

The Great Tribulation: The Approaching Storm of God's Wrath, Part03

Selected Scriptures

June 17, 2007

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We return tonight to our study of “The Great Tribulation: The Approaching Storm of the Wrath of God.” It was in 1997 that John MacArthur approached me and asked me if I would be willing to help on the MacArthur Study Bible project. Several years before as the director of publications at Grace to You, I had with several others suggested the project, and so it was a joy to be involved in the actual work on it. And John asked me specifically to take on as my first project the book of Revelation. I was responsible to decide what concepts and words and phrases needed notes. And then I was to write an explanation with content taken from transcripts of John’s preached sermons.

After that, after I completed the book of Revelation several months later, my involvement in the study Bible project grew. I got to oversee an editorial team that ended up doing most of the New Testament. And, for the better part of eight months, every waking moment (my wife will attest) was spent working on the study Bible project. My favorite part of the project I have to admit was not Revelation, but rather was getting to prepare the notes for Romans. But I will never forget the journey that I took in those months with the apostle John and with John MacArthur, my mentor, through the apocalypse, the book of Revelation.

When you look at the book of Revelation, understand that it is primarily, the bulk of the book of Revelation, is about a seven-year period called the tribulation. From chapter 6 all the way through chapter 19, the events of that tumultuous time are unfolded. One after another, we see what God is going to unleash upon the, on the earth. At some point still in the future at the end of human history (could begin very soon, could be yet thousands of years ahead if God should choose) there will be a period of seven intense years during which God will unleash His full fury against the earth.

Let me just remind you of how this fits in the overall scheme of God’s end time plan. Several months ago now, we put together a biblical “ordo eschatos”. What is the order of end time events? Starting at the left and moving to the right, you see there in the middle the spread of those events. After death for the individual believer and the intermediate state, the next great

event on the horizon is the rapture, the rapture of the church then followed by the tribulation. It is that seven year period between the rapture of the church and the second coming of Jesus Christ that we are discussing together over these weeks.

Now, let me just remind you that this period has certain distinct purposes. It is to take back the earth from the usurper Satan. It is to bring redemption to Israel. It is to destroy false religion. And it is to punish Christ-rejecting people alive at that time. Keep in mind that the overarching point of the tribulation period is described by those alive at that time whom John the apostle tells us will cry out, “The day of the wrath of God and of the Lamb has come.” That’s what this seven-year period is all about. It is not about what the man of sin will do; it is not about what the false prophet will do, although certainly they will be active during that time. This period of time called the tribulation is about what God does and what the Lamb of God does in pouring out their wrath upon the earth.

Now, the major actors we noted last time are the beast, the major military and political leader also called the man of sin and a number of other names and we went over that in detail last time. Another major actor in this period of time is called the false prophet. He is the religious and spiritual leader of the last world empire before Christ’s second coming. The dragon, who is none other than Satan, and as he’s called there in Revelation 20, that serpent of old, (making reference to the Garden of Eden). And he’s called by all of his or most of his major biblical names in that text so we’re left certain that we’re talking about Satan himself who is empowering these human figures – the beast and the false prophet. And of course, the major figure throughout this time is the Lamb of God – the Lamb having been slain as we read this morning from Revelation 5. So those are the major characters.

Now, I want us tonight, as I mentioned this morning, to take a brief survey of the main events of this period. It is a period of intense judgments, judgments from God. You see it in Matthew 24, and you see it in detail in Revelation 6 - 19. As Jesus takes that scroll that we read about in Revelation 5, the title deed to the earth, and as He breaks each of those seals (seven seals), each seal brings a new and devastating judgment to the earth. The seventh seal, as He breaks the seventh seal, we discover in chapter 8:1 that it contains seven trumpet judgments. And then

following the seven trumpets, there come seven bowl judgments. Now either the bowl judgments follow the seven trumpet judgments or the seventh trumpet contains the seven bowl judgments.

I mentioned to you several months ago about the sort of Russian stacking dolls, I believe they're called "matryoshkas" - in which you open, you open one of those little carved dolls and you find another inside. That's much how it is with these judgments. You open the seventh seal and inside the seventh seal, you find another doll, a series of dolls, that unleash the seven trumpets and then under the seventh trumpet, you find in it the seven bowls. That's the picture behind these judgments. All of them are ultimately contained in the seven seals and the seventh seal contains seven trumpets and seven bowls.

