

**From tribulation
to the
Triumph of the Lamb**



In the world you have tribulation

"*In the world you have tribulation*". The Lord didn't say you will have, He said, "*you have tribulation*", your tribulation is already in process, and it will continue for His people until He comes again to fulfil all things.

"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." John 16:33

Jesus came from God to give us clarity not confusion. The Lord wants us to know His purposes in redeeming all things and that He will vindicate the faithful; so we can be assured the Book of Revelation is for clarity not confusion. It is to assist us in knowing what God is doing on our behalf as He brings all things to an end in Christ.

What is revelation?

The type of writing used in the Book of Revelation is called "Apocalyptic".

This word simply means a "revealing" or to "reveal". This is where we get the word "Revelation" from. God used this kind of language in order to "reveal" what He wished to communicate. The words used have a symbolic meaning for the readers of the letter. For instance the word "Horn" is used in both Revelation and Daniel.

To the Jews, the horn was an emblem of power. (1 Kings 22:11) Samuel wrote, "*and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed.*" (1 Samuel 2:10) David wrote, "*But my horn shalt thou exalt like the horn of an unicorn.*" (Psalms 92:10) The Jewish Christians who in John's day would be familiar with this, and when they heard the word "horn" they would associate it with "strength and power." So the many words used as symbols in the Revelation have significant meanings to the people who would first read the letter. The symbolic meaning of the word "horn" would not be easily known to anybody who was not familiar with the Old

Testament scriptures; so those reading the letter who were not of the faith, would not be able to understand what it meant to the first readers.

Therefore if we are to understand the Revelation of Jesus, we must take some time to learn what the symbolic language meant to the people who read the letter in John's day. And since Revelation is filled with Old Testament references, we have some work to do. There are 235 references from the Prophets, 57 from the Pentateuch and 56 from historical and poetic books of the Bible.

In the book of Revelation, words are used with symbolic meanings to paint a picture in our imaginations, to suggest a meaning often masked by shadowy reflections of the idea intended. By using this form of writing God was able to express what He wanted the Christians to know, while keeping the meaning of his message hidden from those

who would condemn the Christians if they were to obtain a copy.

Because John uses symbols as a means of presenting the message, we must not only pay attention to the image but also the ideas that the image is pointing towards. These dramatic images come through the mind of a prophet in the form of apocalyptic writings.

The strength of this type of writings lies in its ability to communicate its message by inviting us to participate in the story by our imagination. The symbols are used to communicate ideas in a vivid and arresting manner to stir up our emotions, and give us the understanding that would have been much more difficult with normal language.

As the Lord Jesus has given us greater understanding of the Old Testament and how we should walk as children of God, we can expect that in His last revelation He would want us to have even greater clarity as to how God's purposes would work out in the last

days of the cosmic struggle between God and Satan. In His revelation we see how the scales of justice are already at work, even before He returns to us to bring all things to an end.

The Lord wants to encourage His church to hold fast to the faith, even while things are looking for a little while like Satan has the advantage; but the devils doom is fast approaching. He will soon face final judgement along with all who have followed his lies and assisted his evil reign. When Jesus Christ returns the evil forces will be thrown into the fiery pit and the believing faithful who overcome will share in His eternal glory.

At the time of John writing Jesus' revelation, serious issues had already developed in the churches, 71 percent of the church's had problems with looking too much as what was going on around them in the world, while at the same time failing to trust God. They had either agreed to satisfy the passions and desires of the flesh, or they had given in to

fear of the enemy who opposed submission and obedience to God. Regardless of their motivation, in the end five of the seven churches had compromised their faith. And while these seven churches were local communities in John's day, they represent all the churches in the world until Jesus Christ returns. This is understood because seven indicates wholeness, or completeness.

Jesus' people will suffer as He did

At this time the Lord sits on His throne in heaven as Sovereign King because He has overcome the world. He is the one who gives the command to carry out the work of the 7 scrolls, 7 trumpets and the 7 bowls.

Through these prophecies God uses the intense impact of disaster, catastrophe, and tragedy, to judge unbelievers, and at the same time He intends to use this to purify those He loves as they hold fast their faith in the face of bitter trials. In this process everyone who lives in the world will suffer because the

world is under judgement; this means Christians are included. But Christians will also be tested and more increasingly persecuted by the world because they will not confirm to its self centred humanistic materialist culture promoted by the antichrist.

Therefore, from the book of Revelation we can see that suffering and persecution are going to be normal experiences for the people of God. Nowhere in the book of Revelation are believers promised they won't suffer if they are determined to walk with God. Jesus recognised that His churches were going through intense suffering when He sent His letters to them.

