

7. The Fifth Seal and Great Tribulation

Revelation 6:9-11

In our previous study, [The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse](#), we studied about a time during the first half of a seven-year period spoken of by Daniel the prophet (Daniel 9:27), that as the first four seals of a scroll are opened ([Revelation 5](#)), there will be four effects upon the Earth. Jesus also mentions these effects in His talk with His disciples on the Mount of Olives in Matthew 24. Jesus said the events were signs that would precede His Second Coming and that before His coming, there would be a time of persecution of believers: **“Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. ¹⁰At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other”** (Matthew 24:9-10). This time of persecution is similar to what happens at the opening of the fourth seal. The persecution continues into the fifth seal but now with the martyrdom of believers in Christ taking place. In Revelation 6:9-11, at the opening of the fifth seal, we read of God's servants crying out to Him for judgment to fall on those who are murdering believers in Christ:

The Fifth Seal

⁹When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the Word of God and the testimony they had maintained. ¹⁰They called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” ¹¹Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed (Revelation 6:9-11).

The fifth seal brings persecution and martyrdom (v. 9) of Christ-followers who have been faithful to the Word of God and their testimony as believers. I do not believe that God initiates the persecution of believers. He sometimes allows it, but He is not the initiator of it, so how can some teachers say that the opening of the seals is the wrath of God? God has not appointed believers to go through wrath (1 Thessalonians 5:9), and He is not the author of the persecution of His people. If the opening of the fifth seal brings an effect on believers that is not the wrath of God, then why would the first four seals be the wrath of God? At the opening of the fifth seal, we read of martyred believers asking God how long they must wait before the Lord avenges their blood (Revelation 6:10). Why would they be crying out for God to bring justice and judgment if the wrath of God is being poured out during the breaking of the scroll seals, as some believe? It is my persuasion that God's judgment and vengeance have not yet started. Author Charles Cooper, in an online article, writes:

The martyrs of seal five specifically ask God (O Sovereign Lord), “How long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” (Rev. 6:10, ESV). The NASB frames the question this way: “How long...will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the Earth?” Bratcher and Hatton, in *A Handbook on the Revelation of John*, suggest, “Please don’t wait any longer to condemn and punish those people on earth who killed us,” correctly reflects the sense of the question, (Bratcher, R. G., & Hatton, H. *A Handbook on the Revelation to John* ((1993),

p. 116)). Taken at face value, the question of the martyrs can only mean that no evidence of God's wrath occurs prior to the fourth seal.¹

In our next study, we will see that at the opening of the sixth seal, the wrath of God is imminent:

¹⁶They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! ¹⁷For **the great day of their wrath has come**, and who can withstand it?" (Revelation 6:16-17).

It is when we come to the seventh seal that the trumpet judgments start. Until then, we do not read of any painful consequences on the wicked that are destroying the Earth and murdering believers in Christ. That which is happening at the fifth seal is the **wrath of Satan against God's people**. God is not yet pouring out His wrath; it is Satan using the Antichrist to persecute the saints, something we are told about in Revelation 12:

...But woe to the Earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short... ¹⁷Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off **to wage war** against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus (Revelation 12:12; 17).

In Revelation 12:12 and 17, we see Satan cast down to the Earth by Michael and his angels (12:6) and a war erupting against the elect of God, the body of Christ. The prophet Daniel also prophesied about the Antichrist waging war against the saints and defeating them: "**I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them**" (Daniel 7:21).

The fifth seal ties in with the Great Tribulation (KJV) or Great Distress (NIV), where believers in Christ will be slain because of their stand for the Word of God and the testimony they have maintained, these five seals are not the wrath of God occurring. When God's wrath begins, Antichrist will not be enjoying everyone calling him a god and sitting in the Temple of God (2 Thessalonians 2:4), he will be looking for a cave to hide from the wrath of God (Revelation 6:16). The Great Tribulation is the wrath of Satan against God's elect because they do not conform to Antichrist's desire to be worshiped! □