Now, let's look at these great judgments. We're going to kind of walk one by one. I won't have time (obviously we're talking about a number of chapters) I won't have time to go in great detail, but I want to give you the sweep of what God is gonna unleash on the world in the days to come. Let's start of course with the seven seals. Turn to Revelation 6:1 and we are introduced to the first of these seals. The Lamb has taken the scroll, the title deed to the earth, and verse 1 says,

... I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a loud voice of thunder, "Come." I looked, and behold, a ... [white] horse; and he who sat on it had ... [a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.

This first seal is the false peace of antichrist, the false peace of antichrist.

Now the first four seals (you'll notice), are described as horses with riders. These are commonly referred to as the four horsemen of the apocalypse. Perhaps you've heard that figure. It's clear that the second, third and fourth riders are impersonal forces, not people. So, it's best to take this first one not as a person, but rather as a force. And notice that there's conquering going on and there are crowns. So, we're clearly talking about a rapidly expanding kingdom. We learned from parallel texts that antichrist will accomplish this worldwide expansion of his rule not through bloody battles, but through treaties and covenants and agreements. We saw that last time in Daniel 9:24 - 27. So, the first part of the tribulation will be characterized by the rapid growth of a

world empire achieved for the most part without bloodshed and one that promises peace. But it's a charade. It's a false peace.

And that brings us to the second seal. It's in 6:3 and 4. And I'll put, by the way, the complementary passages in Matthew up here. We'll make these slides available next time. I know you won't be able to write as fast as I'm moving, but we'll make these slides available. So if you want this, you can have it next time. Now here, we find the second seal is worldwide war. The false peace of the first horsemen is quickly shattered by a second. Notice verse 4, he takes peace from the earth. "It was granted [him] to take peace from the earth." So, that false peace is shattered. He's given a short sword. (It's the,) The word for sword here is the short sword that Roman soldiers carried into battle. It pictures intense fighting. There has always been war, but this second horsemen will usher in a time of unparalleled war, so first a false peace followed by worldwide war.

The third seal is in verses 5 and 6 of this chapter, and we could characterize this seal as scarcity of food. Notice in verse 6 this rider has a pair of scales in his hands, and in verse 6, "I heard *something* like a voice ... saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius." Now what's going on here? Well, a quart of wheat is essentially the amount it takes to sustain one person for one day. And a denarius (is an,) was an average day's pay. So essentially, it will take an average worker's daily pay to purchase enough of this wheat for one person to have life sustained. And notice verse 6 also says, "three quarts of barley [here's a cheaper grain, three quarts of barley] for a denarius." So, a day's work, this is a cheaper grain usually fed to, usually fed to animals – you would work an entire day to provide food for a family of three. That's essentially what this passage is saying. Normally, by the way, a denarius would buy about thirty quarts of barley or would have in that period of time, so this shows incredible scarcity.

We don't know for sure what the last comment means, "do not damage the oil and the wine". Some think this means the necessities will be scarce, but luxuries will be available. I'm not sure that's true. Oil and wine were both necessities in that culture. And so it may very well be that the reference here is that those cheap necessities like oil and wine, oil for making bread, wine for purifying the water as well as a cheap drink, that they will need to be carefully protected in that

day because of the scarcity of food. So, you have war - you have peace, you have war and now you have scarcity of food.

That brings us to the fourth seal. The fourth seal is found in verses 7 and 8. (It's,) we could describe this seal as earthquakes, pestilence and death. Notice this horse is called a pale horse. Literally, the Greek expression is a yellowish green horse if you can picture that. It's a very sickly, deathly color. And we're told that, verse 8 says: "and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him." Death claims the body. Hades claims the soul. That's the picture here.

And notice that he was given authority over a fourth of the earth, a fourth of those left after the carnage of war and the decimation of the famine will die. And notice this death, we're told in verse 8, comes four ways. It comes with the sword, so in military conflict. It comes with famine. It comes with pestilence, apparently like we've unfortunately sometimes seen even in Africa, the African continent. So many die that burial does not take place immediately and from the rotting corpses, additional diseases create new sources of death. And then finally, verse 8 tells us that the wild beasts of the earth will be involved in the carnage. You know, hunger is one drive that expels the fear of man from animals. Normally, animals have a fear, a natural God-given fear of man. But when they're hungry, that fear goes away, and out of the forests and swamps, they will emerge in their search for food including unwary men.

