 10:*

*“Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb”* - These believers overcame not through supernatural deliverance, but through joyfully embracing the way of the cross. Life eternal is now theirs and will never be taken from them.

*Verse 11-12:*

*“All the angels... elders and the four living creatures... fell down on their faces... saying ‘Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!’”* - These creatures will never know the wonder of salvation the way we can (1 Peter 1:12). The cycle of worship in heaven continues as the songs of the saints inspire new worship in heaven. Heaven receives new revelation of who God is through His people.

*Verse 13:*

*“These in white robes - who are they, and where did they come from?”* - The elder wants to make sure John knows and understands who these people are.

*Verse 14:*

*“These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb”* - This crowd are those who died in the great tribulation (Revelation 6:11). This period of time will be when the troubles of all the seals reach their fullness on the earth (Matthew 24:15-21). But these people embraced the message of Revelation 2-3 - to fix our eyes on eternity - and even in dying overcame death (Hebrews 11:35-40).

*Verse 15-16:*

*“They are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple”* - There is no greater joy and pleasure than to join the songs of heaven and worship God (Psalm 84:1-4) *“He who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. Never again will they hunger”* - Though our troubles seem big, they are so small compared to our eternal reward in Jesus (2 Corinthians 4:17).

*Verse 17:*

*“For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of water.” ‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes’”* - Jesus is not just a king - He is a shepherd who will lead and protect His people forever. Every remnant of pain will be washed away completely.

## **Summary**

These chapters highlight six key dimensions to this end-time trouble:

1. Jesus will confront sin and darkness once and for all (Revelation 6:1,3,5,7,9,10,12)
2. Heaven will partner with Him and cry out for Him to return (Revelation 6:1,3,5,7)
3. Demonic influence will increase upon the earth (Revelation 6:2,4,5-6,8)
4. Mankind will grow in sinfulness (Revelation 6:4,9-11)
5. The physical earth will become more hostile (Revelation 6:12-14)
6. God's people will respond as they cry out for Jesus to bring justice to the world (Revelation 6:10)

These chapters reveal six ways this trouble will play out on the earth:

1. Through kings and leaders bent on conquest and power (Revelation 6:2)
2. Through the war and violence these men and women will leave in their wake (Revelation 6:4)
3. Through famine and poverty that will come as a result of war (Revelation 6:6)
4. Through unimaginable numbers of people dying (Revelation 6:8)
5. Through persecution against God's people (Revelation 6:9-11)
6. Through natural disasters and unexplainable environmental and cosmic happenings (Revelation 6:12-14)

These chapters highlight how God will enable His people to withstand all of this:

1. He will supernaturally protect and seal a remnant of Israel (Revelation 7:4-8)
2. He will give a deep understanding of His salvation and the power of Jesus' blood to His church (Revelation 7:10,14)