Great Tribulation Begins at the Antichrist's Desecration of the Temple

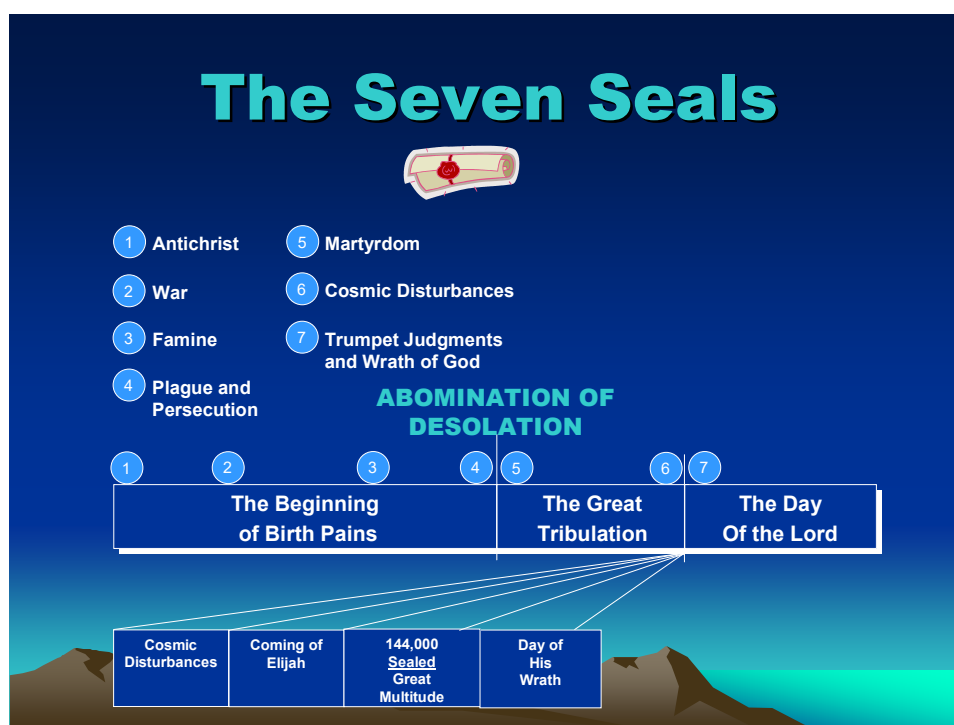
There is a shift from the general overview of the timeline at verse fifteen of Matthew's Gospel, where the Lord transitions to talking about the need for specific care at the midpoint of the seven-year period mentioned by Daniel the prophet. This shift or change from a general overview is indicated using the words, "So when," or in another English translation, the term "therefore" is used. Let's read Jesus' words of warning: □

¹⁵"**So when** you see standing in the holy place '**the abomination that causes desolation**,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand— ¹⁶then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁷Let no one on the housetop go down to take anything out of the house. ¹⁸Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. ¹⁹How

¹ <https://prewrathrapture.com/the-terminus-a-quo-of-the-day-of-the-lord-a-review/>

dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! ²⁰Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. ²¹**For then there will be great distress** [thlipsis], unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again (Matthew 24:15-21).

Jesus warned us of an event He called the Abomination of Desolation, i.e., a desecration of the temple by the Antichrist (Matthew 24:15, 21), that would precipitate a time of Great Distress or Great Tribulation on Earth. The prophet Jeremiah also talked about it: “**How awful that day will be! No other will be like it. It will be a time of trouble for Jacob, but he will be saved out of it** (Jeremiah 30:7). Paul, the apostle, also wrote of desecration by the lawless one (the Antichrist) in 2 Thessalonians 2:4). □



Some Bible teachers say that Christians will not have to go through this time of great tribulation, believing that it is God’s wrath poured out, and believers will not experience God’s wrath (1 Thessalonians 5:9). This writer believes that, at the midpoint of the seven-year period, the time of wrath has not yet started and what we call the Great Tribulation or Great Distress is a time of persecution. Let's look at how the Greek word, *thlipsis*, is used in the New Testament and understand what the gospel writers were communicating.

What is the Great Tribulation or Great Distress?

The word *tribulation* (KJV) or *distress* (NIV) is the translation of the Greek word *thlipsis*. My Hebrew Greek Key Word Study Bible tells me that this Greek word means:

"To crush, press, squeeze. It means tribulation, trouble, or affliction. *Thlipsis* conveys the picture of something being crushed, pressed or squeezed as from a great weight. It is used to denote grievous physical affliction or mental and spiritual distress."²

Not once is it described as a time of wrath from God. This Greek word occurs 20 times in the New Testament. Of those 20 times, the term is descriptive of trouble and difficulties that the believer variously goes through on his journey in life. For instance, when Jesus was teaching the Parable of the Sower, He said that we should expect tribulation or affliction as *thlipsis* is translated in the following passage: □

²⁰"The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when **affliction** [*thlipsis*] or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away (Matthew 13:20-21).