That brings us to the fifth seal in verses 9 -11, and we could call this seal martyrs and divine judgment. You see, on earth the righteous will be severely persecuted and killed. In heaven, their voices will be heard before God. That's the point of this seal. Now the events described in this fifth seal begin during the first half of the tribulation, but these events also mark the midpoint.

It's clear from a variety of texts that some kind of significant event is at the midpoint of the tribulation. What is that event? Well, Daniel 9:27 tells us antichrist breaks the treaty that he had made with Israel at the very beginning of the tribulation halfway through the tribulation, and there will be incredible persecution and carnage. That's why it is called in some places in reference to Israel "the great tribulation", this second half of the tribulation period, because there will be amazing, relentless persecution of those who have any association with God.

The sixth seal is in 6:12 - 17, and it is cosmic darkness and disasters. Although the five previous seals are in essence acts of divine wrath, they did not in an obvious way involve divine intervention. The sixth seal will - catastrophic, cataclysmic divine intervention. Notice verse 12. There is a great earthquake surpassing many earthquakes that have occurred before. And as a result, verse 12 says, the sun will become like sackcloth and the moon like blood. Now, we don't know exactly what that means. It's possible that these effects will be produced by volcanic ash and soot from the volcanic eruptions that follow the huge earthquake.

This often happens in areas in the Ring of Fire over in the Pacific. When there is a serious earthquake, it can set loose volcanos and, as a result, soot and ash are poured out into the sky. And the resultant look is very similar to what is described in this passage. So, it may be that that's what happens.

Verse 13 says stars will fall. Now the Greek word for stars can identify any celestial body. Don't think those stars that are bigger than earth itself. That's not the picture here. It can describe any celestial body. It's probably best to understand meteors. So, meteors will hit the earth and cause havoc. Verse 14 says the sky will be split apart. There will be some disruption of earth's atmosphere. And verse 14 says every island and mountain will be moved. The earth's tectonic plates will begin to shift.

And this display of wrath is finally recognized as from God. Look at verses 15 - 17. At this point, with the sixth seal,

... the kings of earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

Up to this point, perhaps they found any number of ways to excuse the events that have occurred, but at this point, there is a clear recognition that this is in every true sense an act of God.

Now the seventh seal is in Revelation 8. (There's an interlude in chapter 7.) Skip over that and move to chapter 8 and you find the seventh seal at the beginning of chapter 8. And we could call this seal an earthquake, seven trumpets and seven bowls because in this seventh seal are the rest of the judgments that will be poured out. It begins, you'll notice, with thirty minutes of silence in heaven as everyone contemplates what's coming to the earth.

And then, the second set of judgments begin. They're called the seven trumpets. Now in Revelation, trumpets announce coming displays of God's wrath. The trumpet judgments seem to be more intense, if you can imagine, than the seal judgments, but not nearly as severe as the bowls will be as we'll see in a few minutes.

The first trumpet is in 8:7 and we can describe it as all the earth's vegetation or much of the earth's vegetation being burned. We know the end result of what happens. It says that a third of the earth's forests are destroyed. While we can't be dogmatic, it's possible that the hail, fire and blood that's in this verse result from the great earthquake that came in verse 5. It's possible that as a result of the eruptions, water and steam could be catapulted into the sky and fall as hail mixed with lava. And the ash, dust and lava could easily color and contaminate water supplies so they look like blood. Or it may in fact be a divine miracle of blood itself. We cannot be sure.

The second trumpet in 8:8 - 9 – sea life is destroyed, ocean life. The great salt water of the earth is destroyed. Verse 8, you find that apparently another meteor ignites in the atmosphere and upon impact with the earth, it creates a huge tidal wave that destroys one third of the world's ships – both those at sea and inundates those that are at various docks around the world. A third of the ships of the earth are destroyed as a result of this meteor that strikes the earth. And it says, "the sea became blood". That could be literal. It could be again a miracle of God in which the seas become actual blood. Or perhaps, it may be as some have suggested an event called the "red tide", an event caused by the death of millions of tiny organisms. If so, it could be the result of the meteor collision in the ocean.

