

Eschatology: Revelation 12-16

The seals and the trumpets (Revelation 6-11) describe the themes and characteristics of the period from Pentecost through the Great Tribulation. Remember, the Great Tribulation is a time of trouble for believers. Believers are rejected, persecuted, and martyred. This Tribulation for believers leads to God taking vengeance on those who persecute. This morning, we are going to cover Revelation 12-16. Revelation 12:1-15:4 backs up and further describes the times of the seals and trumpets. Revelation 15:5-16:21 describes the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem by the Seven Bowls of Wrath.

Revelation 12

In Revelation 12, John is given a new vision, which is a retracing of the birth of the Jesus and of the church. This is described as two signs appearing in the heavens.

Revelation 12:1-2

The first sign is a woman. This woman is Mary (specifically) and Israel (generally). She is pregnant and about to give birth to Jesus.

Revelation 12:3-4

The second sign is a dragon, who is Satan. He has seven heads with seven diadems and ten horns. These will be explained later. Satan wants to kill Jesus (specifically) and the church (generally). After the birth of Christ, Satan kills all males under the age of two. After the birth of the church, Satan persecutes and kills those in Jerusalem.

Revelation 12:5-6

This describes the incarnation, the ascension, and the dispersion. Jesus is born to rule, and so he ascends to heaven to take his throne. Because of persecution, the church flees Jerusalem into the "wilderness." Again, these visions are not a comprehensive history of Christ and the church, but a selective, thematic history. The 1,260 days is the exact same period of time that the two witnesses prophesy (Revelation 11:3). This is 3 years and 5½ months. The spiritual battle during this period is described next:

Revelation 12:7-9

Michael is an archangel. He and his angels fight against Satan and his angels (demons). This is the heavenly battle behind the earthly persecution. Michael's side prevails, and Satan and his demons are cast out of heaven. Notice, we see four more names of Satan: dragon, serpent, Devil, and Satan (Revelation 12:9).

Revelation 12:10-12

Satan and his demons are kicked out of heaven, firmly establishing the kingdom of Christ in heaven and the church on earth. God has given Satan a short time (forty years) to torment the earth (*geo*, or land of Israel) and the sea (Gentiles).

Revelation 12:13-17

When Satan is cast out of heaven, he enters the temple and persecutes the woman (the church) via the Jews, as described in Acts 3-7. The Jewish believers flee into the wilderness (Acts 8:1), as Satan continues to try to persecute the them, but he is deterred. Instead, Satan goes after "the rest of her offspring," which are the Gentile Christians.

Revelation 13

Revelation 13:1-2

Revelation 13 describes how the church will be persecuted by Rome. "A beast rising up out of the sea" is Rome (the beast) rising up among the Gentiles (the sea). Satan brought this to pass when he used Nero to change Rome's relationship with the church. Up until then, Rome was the restrainer of the Jewish persecution and the protector of the church. In fact, during the early part of Nero's reign, from AD 58-64, Nero did not persecute the church. However, after the Jewish persecution of the church began to wind down, Satan moved Nero to persecute the church, beginning in AD 64. Nero blamed the burning of Rome on Christians.

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This imagery of the beast should remind us of Daniel 7. Remember, that God gave Daniel a vision of four animals that would be the caretakers of Israel until the Messiah. The fourth animal, representing the Roman empire, was simply described as a beast. Notice that this beast encompasses the previous three empires: leopard (Greece), bear (Persia), and lion (Babylon). These four caretakers of Israel can also be divided into seven distinct stages, which are the seven heads.

1. Babylon
2. Persia
3. Greece (under Alexander)
4. Greek Egypt (king of the South from Daniel 11)
5. Greek Syria (king of the North from Daniel 11)
6. Hellenistic Rome
7. Imperialistic Rome (under Nero, AD 64-70)

Just as in Daniel 7, the ten horns are the ten rulers of Rome, starting with Julius Caesar and ending with Vespasian, who was ruler in AD 70, when the temple was destroyed.

Revelation 13:3-4

This describes the transition from the sixth head to the seventh head. Under Nero, Hellenistic Rome suffers a "mortal wound" and is "healed" when she becomes imperialistic and persecutes the church.

Revelation 13:5-10

Nero is given forty-two months (3½ years) to persecute the church. He forces all inhabitants of the land of Israel to worship him (verse 8).

Revelation 13:11-12

John now sees a second beast. This beast comes not out of the sea (Gentiles), but out of the earth (*geo* = land of Israel). This is a Jewish beast, representing the Jewish rulers. He has two horns, like a lamb. However, he is a counterfeit of the true Lamb. The two horns may refer to the twin powers of evil: the Herods and the high priests. He speaks like a dragon, that is, like Satan. He has all the authority of Nero, and forces those in the land of Israel to worship Nero.

Revelation 13:13-15

This may be referring to the completion of the Herod's temple, which was completed in AD 64, the same year that Nero began to persecute the church. The newly built temple emboldened the Jewish leaders to persecute. The fire from heaven may be a reference to the animal sacrifices. An image of Nero is set up, and worship is commanded under the penalty of death.

Revelation 13:16-18

This is one of the most well-known and least-understood parts of Revelation. The "mark of the beast" is not a literal mark on the forehead or hand. This is not a tattoo or a computer chip. This is classic Old Testament language to describe one's thoughts (forehead) and deeds (hands). To receive the mark of the beast was to worship the beast, which is the sea beast (Nero).