Since Christians live in Satan's domain they will also suffer with everyone else as the judgement of God comes upon the Earth. And as an unbelieving world hardens their hearts, we see repeated references to the persecution of Christians by the forces of darkness in the letters to the Churches.

Suffering is normal on earth because of sin, but the Bible also indicates that suffering for the sake of Christ and the gospel is something all serious believers must embrace. Rev 2:9-10

According to Paul, it is through many tribulations, that we must enter the kingdom of God. Acts 14:22

'Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.' 2 Tim 3:12

God protects His chosen people

In the face of persecution from the beast and unbelievers, Jesus promises to keep the faithful from spiritual harm. His promise means we can be confident He will lead us to victory. The Lord says "*Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.*" (Rev 3:10) The same word on testing used in (John 17:15) "*I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil*

one." Being kept from the hour of testing obviously doesn't mean being removed from the test, because they remained in the world, but it means they were upheld spiritually during the testing. However bad things seem, Jesus promised them peace even though they will have tribulation in the world. John 16:33

In this time of testing we must remember what God has done for us and in us. We are not just ordinary people who live according to the world and its ways. We are made new, as Peter reminds his church as they went through serious persecution. *'To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Saviour, Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so*

that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.' 2 Pet 1:1-4

So we can we rejoice in our sufferings because we know it has a purpose in God's ultimate plan to conform us to Christ's image, and to bring all things to an end in Him.

'And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.' (Rom 5:3-5) Jesus has told us to *"Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also."* John 15:20

This book shows us that believers have a special place in God's plan, and can know that God is ultimately in control even though

Satan rages. *'Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.'*

Rev 1:7

While we all suffer as a result of living in a fallen world, everyone living holy lives will suffer persecution from unbelievers who act as the agents of the prince of darkness. So the people of God are sealed in case they suffer spiritual harm from the tribulation that is taking place.

Rev 7:1-3, 13-14

This sealing is by the Spirit of God who now dwells in us and works out God's plan in order that we can be transformed into the image of His Son.

Eph 1:13

God's wrath is for the judgement of unbelievers, but suffering and persecution is God's ongoing work for the purifying and strengthening of believers in maturing and perfecting their faith.

Rom 8:28

In this way, believers conquer Satan and the beast "*by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death*" Rev 12:11

The Lord Jesus asked the Father to keep us while we remain in the world that persecuted His people.

"I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are." John 17:11

Christ now reigns in heaven

The Lord Jesus is sovereign Lord and the only eternal judge of righteousness. (Rev 1:5; 2:26-27; 5:1-14) So we have been given the visions of the 7 Seals, the 7 trumpets and 7 bowls. All these works of God are bound together in a type of parallel operation during the whole church age, from the resurrection of Jesus Christ until His second coming.

The events of Revelation are a series of visions looking at the events of the one thousand year tribulation from different angles, where many similar visions are the same event but from different perspectives. One thousand years here is not meant to be taken literally, but represents the greatness or perfection of time for God to complete His work.

The sealed book of the Lamb determines the seven cycles of judgment. (Rev 6:1-8:1) These events are not Satan's initiative, but judgment from God's throne as the Lamb opens the seven seals one by one. Seven again is a number of completeness.

The first four seals show His authority extends over situations of suffering as they are sent from the hand of God to purify the saints and to punish unbelievers. Revelation 6:1-8 shows Christ rules over an apparently chaotic world, and that suffering does not occur aimlessly or by chance.

It is not the evil powers of darkness which brings all this chaos. It is Christ, the Lamb of God sitting on His throne who controls all the trials and persecutions of the church for its ultimate good and glory, not the dragon, or the beasts, or the false teachers or even the fanatical mob of unbelievers.

Christ opens each seal in the heavenly throne room and issues the command for the contents of each to be carried out on the earth. The disasters that unfold are the same foreseen by Ezekiel. (Ezek14:12-21) These things are also seen in the judgments prophesied by Jesus.

Matt 24:6-28

The judgments in symbolic form

The seven seals include the appearance of the Antichrist, (Rev 6:1–2) great warfare, (Rev 6:3–4) deadly famine, (Rev 6:5–6) disastrous plagues, (Rev 6:7–8) the martyrdom of many believers, (Rev 6:9–11) devastating earthquakes, and astronomical upheaval.

Rev 6:12–14

The result of the seals and the trumpets on the earth will mean there will be false religious teachers of every kind, much sickness, extreme poverty, and political and military turmoil; and to add to the groaning of the earth as it awaits the redemption of man, natural disasters in every generation.