The third trumpet is in (verses 8 - 11, or) verses 10 and 11 (rather). And here, not just the salt water now, but the fresh water of earth is made bitter. We read in verses 10 and 11 that a great star, possibly a comet or maybe another meteor, we don't know, as it enters the earth's

atmosphere, it shatters into many pieces, and it falls to earth poisoning a third of the earth's fresh water supplies.

The fourth trumpet in verse 13 of chapter 8, the heavens are struck. Notice it says a third of the sun, moon and stars. Again, we can't be absolutely certain here. There are two possibilities. This could mean that the day night cycle will somehow be altered so that it won't run the way it runs now. It'll be shortened in some way. Or it could mean that God will, for a short time, supernaturally diminish the intensity of the heavenly bodies which would of course radically alter the earth's climate. But either way, the heavens are absolutely altered.

The fifth trumpet is in chapter 9, turn there, 9:1 - 12. And this is a very difficult passage to interpret. We could call it demonic locusts. It appears, you'll notice, in 9:1: "the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star (fall) from heaven which had fallen to earth." Now in the other cases, it seemed pretty clear that it was a meteor, a celestial body of some kind, but here it seems to be a person. Notice in verse 1, "the key of the bottomless pit was given to him."

So, this star seems to be a person, probably a reference to Satan - certainly some emissary of Satan if not Satan himself. And we're told that he will release demons from the bottomless pit, the sort of maximum security section of hell where the fallen angels are kept. And these demons then attack the earth in the form of something like locusts, small, grasshopper-like insects. They are described in verses 7 - 10. They are described as intelligent, as vicious and as absolutely invincible. And these demonic locusts have a sting like a scorpion we're told. And for five months, the normal life cycle of locusts, these demonic insect-like creatures, will hurt and torture all of humanity, the fifth trumpet.

The sixth trumpet is in 9:13 - 21. It involves deadly plagues, deadly plagues. Notice that four bound angels, almost certainly a reference to fallen angels, are released. And so, there's this force of demonic former angels that are released numbering (we're told in this text), two hundred million. That's a frightening thought - two hundred million. This is probably not a reference, to those of you who are a little more familiar with prophecy, this is probably not a reference to the kings of the east and all of their armies because that typically comes later. This is almost certainly a demonic horde - two hundred million. And they kill one third of the remaining population of the earth.

That brings us to the seventh trumpet, the seventh trumpet. Turn to 11:15 - 19. You meet the seventh trumpet.

[And] ... the [seventh trumpet] seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever." [You're familiar with these words, of course, from Handel's great '*Messiah*' taken here from the words of those in heaven.] And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, "We give you thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign. And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the *time* came for the dead to be judged, and *the time* to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth."

So, there is connected with this seventh trumpet then the next series of judgments. Out of the seventh trumpet comes another series of judgments called the seven bowls.

The seven bowls begin in 15:1. "Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, *which are* the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished." As you read the rest of chapter 15, you read what amounts to a prelude to the final series of divine judgments. And in verse 1 of chapter 16, we're told exactly how this is going to unfold. "Then I heard a loud voice from the temple, saying to the seven angels, 'Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.'"

So here, we have this final series of destructive judgments unleashed upon the earth. Think of these bowls not as a deep sort of bowl as you often think of when you think of bowls, but really the Greek word describes something more like a flat saucer that just has a lip to it so that it's very volatile. The contents are easily dumped, and the picture is of sudden catastrophic dumping of the judgment and wrath of God upon the earth. These will come near the end of the tribulation period, and they will come in staccato-like, relentless wave after wave after wave of these devastating, intense judgments.

The first bowl judgment we meet in 16:2. “The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth; and it became a loathsome and malignant sore on the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image.” So here you have open, oozing sores that will appear on the bodies of those who are loyal to the antichrist.

The second bowl in verse 3 tells us that the seas become blood. Verse 3 says, “The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like that of a dead man [in other words, coagulated blood]; and every living thing in the sea died.” Did you see that? Every living thing in the sea died. This is similar to the second trumpet judgment which we went through a few minutes ago, but far more widespread and far more devastating. All of earth’s oceans, all of earth’s seas, will actually become or resemble coagulated blood, and every living thing will die.