The "number of the beast" is 666. This is not three sixes in a row, but a number, six hundred and sixty-six. This appears in 1 Kings 10:14 to describe the weight in talents of the gold that Solomon took in annually. Israelite kings were forbidden to multiply gold, women, and horses. Solomon did all three. He collected an "evil" amount of gold, and thus the kingdom was taken from him. The first century Jewish leaders were thoroughly evil, and so their kingdom was taken from them in AD 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed.

The number 666 corresponds with the Hebrew (Aramaic script) of Nero's full name, Nero Caesar. The Hebrew language did not have a separate alphabet and separate numerals. Alphabetic letter also represented numerals, similar to how Roman "numerals" (I, V, X, L, M, etc.) are actually from the Roman alphabet. In Hebrew, Nero Caesar would have been written: "NRWN QSR." This adds up to 666 (N = 50; R = 200; W = 6; N = 50; Q = 100; S = 60; R = 200).

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John was given a clue to identify the beast. The sum of his name is going to be 666, according to the Hebrew alphabet. This was a message for Jewish believers. Thus, non-Jewish readers of Revelation would have been confused because in Greek, Nero Caesar adds up to 616. Interestingly, one ancient manuscript lists the number of the beast as 616. Some enlightened scribe changed this so that Gentile readers would understand.

Revelation 14

In Revelation 7, John witnessed the sealing of these 144,000. Now, in Revelation 14, John witnesses the martyrdom of this multitude of Jewish Christians.

Revelation 14:1-5

These 144,000 are the firstfruits of the New Covenant, as well as the final harvest from the Old Covenant. Next, three angels make pronouncements.

Revelation 14:6-7

The first angel commands that these martyrs are to preach the gospel to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people.

Revelation 14:8

The second angel announces that Babylon has fallen. Babylon is a symbolic name for Jerusalem, who has become apostate. God will later describe Jerusalem as a great harlot who is guilty of fornicating with the nations.

Revelation 14:9-13

Whoever worships the sea beast (Nero) will suffer the wrath of God forever. Conversely, the saints who are martyred will receive eternal comfort.

Revelation 14:14-16

Jesus is the One like the Son of Man with a golden crown. He thrusts his sickle into the earth and reaps. This is the salvation and martyrdom of the 144,000. Jesus said that the fields were ripe for the harvest, and now he reaps his harvest. This is the grain harvest.

Revelation 14:17-20

Another angel cries out for another harvest, the grape harvest. Grain and grapes produce bread and wine. This is a sacramental harvest of the church. The saints (symbolically grapes) are martyred outside the city (Jerusalem), just as Jesus was. The blood from their martyrdom fuels the winepress of the wrath of God. The blood of the martyrs covers the land and cries out for vengeance. This vengeance comes with the pouring out of the bowls of wrath.

Revelation 15-16 (The Seven Bowls)

In Revelation 12, there were two signs in heaven 12 (the woman in 12:1 and the dragon in 12:3). We see a third sign in Revelation 15.

Revelation 15:1

The third sign is the seven angels, who have the seven plagues (bowls), which will complete the wrath of God on Jerusalem, which is a response to the martyrdom of the saints.

Revelation 15:2-4

The saints have been martyred. They are now in heaven, worshiping God. Next, the attention returns to the seven angels with the seven plagues.

Revelation 15:5-16:1

One of the four archangels gives each of the seven angels a bowl of the wrath of God and commands them to pour them out. As we shall see, the first four bowls are similar to the first four trumpets.

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The First Bowl

Revelation 16:2

The first bowl of wrath is poured out upon the earth (*geo* = land of Israel). This is against the unbelieving Jews who worshiped Caesar instead of Jesus.

The Second Bowl

Revelation 16:3

The second bowl of wrath is poured out on the sea, which is a symbol of the Gentiles. The Gentiles who participated in the persecution will be judged.

The Third Bowl

Revelation 16:4-7

The third bowl of wrath is poured out on the rivers and the springs of water, which are symbols of the Temple. The priests and the Levites led the Jewish persecution of the saints. The saints who cried "How long?" in 6:10, now say "Even so" (amen) in 16:7

The Fourth Bowl

Revelation 16:8-9

The fourth bowl is poured out on the sun, which is a symbol of Jewish rulers, particularly the high priest.

The Fifth Bowl

Revelation 16:10-11

The fifth bowl is poured out on the beast, Nero (Rome). Nero dies in torment and pain.

The Sixth Bowl

Revelation 16:12-16

The sixth bowl is poured out on the Euphrates. When Rome surrounded Jerusalem with her armies, they were supported by troops from the east. John also sees three demons coming out of the dragon (Satan), the beast (Nero/Rome), and the false prophet (the high priest). These demons deceive the people into a battle royal.

The battle is going to take place at "Armageddon." Armageddon does not mean "apocalypse." It is a place. In Hebrew, it is actually *Harmagedon*, which is made up of two words: *har* meaning mountain and *maged* meaning festival assembly. *Harmagedon* is a reference to Mount Sinai. There will be a final battle at the temple on Mount Sinai. This battle will be further described in chapter 19.

The Seventh Bowl

Revelation 16:17-21

The seventh bowl is poured into the air. The full wrath of God has been poured out. The language of cosmic destruction is the final destruction of the temple, the city, and the entire Old Covenant system.

The Seven Bowls (Revelation 15:5-16:21)

1. Judgment against Land (Israel)
2. Judgment against Sea (Gentiles)
3. Judgment against Waters (Temple)
4. Judgment against Heavens (Jewish Rulers)
5. Judgment against the Sea Beast (Rome/Nero)
6. The Battle of Armageddon (Mount Sinai)
7. The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple