

Session 1 Why Study the Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls?

I. THREE NUMBERED JUDGMENT SERIES: 7 SEALS, 7 TRUMPETS, AND 7 BOWLS

- A. The ***three numbered judgment series*** are the three sets of judgments that are numbered in the book of Revelation: **7 seals** (Rev. 6), **7 trumpets** (Rev. 8-9), and **7 bowls of wrath** (Rev. 15-16). They describe 21 judgments to be released against the Antichrist’s empire in the Tribulation.
 - B. The book of Revelation is called the ***revelation of Jesus*** because it reveals His heart, power, and leadership in preparing the nations for God’s glory. The Father’s purpose in giving us this book is to reveal the majesty of Jesus. It is secondarily a book about events in the end times. If we read Revelation with the right perspective, it causes us to adore Jesus and to trust His leadership.
- ¹The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. (Rev. 1:1)***
- C. The events prophesied in Revelation are so significant. They include Jesus returning to earth to establish His kingdom as He releases His judgments and casts Satan into prison.
 - D. We must teach and meditate on these themes regularly so that the fog of unbelief lifts off of our mind concerning these unprecedented, historic events. We do not see these events with clarity until we get familiar with what Scripture says about them.
 - E. The primary theme of the book of Revelation is Jesus coming back to earth in the context of judging the Antichrist’s empire in the Great Tribulation for 3 ½ years. The secondary theme is tribulation against the saints from the Antichrist (Rev. 12:12; 13:4, 8).
 - F. Revelation is the ***end-time book of Acts***, the acts of the Spirit through the end-time Church. As Moses released God’s plagues on Egypt through prayer, and as the apostles released His power in Acts through prayer, so the Tribulation will be released by prayer on the Antichrist’s empire. The miracles of Exodus and Acts will be combined and multiplied on a global level.
 - G. The book of Revelation is a ***canonized prayer manual*** that equips the Church to partner with Jesus against the Antichrist. Nothing like this has ever happened in history where hundreds of millions are unified with an ***infallible prayer guide*** revealing Jesus’ battle plan.
 - H. The end-time prayer movement under Jesus’ leadership will release His judgments through prayer (Rev. 5:8; 6:9-11; 8:3-5; 9:13; 10:6; 14:18; 16:7; 19:2). We need not fear the Great Tribulation as powerless victims. We stand boldly as Jesus’ Bride who releases it by prayer.

⁴The prayers of the saints, ascended before God...⁵Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth. (Rev. 8:4-5)

⁶Let the high praises of God be in their mouth...⁷to execute vengeance on the nations...⁹to execute on them the written judgment—this honor have all His saints. (Ps. 149:6-9)

II. UNDERSTANDING GOD'S THREE NUMBERED JUDGMENT SERIES (REV. 6-16)

- A. The three judgment series are ***literal*** events that must not be explained away symbolically or historically. Our method of interpretation is the ***plain, literal, common-sense*** approach. All the events and numbers in the book of Revelation are to be understood in their plain meaning unless they are specifically indicated as symbolic, as in Revelation 1:20; 5:6; 11:8; 12:1, 3, 9; 17:7, 9.
- B. The three judgment series are ***future***. They have not yet occurred in history. The ***preterist view*** wrongly sees much of Revelation as having been fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem and the fall of Rome (in the first three centuries after Jesus' death). The ***historicist view*** wrongly interprets Revelation as a progressive unfolding of church history in seeing many of these prophecies as being already fulfilled in history. The ***idealist view*** does not see a unique end-time application of the book of Revelation, but wrongly interprets it merely as a symbolic picture of the spiritual conflict between good and evil that has occurred throughout history.
- C. The three judgment series are ***numbered*** according to the chronological order in which they occur. For example, the first seal is followed by the second seal, which in turns leads to the third and so on. Because God's judgments occur according to a numbered sequence, the Church globally can be unified in faith in praying for their release against the Antichrist's oppression.
- D. The three judgment series are ***redemptive***. They will create a global crisis that results in many unbelievers crying out for salvation, while hindering the Antichrist's persecution of the saints and destroying his oppressive worldwide infrastructures. Revelation is not a doomsday prophecy about the world coming to an end. It is about God's new beginning for the world. The birth of a baby is the end of a pregnancy, but it is mostly about the beginning of a new life. We are coming to the end of the dark night of Satan's oppression of human history, to the dawning of a new day.
- E. The three judgment series are ***progressive*** in that they increase in intensity as each series is released. The seal judgments are surpassed in severity by the trumpet judgments, which are surpassed by the bowls. For example, one-fourth of the human race dies in the fourth seal (Rev. 6:8), yet at a later time this increases to one-third dying in the sixth trumpet (Rev. 9:15).
 - 1. The ***seals alert us*** of something important to come. They are ***preparatory***, being analogous to the wrapping on a gift that conceals the contents inside the package. The wrapping anticipates the mystery inside. The nature of a seal is to keep private something that is anticipated. The contents inside of a scroll are always much more important than the seals that secure its privacy. The seven seals around the scroll ***must*** be broken to open the scroll to release the mysterious contents inside (Jesus' battle plan).
 - 2. The ***trumpets warn us*** of something more severe to follow. They speak of impending disaster that requires extreme, desperate, emergency actions.
 - 3. The ***bowls pour out in fullness*** without any delay or hindrance.

III. THE STRUCTURE OF THE SEALS, TRUMPETS, AND BOWLS

- A. Each of the three judgment series are structured in a similar way. They are divided into three parts with the first four events belonging together, the next two being grouped together, and the final one standing alone. For example, the four horsemen form a group of four seals, distinct from the next two seals, which are separate from the final one. In the same way, the first four trumpets and bowls are distinct from the following two trumpets and bowls, etc.
- B. As this structure is understood, we receive more insight into the judgment events.
- C. The gap between the judgment events decreases, as does the duration of the judgments. The seals cover years (possibly two years), the trumpets months (possibly 12-18 months) and the bowls are completed within 30 days, occurring in rapid succession (Dan. 12:11; Rev. 11:3; 12:6; 13:5).

IV. THE PURPOSE OF THE THREE JUDGMENT SERIES

- A. **Judging the Antichrist**: God will destroy the Antichrist's resources and discredit his leadership by showing his inadequacy to solve the crisis. God's judgments will cleanse the earth (Zech. 13:2).
⁴**...commanded not to harm the grass...only those...who do not have the seal of God.** (Rev. 9:4)
⁹**"If anyone worships the beast [Antichrist]...¹⁰he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation."** (Rev. 14:9-10)
- B. **Winning the harvest**: Some will be moved to cry out for salvation as they observe believers accurately prophesying crisis events. The judgments will remove the false props that they lean on and warn the lost as they face the reality of eternity, witnessing the death of so many.
⁹**A great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes...and tongues, standing before the throne...¹⁴"These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation."** (Rev. 7:9, 14)
- C. **Directing prayer**: Insight for the end-time prayer movement during the Tribulation (Rev. 8:3-5)
³**Another angel...should offer it with the prayers of all the saints...⁴The smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God...⁵The angel took the censer...with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth.** (Rev. 8:3-5)
- D. **Vindicating the saints**: Those who stood faithful in love for Jesus and the truth (2 Thes. 1:7-10)
²**"He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her."** (Rev. 19:2)
- E. **Preparing the Church**: Giving understanding so they have confidence, knowing what is coming next and why. The judgments signal the certain victory that is soon to come for God's people. Unbelievers will be filled with fear and confusion.
²⁶**"...men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things."** (Lk. 21:26)
¹⁰**"Many shall be purified, made white, and refined...the wise shall understand."** (Dan. 12:10)

V. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF UNDERSTANDING THESE JUDGMENT EVENTS