The third bowl is found in verses 4 - 7. And here again, the fresh water is affected. The fresh water becomes blood. Basically, John notices that the same thing happens to the fresh water supply. So, there will be no clean, fresh water to drink or to clean the sores that were a part of the first bowl.

The fourth bowl comes in verses 8 and 9. And here, the sun is allowed to scorch men.

The fourth *angel* [verse 8 says] poured out his bowl upon the sun, and it was given it to scorch men with fire. Men with scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God *who* has the power over these plagues, and they did not repent so as to give Him glory.

So here the sun is unleashed. This is true global warming. Perhaps through the destruction of earth’s protective atmosphere, the sun will begin to scorch the earth, and the result will not only be intense and fierce heat. It will also be fierce drought. So, you have intense heat. You have drought. You have painful blisters, and you have other catastrophic changes to the earth’s environment. The polar icecaps will melt in that day. Some scientists suggest that that will raise sea levels worldwide from between one hundred to two hundred feet, flooding and destroying most of the earth’s coastal cities.

The fifth bowl comes in verses 10 – 11, and it’s darkness and pain.

The fifth *angel* poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became darkened; and they gnawed their tongues because of pain, and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they did not repent of their deeds.

You know, that's really a staggering thought, isn't it, that in spite of all this relentless judgment of God, man doesn't repent. He wouldn't repent with the goodness of God as Paul says in Romans 2. He wouldn't allow the goodness of God to lead him to repentance and so now when God pours out His wrath, he won't repent either. He remains absolutely stubbornly hard-hearted against God - acknowledging that these judgments come from God and yet refusing to bow the knee. This fifth bowl is darkness. Added to the sores, added to the pain, added to the absence of water and the blistering heat comes a new and more terrible reality – a cosmic darkness.

Just think about that for a moment. Think of how terrifying that would be in the face of all of the things that had been unleashed upon the earth. And think about how darkness intensifies pain. Just think of how much more intense pain seems at night. A toothache during the day is a distraction, but at night in the darkness, it's all-consuming. And in the darkness that is yet to be, their circumstances will be so intense, this passage tells us, that they will gnaw their tongues because of the pain. And yet still, they will refuse to repent.

The sixth bowl in verses 12 - 16 of chapter 16 is preparation for Armageddon. I'm not going to spend much time here because we're gonna talk about this some next week, but preparation for Armageddon.

The seventh bowl is in 16:17 - 21. And here is the final judgment, the seventh bowl. And in it, the entire earth is shaken. This seventh bowl, remember, completes the seventh trumpet which completes in turn the seventh seal. This is it. This is the final judgment. It immediately precedes the second coming of Jesus Christ, and it will be the worst disaster in the history of the world. We learn in this paragraph that it will be the mother of all earthquakes.

Notice what John writes. Chapter 16:17,

Then the seventh *angel* poured out his bowl upon the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, "It is done." [this is it, this is the final

judgment.] And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake *was it, and* so mighty. The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe.

So here you have this cataclysmic, catastrophic earthquake. And according to verse 20, it will radically change the entire earth's topography as all of the tectonic plates shift and buckle. Verses 18 and 21 point out that along with this earthquake will come violent, unrelenting thunderstorms with hailstones weighing a hundred pounds each as the entire atmosphere of the earth is destroyed, as it's completely rearranged by all that's going on on the earth itself. That is the judgment that God has prepared for the earth.

The end comes in Revelation 19 with the battle of Armageddon and the second coming which I hope to study with you next week. So I'm not going to touch on those tonight.

But I want you to see the total sweep of the judgment that will scrape, scraife the earth and absolutely decimate the physical structure of the earth as well as mankind that lives upon it.

What are we to learn from all of this? Well, I think first of all, the events of the tribulation provide (that should say) a powerful illustration of God's hatred of sin, God's hatred of sin. When you see what God's wrath on unrepentant man looks like, it reminds you of how God sees sin. It should cause you to see how God sees your sin, how He sees my sin. It's not a little thing to God. These people won't do anything differently in terms of sin than the people who live today. And yet God will unleash His fury, and in that is illustrated God's hatred of sin and His just wrath against it.

You may be here tonight, and you may be here because it's tradition for you to be in church on Sunday night. You may be here, young people, because your parents insisted that you come. You

may not really know Jesus Christ. Let me tell you that today He's a Lamb who welcomes you to Him for forgiveness and grace and mercy. But the day is coming when He will be a Lion, and He will destroy those who set themselves against Him. This is how much God hates your sin and my sin as it's pictured in these catastrophic events.

Secondly, (when we think of this) I'm reminded of another thing that's true about God – that even in wrath, God remembers mercy. That phrase of course comes from Habakkuk. You remember the prophet Habakkuk? No children in our church named Habakkuk, but Habakkuk was a great figure. Habakkuk learned that God was gonna judge His people through the Babylonians. And he was incredulous. "God, how can You use an evil people like the Babylonians to destroy Your people and to lead them off captive? How can you do that?" And he had this struggle of faith, faith and doubt. But eventually, he came to understand who God is and that God could be trusted. But he prayed this prayer in Habakkuk 3:2. He asked God to show mercy in the middle of His wrath, "In wrath remember mercy." And in the time of the tribulation, that is exactly what God will do.

In fact, we learned that the gospel is preached throughout this horrific time of judgment. I love this. It's preached by 144,000 Jewish evangelists according to chapter 7 and chapter 14. It's preached by two extraordinary witnesses whom we can't be certain but may be Moses and Elijah as many believe they will be in chapter 11. The gospel is preached by innumerable redeemed, both Jew and Gentile. And the gospel is even preached by an angel. Chapter 14:6 - 7 pictures an angel flying through the sky – that is, using some extraordinary means to broadcast the gospel to the earth. As John Macarthur writes, "This is the amazing paradox. God is busy working to save sinners from His own wrath." Isn't that what God does now? The same thing will be true then.

And as a result of that, a huge number will be saved. Listen to these verses. Revelation 7:9, "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and ... tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches *were* in their hands." Who are these people? Verse 14, the angel explained to John, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Even in wrath, our God will remember mercy and He will be gracious.

There's a third lesson for us that comes from this great event and that is God's patience and grace are revealed in the fact that the tribulation has not yet happened. Turn to 2 Peter for a moment, 2 Peter. Why is it that God delays? Why has this not yet happened? Second Peter 3 explains a little bit of the workings of God and His great eternal purpose. Second Peter 3:9, There were people who were doubting about the coming day of the Lord. Verse 4 says they're going to say,

"Where is the promise of His coming? ..." [They're uniformitarians. They say, "Everything's happened just like it's always happened. God's not going to intervene in human history. He's not going to do this." Verse 5, [wait a minute. Don't forget that God's done it before when He flooded the world. Don't think He's not going to do it again.] Verse 7 says, [but then this time it's not going to be with water. It's going to be with fire.] "...

[Don't] let this one *fact* escape your notice [verse 8], beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. [Here it is. Here's why it hasn't happened yet.] The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but [here's the point] He is patient, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."

Look down at verse 15, "... [so then] regard the patience of our Lord *as* salvation." The reason this terrible period of time has not yet been unleashed upon the world is because our God still has those whom He plans to draw to Himself through the work of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. It's His patience. It's His grace. It's His mercy.

A final application point for us to consider is this. Through God's mercy and grace, and this is amazing, we will not be subjected to that awful time called the great tribulation. During the entire tribulation period, the church is in the presence of God and the Lamb in heaven. We are pictured in the book of Revelation in a group called the twenty-four elders. I've touched on this before, but I've never really defended it to you. I want you to see this because it's a great encouragement to me, and I trust it will be to you.

The twenty-four elders, now there are two views on who these beings are. Some say (there is a,) they're an order of angelic beings. The other view is that they are human representatives of the redeemed. And I want us to see who they are. They're first mentioned in Revelation 4:4. Turn there. This is key for us, Revelation 4:4, notice that, "Around the throne, around God's throne, [there] were twenty-four thrones." This pictures these elders ruling and reigning. Well, Scripture nowhere presents angels as ruling and reigning. In fact, Hebrews 1:14 presents them as servants of the redeemed.