Great is my confidence in you; great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort; I am overflowing with joy in all our **affliction** [*thlipsis*] (2 Corinthians 7:4).

It is correct to believe that God does not pour out His wrath out on His people. However, God's people have always gone through tribulation, and He has warned us about this so that we do not fall away during this time. People that believe in a Pre-Tribulation rapture rely heavily on interpretation and will always offer scriptures that talk about God's wrath as if the seven-year period (the 70th Week of Daniel) is the wrath of God. God wants us to understand that we will not go through or have to suffer His wrath, but what does He tell us about tribulation? Historically speaking, this doctrine is pretty new to the Church. We do not see evidence of people teaching this particular doctrine before the 1830s. Many great men of God believed that the Church would endure the Great Tribulation, men such as John Wesley, Charles Wesley, Charles Spurgeon, Matthew Henry, John Knox, John Hus, William Carey, John Calvin, Isaac Newton, George Whitfield, A.B. Simpson, George Mueller, John Newton, Jonathan Edwards, John Wycliffe, John Bunyan, and many others.³

There are only five times in the New Testament when the Greek word *thlipsis* is used in an end-times prophetic sense. Twice in Matthew's gospel, twice in Mark's gospel, and once in the Book of Revelation. So let's take Matthew's warning about this time first.

²¹**For then there will be great distress** [*thlipsis*], unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again (Matthew 24:21).

²⁹**“Immediately after the distress** [*thlipsis*] **of those days** “‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken’ (Matthew 24:29).

because those will be days of distress [*thlipsis*] unequaled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now—and never to be equaled again (Mark 13:19).

² Key Word Study Bible, AMG Publishers, Chattanooga, TN 37422, USA. Copyright 1996, Page 1632.

³ As told by Marvin Rosenthal, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*, Published by Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN. Page 54.

²⁴“But in those days, following that distress [**thlipsis**], “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; ²⁵the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’ ²⁶“At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷And he will send his angels and gather **his elect** from the four winds, from the ends of the Earth to the ends of the heavens (Mark 13:24-27).□

Some will say that when Jesus was talking about gathering His elect, He wasn't talking to us believers; He was talking to the Jews. But at the very end of the gospel of Matthew, he records Jesus as saying to His disciples to go and “...make disciples of all nations and to teach them to obey all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20). All of what Christ taught them, they were also to teach others. He didn't tell the disciples not to teach the Gentiles about the end-time prophetic events because it didn't apply to them. Also, right at the end of Mark's words about the tribulation/distress, the Lord adds the warning to stay awake and not to sleep spiritually, then He adds the words, “What I say to you, I say to everyone: Watch! (Mark 13:36-37). It's almost like He knew that some would say that these words were not for believers.

The fifth time the Greek word *thlipsis* is used concerning the end-times is spoken about as happening during the Great Tribulation.□

I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation [**thlipsis**], and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14).

The Great Distress or Great Tribulation will be a time of testing that God will use to deepen believers in their faith in Christ and bring maturity and fullness to the Body of Christ. It will also be a time of many coming to Christ as they are awakened out of spiritual slumber.

This persecution by the followers of the Antichrist will be targeted towards those who hold to the God of the Bible, both Jews, and Christians. The Antichrist will be a satanically motivated individual who desires to have the whole world worship him and get behind his agenda. He will seek to control people through control of food, laws, education, the health system, the government, religion, etc. We live in a time of full-spectrum spiritual warfare against those who serve the God of the Bible. This time will bring a period of distress and the falling away, rebellion or apostasy of many who have never been serious about their faith in God. The Antichrist will force people to worship him by setting up an image of himself in the temple of God in Jerusalem, a temple that has not yet been built, but Paul the apostle said that it would be:□

³Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until **the rebellion** occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. ⁴He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that **he sets himself up in God's temple**, proclaiming **himself to be God** (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 Emphasis mine).

The Greek word highlighted above and translated as *rebellion* means to apostatize or fall away from the faith. It also has the direct article that tells us that it is **the** rebellion, a significant event

that will cause a world-wide departure from biblical Christianity and the Lord Jesus. Those who fall away are those who maybe go to church but have never come into a relationship with Christ, typified as the five foolish virgins in the Parable of the Ten Virgins in Matthew 25. There is the possibility that this falling away might happen when many are required to take the Mark of the Beast to be a part of the new one-world system. Part of accepting this mark will be the acknowledgment of the Antichrist to be god. Many will compromise their faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob when confronted with taking the Mark of the Beast. Let's look closely at this persecution.

Hatred by the World System Toward Followers of Christ

All those who serve the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Jews and Bible-believing Christians) will suffer persecution and, in some cases, will die at the hands of God's enemies. We are amid a spiritual war that is taking place on planet Earth. When an unfortunate situation arises, many so-called Christians will compromise and turn away from the faith (v. 10), especially if they have to take their medical shots, or show their papers to the grocery store, or to flash their mark. Those who are half-hearted Christians will be tempted by Antichrist to betray true believers, more than likely because there may be a price on the heads of believers. There may be some who are so in debt and having no work that they are tempted to give up Christians for the snitch money to get food. Just as true Bible-believing Christians were hauled off to prison along with Jewish people during the Second World War by the Nazis, so there will be an outbreak of hatred towards true Christians and Jews alike sometime in the future. Satan and the occult motivated the Nazis, and it is the same in our day and the days ahead. There is an occult dimension to the Antichrist and his world kingdom, just as there was in the Nazi party. □

Believers will be betrayed and hated by those that today we may consider friends or even family:

²¹“Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. ²²You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved (Matthew 10:21-22).

Those that stand firm (v. 22) at that time are believers, so the word *saved* should be translated as *delivered*. The Greek word translated into English with the word *saved* means "deliver out of danger and into safety; used principally of God rescuing believers from the penalty and power of sin and into His provision of safety." I believe we will be delivered by being caught up to be with the Lord. How terrible will it be for some of us to be betrayed by our unbelieving family members? Does this mean that some of us will be hiding from those seeking us out and that members of our family will hand us over? Some might suggest that the above passage was fulfilled in the persecution that broke out after the stoning of Stephen in the Book of Acts, chapter 8, verse 1. However, it is evident from other passages that the Great Tribulation or persecution is still ahead of us because this persecution will happen during a time when one man will rule every tribe, people, language, and nation. The “He” in the below passage speaks of the Antichrist:

⁷He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. ⁸All inhabitants of the

Earth will worship the beast—**all whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book of life**, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world. ⁹Whoever has ears, let them hear. ¹⁰“If anyone is to go into captivity, **into captivity they will go**. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword they will be killed.” **This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God's people** (Revelation 13:7-10).

Jesus encourages us that, when the time comes, He requires us to be faithful and endure—even to death if need be. Death is never the end of a believer. It is but a doorway into eternal life. These words of Jesus should encourage us if we are those alive during the time of persecution. If we see these things happening on the Earth, we know that the time is not far off. We shall soon see Him coming in great power and glory to receive us to Himself (Matthew 24:30-31). □

What Should We Do When We See the Abomination of Desolation?

If you find yourself alive and well on planet earth during Antichrist's time, how will you respond to the persecution? What should be your primary objectives? □

If you are in Jerusalem, Jesus warns to get out of the city right away (Matthew 24:15-28). However, for those of us who are in different places all over the world, as far as I can see, we have three choices to make:

1) Take up arms against those who seek to enslave the saints and want us to bow to Antichrist. Some would say that those aware of what is happening should leave the cities for camps devoted to armed extremism. These will likely be the first to experience the wrath of Antichrist. He will waste no time in sending drones with missiles and dropping bombs on gatherings of people that resist his will. During this time, we will all have to make decisions as to what to do. Should we defend ourselves? Thank God for those in the Second World War who rose to fight against the tyranny of the Nazis. In the Upper Room, Jesus told the disciples to prepare for what would happen in the Garden of Gethsemane by arming themselves: ³⁶And He said to them, "But now, whoever has a money belt is to take it along, likewise also a bag, and whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one... ³⁸They said, "Lord, look, here are two swords." And He said to them, "It is enough"(Luke 22:36, 38).