The seventh seal introduces the seven trumpet judgments. The trumpets include hail and fire that destroy a third of the earth. A third here is symbolically indicating a vast amount. (Rev 8:7) the death of much of the world's sea life, (Rev 8:8-9; 8:10-11) the darkening of the sun and moon, (Rev 8:12) a plague of demonic locusts that torture the unsaved, (Rev 9:1-11) and the march of a demonic army that kills a third of humanity. Rev 9:12-21

The seventh trumpet brings seven angels who carry the seven bowls of God's wrath. (Rev 11:15-19) The bowl judgments include painful sores afflicting humanity, (Rev 16:2) the death of every living thing in the sea,

(Rev 16:3) the turning of rivers to blood, (Rev16:4–7) an intensifying of the sun’s heat, (Rev 16:8–9) a great darkness on earth, and an intensification of the sores from the first bowl, (Rev 16:10–11) then the advance the Antichrist’s armies at Armageddon, (Rev 16:12–14) and a devastating earthquake followed by giant hailstones. Rev16:15–21

Together, the seals, trumpets, and bowls serve to judge the Antichrist’s kingdom of wickedness. *“You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve. . . . Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments.”* Rev 16:5–7

Since the majority of these events take place over the period from Christ resurrection to His second coming, we need to understand that the sheer size of the numbers and extent of the judgment is accumulative over this time, that

is, the numbers keep adding up, they do not just take place in a short period of time at the end of the age.

The large numbers in these judgements in the revelation is staggering, but look to the signs of the times, when around 2000 years after John wrote, from 1937 to the end of the Second world war in 1945; with all the carnage of battle, all the destruction of the environment, all the disease causing death, and all the economical poverty and distress, the hardships and family turmoil, with Joseph Stalin in Russia who killed from 9 to 50 million. This period of time alone would have accounted for far more than a third of the population of John's day of about 235 million.

And the many wars and grotesque killing, and the persecution of Christians and destruction of the environment just add to the carnage, as the sign of the times continues to bring judgement on the wicked and purification for the church of the beloved Lamb.

Believers in Christ are not to be discouraged by the signs of the troubles of the times. The enemy would point to the troubles and say there is no God. But the signs really tell us of the judgement and triumph of the Lamb. In Christ our tribulations will turn to triumph, for Jesus has overcome, and we who overcome the world will share in His triumph.

As soon as the armies of the dragon are gathered at Armageddon, Christ comes. *'Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming.'*

2 Thess 2:8

The coming of Christ in the clouds is the end for all wickedness, and the time we will be with Him as the bride of the one who was slain and now reigns in heaven. These visions of John also give some meaning to the sorting out of the wheat from the chaff, the sheep from the goats, and the weeds from the wheat. So when trials and tribulation come in the

form of calamity, hardships, sickness, and persecution; the truly faithful believer can look to God and give thanks in all things. Hallelujah.

Through all this, we can be assured our God reigns. And we can say, along with all the faithful, all is well with my soul. Amen and amen. *"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."* John 16:33

This purifying work of God's judgement is necessary for the church as well as the world, and it is for this very reason Christ didn't offer to prevent the churches from going through the trials He predestined to happen. Many of the people in our churches today want to avoid struggle and adversity, but it is this very challenge from God that is to perfect our faith which our Almighty God is using for our eternal good. Instead of avoiding the struggle, we need to turn our faces like flint towards

Jerusalem. *'Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.'*

1 Thess 5:16-18

While God is using troubles for our good, He is using them to harden the hearts of unbelievers as He brings all things to a climatic end where they, along with the beasts, false prophets and Satan, will be cast into the lake of fire.

In the meantime we can take comfort again from Peter's words to his church while suffering severe persecution. *'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.'*

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ.'

1 Peter 1:3-7

Deception can't deceive the faithful

Satan is the great deceiver, and the very meaning of deception is that what seems to be true is really a lie. But what the devil uses for our destruction, God uses for our good. Those who seem to be winning will lose. It may appear the enemy has the upper hand at times, but appearances can be deceptive. When all hope seems to be lost, victory is assured. Faith in believing in what we can't see, because we believe in the Lord whom we also can't see. Regardless of what looks like a hopeless situation, those who walk by the Spirit aren't overwhelmed by their circumstances.

Christ has overcome the world. We can find strength and power from His indwelling presence so we can walk with Him, face to face in the darkest hours.

Therefore we have His peace wherever we are and in whatever situation His Providence places us. In good time or bad, God causes all things to work together for our good as He transforms us into the fullness of the image of His Son. (Rom 8:28-29) In fact, nothing the world can throw at us can separate us from God's love, except if we give our full attention to the world and negative experiences.

"Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death."

Rev 2:10-11

Living Water Resources

Come to the river

*"These things I have spoken to you,
so that in Me you may have peace.
In the world you have tribulation,
but take courage; I have overcome the world."*

John 16:33

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