On the other hand, the saints are often described as reigning with Christ. Revelation 2 to the church in Thyatira, he describes those who will rule with Christ. Verse 21 of chapter 3, "He who overcomes, I will grant him to sit down with Me on My throne (Christ said), as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne." So the saints are promised thrones with Christ. Chapter 10, "You have made them to be (speaking of believers) a kingdom and priests to our God; they will reign upon the earth." Chapter 20:4, "I saw thrones, and they sat on them."

And then there's this other group that come out of the tribulation that are associated to those who sit on thrones. They too reigned with Christ, we're told at the end of the verse 4, for a thousand years. There are other passages in the New Testament that describe saints reigning; Matthew 19:28, Luke 22:30, 1 Corinthians 6:2-3, 2 Timothy 2:12. All of those passages describe the saints reigning, but never do you see angels reigning or sitting on thrones.

They're also called, in 4:4 of Revelation, elders, elders. The Greek word means "to be older or old." This word is never used in Scripture for angels because it's inappropriate. Angels don't age. Always it's used instead of older men, the elders of Israel or the elders of the church. That's how it's always used in the rest of Scripture. So, it's most natural to see it as the redeemed.

Notice that in verse 4 of chapter 4, they are clothed in white garments. Now that can be true of angels. It is, it was at Christ's resurrection for example, but in Revelation, white garments are used most frequently of the saints, and I've listed several references here, Revelation 3:5, 18, 19:8. So this too seems more likely to be the saints.

And then lastly, we're told they have golden crowns on their heads. Crowns were never promised to angels, and they're never described as wearing them, but believers are described in

this way. They are described as wearing crowns in a number of passages in the New Testament. So, (you,) when you look at the overall weight of evidence, it's very clear that these are the redeemed.

Why twenty-four? Well, twenty-four is sometimes used in Scripture as representative of a larger group. For example, there were twenty-four officers in the sanctuary representing the twenty-four courses of Levitical priests. There were twenty-four divisions of singers in the temple representing the larger number. So the twenty-four elders appear to be representatives of a much larger group of the human redeemed. Who exactly are these human believers? Probably, (we can't be certain but probably) all the believers of the Old and New Testaments.

And when you look at the rest of the evidence in the rest of Revelation, the evidence affirms that believers are not here during the tribulation. Not only do you see it with the twenty-four elders which are the redeemed in heaven with Christ, but you look at the rest of the book, you see the same thing. In chapters 1 - 3, the churches on earth - over and over again, nineteen times in fact in those chapters the word "church" occurs, and they're here in earthly cities. In 4 - 5, the elders who represent the church are already in heaven. You go all the way to 19:1 - 10, you have the marriage supper of the Lamb in heaven. And then immediately following that, the church returns with Christ at His second coming. So, the church then is not clearly presented as being on earth from the end of chapter 3 until the second coming in chapter 19.

What's the point of all that? It's simply this. As you contemplate and reflect on the approaching storm of the wrath of God and of the Lamb; as you think about those devastating judgments poured out in relenting wave after relenting wave upon the earth when a third of mankind are destroyed at one time, another fourth are destroyed, and over and over again the earth is decimated, thank God that in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are rescued from the approaching storm of His wrath. Because we have been justified, we stand in grace and there is therefore (what?) now no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus. In Thessalonians, Paul describes us as those preserved by Jesus from the wrath to come. Jesus saves us. He rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

Let's pray together.

Father, we are struck as we read these passages, as we reflect on the storm that's coming of Your holiness, of Your righteousness, of Your just wrath against our sin. Father, we see in these pictures, we've read glimpses of what our sin deserves, of how we would have responded to You in absolute rebellion apart from the intervention of Your grace.

Father, how can we ever thank You for the fact that You have made us Your own. Lord Jesus, we thank You that You have made us through Your death, through Your perfect life, You have made us to wear Your own righteousness. You've dealt with our sin, with our guilt. And You shield us from Your coming wrath. We thank You. We praise You. We will adore You throughout eternity for the fact that You chose us, that You have forgiven us, that You have declared us forever righteous in Yourself.

Father, help us to live lives of humble adoration, of thankful praise and of devotion to Your Son who rescues us from the wrath to come.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.