In another place, though, we are encouraged not to fight back in times of persecution. Jesus said, “But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles (Matthew 5:39-41). Each of us must ask for grace and wisdom in whatever situation we are placed. In the Book of Acts, we read of the disciple, Stephen. When he was persecuted, he responded with gracious words to those stoning him to death: “He fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:60). Such words were what influenced the Apostle Paul, then named Saul (Acts 7:57). Dying and going to be with the Lord with Christ's word on your lips can affect many people. □

2) The second option is to leave the cities and retire to farmland and try and survive. How will that work? If we take, as an example, the city of Cincinnati, Ohio, how many Bible-believing,

Jesus-loving people would there be who would seek to get away to hide in the surrounding countryside? Could we say that there are two million people in the greater Cincinnati area? What would happen if 100,000 believers were trying to find places of refuge all at the same time? How would that look? With heat-seeking cameras and RFID transmitters to sort out those with the mark and those without, we will have great difficulty in hiding. □

3) The third option is to wait on the Lord and get His specific direction, trusting Him to show us what to do. When thinking of that period, we often forget that God is waiting for us to depend on Him amid dark times so that He may show Himself strong on behalf of His church (2 Chronicles 16:9). He delights for us to lean upon Him in such times of need. Though the enemy will seem to be having his way, the power of the Lord will be upon His people. We will receive help from the Lord:

³³“Those who are wise will instruct many, though for a time they will fall by the sword or be burned or captured or plundered. ³⁴When they fall, they will receive a little help, and many who are not sincere will join them. ³⁵Some of the wise will stumble, so that they may be refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end, for it will still come at the appointed time (Daniel 11:33-35).

The closer we get to the end-time, the more significant will be the darkness and evil, but at the same time, the greater the light and power will be on true believers (Isaiah 60:1-2). The gifts of the Spirit will be more evident in those days. Bible-believing churches that teach what is going on will be shut down with true believers going underground in small groups or house churches. We should start to gather into Christian communities now, for we will need to know who we can trust in the last half of the seven-year period.

We will have to be wholly disconnected from any computer, cell phone, or electronic devices. Communication with other believers will not be through any digital devices. Even our cars can be tracked through the RFID on all new vehicles and the tires. If we were to use any connecting device, it would broadcast our exact position. In the future, there will be no ability to buy things *via* cash, and we will likely be disallowed to use the Internet because we don't have the Mark of the Beast. All money will be cashless and only transferred from buyer to seller with a digital device, which can only be accessed by those who have the Mark of the Beast. □

Those of us who decline to take the Mark of the Beast might have to use a bartering system. We will know when the time comes. God will not leave us in the dark. Part of the Mark may be an RFID chip, i.e., a signature/authorization chip that will allow you to buy or sell *via* the stores, mobile phone, or the Internet. It will have all your personal information on it, and it will somehow detect whether or not you had worshipped the beast when you came online. Once people have taken the Mark, they are bound to worship Satan and his Antichrist. If a person has taken the Mark and changes his mind and refuses to worship the Antichrist's image, he will be killed:

The second beast was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that the image could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed (Revelation 13:15).

We who refuse the mark will need to have food, either growing or in storage, to last how long we don't know, for we know that the Lord will intervene and cut short the time (Matthew 24:22) by catching up believers before the second half is over. (We don't know the day or the hour of His coming). There will be no cash to buy things for true believers, so we will have to trust and lean on one another. We must also remember that a time of famine broke out when the third seal was opened. We must learn to depend on the Spirit of Christ and His power and to receive direction before the time of famine comes at the third seal, which is some time in the first three and a half years, i.e., the time of the beginning birth pains (Matthew 24:7-8). I do not know everything about this time ahead, but one thing I do know. Scripture says that believers will overcome the Antichrist. We will overcome him by the power of the finished work of the shed blood of Christ, and by the word of testimony of our experience of Christ:

¹⁰Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, **has been hurled down.**
¹¹**They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony;** they did not love their lives **so much as to shrink from death.** ¹²Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the Earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury because he knows that his time is short (Revelation 12:10-12). □

How do you think God will shine through His saints in the last days? Amid persecution, why do you think people will be drawn to Christ and His Church?

Our destiny is to be married to our heavenly bridegroom, Who is preparing us to be powerful agents of His kingdom. The testing process may be a difficult one for some. Still, there will come a day; Christ assures us when we will stand and receive heavenly rewards and enter eternal life in close relationship with the lover of our souls, the Lord Jesus Himself!

I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of **those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God.** They had not worshiped the beast or its image and **had not received its mark** on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years (Revelation 20:4).

What an awesome day that will be! Your joy will know no bounds if you are a believer in Christ! We will see His face and enjoy Him and one another forever and ever. That experience of His presence will be worth the fire of testing! □

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