- A. God gave us four chapters of strategic information in the book of Revelation (Rev. 6; 8-9; 16) about the most severe crisis in history. This information concerns the personal welfare of our families, friends, and cities. In other words, this information is an issue of life or death.
²¹"There will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world...²²Unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved." (Mt. 24:21-22)
- B. The weather service provides information of an impending tsunami or hurricane so that people can prepare for it. Military leaders are held responsible for a crisis that results from ignoring military information. In a similar way, prophetic leaders will be responsible to act on prophetic information. This information must not be ignored as unimportant.
⁶"But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand." (Ezek. 33:6)
- C. **Forerunners** emphasize the second coming of Jesus. The events directly related to the second coming cause the unique dynamics of the generation in which the Lord returns, while also emphasizing the first coming message of what Jesus accomplished in the cross and resurrection.
- D. Forerunners prepare the way for the Lord by preparing people to respond rightly to Him. They make known His plans, so that the people can understand and agree with Him as it happens. The "highway" that God walks on is the voluntary agreement of His people as they partner with Him.
³The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God...⁵The glory of the LORD shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together [at Jesus' second coming]." (Isa. 40:3-5)

VI. RESPONSES OF THE CHURCH TO GOD'S END-TIME JUDGMENTS

- A. **Offense** (fear, confusion, anger) will be the first reaction of believers with an unrenewed mind. These judgment events are offensive to the natural mind without the light of the Spirit. God will use the least severe means to reach the greatest number of people at the deepest level of love without violating anyone's free will. God's judgments remove all that hinders love.
⁶"And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me." (Mt. 11:6)
- B. **Understanding** will be given by the Holy Spirit to the end-time Church.
²⁰The anger of the LORD will not turn back until He has executed and performed the thoughts of His heart. In the latter days you will understand it perfectly. (Jer. 23:20)
²⁴The fierce anger of the LORD will not return until He has done it, and until He has performed the intents of His heart. In the latter days you will consider it. (Jer. 30:24)
- C. **Partnering** with Jesus in intercession to release His judgments against the Antichrist's empire during the final 3 1/2 years of this age only (Rev. 8:3-5).

VII. THE SEALS JUDGMENTS (REV. 6:1-17; 8:1)

- A. The seven seals are released by Jesus, the Lamb of God (Rev. 5:5; 6:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12; 8:1).

¹I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals. (Rev. 6:1)

First seal (white horse): The Antichrist's political aggression (Rev. 6:1-2)

Second seal (red horse): Bloodshed and world war (Rev. 6:3-4)

Third seal (black horse): Famine and economic crisis (Rev. 6:5-6)

Fourth seal (pale horse): Disease leading to the death of one-fourth of the earth (Rev. 6:7-8)

Fifth seal (prayer movement): Prayer movement strengthened by the martyrs (Rev. 6:9-11)

Sixth seal (cosmic disturbances): Cosmic crisis (Rev. 6:12-17)

Seventh seal (anointed prayer): Prayer movement strengthened to release judgments of Rev. 8-9.

- B. There is a recognizable relationship of the first four seals to each other. The points of similarity between them are a horse with a distinct color (white, red, black, pale) with a rider released by a prophetic decree of one of the living creatures. The four horses here are parallel in color to the horses (red, black, white, dappled) seen by Zechariah (Zech. 1:8-11; 6:1-8).
- C. The seal judgments target the kingdom of darkness (harlot Babylon, etc.). The events include the Antichrist conquering the evil nations that aligned themselves with the harlot Babylon (Rev. 17:16-17), resulting in a world war, economic crisis, famine, disease, etc. The Antichrist acts against the harlot; the devastation also affects the resources in his growing empire.
- D. The first four seals release God's judgments in an indirect way—God lifts His restraining hand off evil men, so they attack and destroy one another's resources. The restraints on man's sin are lifted so that the truth of their lawlessness is seen. These judgments involve earthly actions. The fifth, sixth, and seventh seals involve heavenly activity (Rev. 6:9-17; 8:1-6).

VIII. SEVEN TRUMPETS (REV. 8:2-9:21; 11:14-19)

- A. The seven trumpet judgments are supernatural acts, not merely natural or historical acts portrayed in symbolic language. They destroy the Antichrist's resources and people. The trumpet judgments display the Antichrist's power as inferior to Jesus' power. They are supernatural acts of God through nature (the first four) and demons (fifth and sixth ones).

First trumpet (food supply): Burning one-third of the earth's vegetation (Rev. 8:7)

Second trumpet (food supply): Destroying one-third of the sea (Rev. 8:8-9)

Third trumpet (water supply): Poisoning one-third of the earth's fresh water (Rev. 8:10-11)

Fourth trumpet (light, energy): Darkening one-third of the earth's light (Rev. 8:12)

Fifth trumpet (torment): Releasing demonic locusts that torment for five months (Rev. 9:1-12)

Sixth trumpet (death): Releasing demonic horsemen who kill one-third of the earth (Rev. 9:13-21)

Seventh trumpet (defeat): Beginning of Jesus' second coming procession (Rev. 11:15-19).

- B. The first four trumpets will release judgment on nature to destroy the natural resources of the Antichrist's empire (Rev. 8:7-12). Each trumpet destroys a different area, i.e., food (vegetation, meat, fish), sea trade, water supply, the environment, and light and heat (sun, moon, stars). The last two trumpets release demons on the Antichrist's kingdom to torment and kill his followers.
- C. The trumpet judgments have a threefold purpose (Num. 10): judging the Antichrist's empire, warning the lost to receive salvation, and signaling the certain victory that is soon to come for God's people (like the trumpets did for Joshua).
- D. The limitation of the trumpets to a partial (one-third) judgment gives opportunity for repentance (“one-third” is used 14 times in Rev. 8:2-9:21—Rev. 8:7 [2x], 9 [3x], 10, 11, 12 [5x]; 9:15, 18).

IX. SEVEN BOWLS OF GOD'S WRATH (REV. 16:1-21)

- A. The seven bowls of wrath are the third and final numbered series of judgments (Rev. 16).
- B. **First bowl** (sores): Painful sores on those who worship the Antichrist (Rev. 16:1-2)
Second bowl (food supply): Destroying the sea with blood and killing all in it (Rev. 16:3)
Third bowl (water supply): Poisoning the earth's fresh water with blood (Rev. 16:4-7)
Fourth bowl (torment): Scorching heat and fire from the sun (Rev. 16:8-9)
Fifth bowl (destruction): Darkness on the Antichrist's global empire (Rev. 16:10-11)
Sixth bowl (global guilt): Deceiving the nations to come to Armageddon (Rev. 16:12-16)
Seventh bowl (annihilation): Shaking by earthquakes and hailstones (Rev. 16:17-21)
- C. They will destroy social infrastructures in the Antichrist's empire.
⁸***I [Father] will give You [Jesus] the nations for Your inheritance...⁹ You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.*** (Ps. 2:8-9)
- D. Jesus will release the seven bowls in a way that parallels Moses releasing the ten plagues of Egypt against Pharaoh (Ex. 12). He will come as the “greater Moses.” The seven bowls are intentionally similar to the plagues of Egypt. The miracles seen in Egypt will occur in the end times (Mic. 7:15; Isa. 10:22-25; 11:12-16; 30:30; Jer. 16:14-15; 23:7-8; Ezek. 38:22; Joel 2:30).
- E. All the bowls will be poured out over a 30-day period as Jesus marches up through Edom (modern-day Jordan) to fight the final battle of the Armageddon campaign in Jerusalem, and to rescue the unsaved remnant of Israel (Zech. 12:1-9; 14:1-5; Isa. 63:1-6; Hab. 3:3-16).
- F. Jesus will march through the city of Bozrah in Edom (Jordan) and Teman, killing His enemies on His way to Jerusalem. Their blood will be sprinkled on His robes (Isa. 34:5-10; 63:1-6; Hab. 3:3-18; Zech. 9:14; Ps. 110:5-6; Deut. 33:2; Num. 24:17-19; Rev. 19:11-16).