

Notes on Tribulation Chronology

Just as it is important to understand the events of the tribulation, it is also important to understand the chronological relationships those events bear to one another, and to other major prophetic events, such as the rapture of the Church and the millennium. The development of a chronology of tribulation events is not a simple task, but it is rewarding because it greatly aids our understanding of the events themselves. We will address three areas of chronology:

1) absolute external chronology—when the tribulation will begin with respect to the present; 2) relative external chronology—when the tribulation occurs in relation to other prophesied events; and, 3) internal chronology—the approximate chronology of tribulation events.

Absolute External Chronology

At the outset we run into our first major obstacle. We cannot determine an absolute external chronology for the tribulation because it is not possible to know when, with respect to the present, the tribulation will begin. The reason is that the length of the Church age is not given, nor can it be deduced from any biblical data. That this information is missing from the Bible is important to note. Failure to understand this fact has led to misinterpretations of scripture and even some misguided predictions regarding the timing of the rapture and the beginning of the tribulation period. There are two things that need to be borne in mind concerning this problem. 1) God did not reveal the future existence of the Church in the Old Testament. This fact is explicitly stated in the New Testament (cf. Eph 3:1-10). The absence of the Church from Old Testament prophecy can be observed from passages like Isaiah 61:1-3, Daniel 9:27, and Zechariah 9:9-10, in which the prophet's perspective included events of both the first and second advents of Christ viewed as one event, with no indication of the intervening Church age. Given that the future existence of the Church was unforeseen in the Old Testament, and the fact that the Church age is parenthetical to God's prophesied program for Israel, there is no way to determine from the Old Testament when the tribulation period will begin. 2) The New Testament nowhere indicates the length of the Church age, making it impossible to know from the New Testament the approximate starting date of the tribulation. Some have tried to work out a method for calculating the date of the rapture, or the date when the tribulation will begin; however, all such attempts are futile since the prerequisite chronological data has not been revealed. Although it is not possible to know the date at which the tribulation will begin, it is possible to know when it occurs in relation to the millennium, and it is possible to know some things about the internal chronology of the period. These are the two areas where we will focus our attention.

Relative External Chronology

By relative external chronology is meant the chronological relationship of the tribulation to other prophesied events. The Bible indicates that the tribulation period is a prelude to the millennium; its purpose is both to prepare Israel for the return of Christ to usher in his eternal kingdom (Zech. 13:7-9), and to judge the world for its rebellion against God (2 Thess. 2:8-11).

The Tribulation is a Future Event

The tribulation period immediately precedes the millennium; thus, from the present perspective it is a future event. While most covenant premillennialists agree with this observation, amillennialists, because of their allegorization of Bible prophecy, and their belief that we are currently in the kingdom age, almost universally deny that the tribulation is in the future, identifying it with past events, usually the Roman persecutions of the first century church. Some covenant premillennialists hold a similar position, identifying the tribulation as a past event, usually the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem, or the early persecutions of the church. A few covenant premillennialists known as “imminent posttribulationists” suggest that we may now be in the tribulation. This presents us with our first major question concerning the tribulation: Is the tribulation past, present, or future? The following are three questions that can help to clarify our understanding of the relative external chronology of the tribulation: 1) Is there any evidence to suggest that we are currently in the millennium, implying that the tribulation is past? 2) Has there been any set of world events in history that match the description of the tribulation given in the Bible? 3) Are there prerequisites that must occur in order for the tribulation to begin, and if so, have they been met?

The Millennium is a Future Event

When we compare the biblical description of the millennium to the present age in which we live, there is simply no biblical reason to believe that the millennium is now occurring; one would think that would be fairly obvious, and it is, even to amillennialists. That’s why they allegorize prophecy in order to support their view that the millennium is a spiritual kingdom over which Christ is presently ruling from Heaven. Every prophecy of the second coming in which a chronological relationship with either the tribulation or the millennium is given, places the second coming at the conclusion of the tribulation, immediately prior to the beginning of the millennial kingdom (note especially Zech. 14:1-11, Matt. 24:29-31, and Rev. 19:11-20:6). In Matthew 25:31-34 Christ was explicit in stating that his kingdom rule would be inaugurated at his return. He said:

[Matt. 25:31-34] But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, “Come, you who are blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” [NASB]

Jesus clearly established when he would ascend to the throne of his kingdom: “when” he returns in glory with his angels. This was not a reference to a mystical or spiritual coming as some claim. Jesus had just described his second coming (Matt. 24: 29-31), here he associated the inauguration of the messianic kingdom with that coming. The temporal structure of this passage (“when”/“then”) is precise and emphatic. Although Christ is presently seated at the right hand of the Father in Heaven, that is not the throne of the messianic kingdom; how could it be if the

kingdom is on earth as clearly stated in this passage? Concerning the coming of Messiah, Zechariah said:

[Zech. 14:4-9] On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him. On that day there will be no light, no cold or frost. It will be a unique day, without daytime or nighttime—a day known to the LORD. When evening comes, there will be light. On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in summer and in winter. The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name.

Notice the correspondence of this statement to Jesus' statement in Matthew 25:31-34; Messiah will come and his feet will rest upon the Mount of Olives. He will return with his holy ones (the angels, cf. Matt. 24:29-31) and the LORD (Jehovah), the Messiah, will be King over the whole earth. Note also John's description in Revelation 19:11-20:4.

[Rev. 19:11-20:4] I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great." Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh. And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time. 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 for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

In this description of the second coming we see that Christ will not return alone, but with “the armies of Heaven,” a reference to the angels (cf. 19:17-18; 20:1-3). He will strike down his enemies and rule the earth “with an iron rod”; Satan will be bound and sealed in the Abyss, and the saints will be resurrected from their graves to rule with Christ during the millennium. One only has to read this passage to understand why the book of Revelation was for a time excluded from the New Testament Canon after some of the second century eastern churches defected from premillennialism to amillennialism. Nothing in this description fits with amillennialism. To underscore how destitute of validity amillennial interpretation is, we need only ask a few questions, such as: If we are currently in the kingdom, as defined by a spiritual interpretation of the millennial prophecies, in what sense is Satan now “bound” and “sealed” in the Abyss and unable to deceive the nations? In what sense are the saints now ruling? When did the resurrection described in Revelation 20:3 occur? The amillennialists’ answers to these questions inevitably involve either questioning the validity of the biblical text, or its wholesale allegorization. However, there can be no doubt that when scripture is understood in a normal/objective manner it clearly teaches premillennialism.

The Prophesied Events of the Tribulation Have Never Been Fulfilled

To determine whether the tribulation events have been fulfilled in the past or are being fulfilled at the present, the reader need only compare the biblical descriptions of the tribulation with history. Covenantalists have already made such a comparison and have found no match—which is why they switch to an allegorical method when interpreting tribulation prophecies, despite the fact that they apply a normal/objective method when interpreting most other prophecy. The theological bias of such a method is obvious. Only through allegorical interpretation can one claim historical or present fulfillment of the tribulation prophecies. For example, we might ask: When, since the writing of the New Testament, did an object hit the earth destroying the life in one of the oceans? Or, when did Christ return bodily, as is indicated to be the concluding event of the tribulation (Zech. 14:1-21; Matt. 24:3-31; Rev. 19:11-21)? There simply is no past fulfillment of tribulation prophecy to be found in history.

The Prerequisites For the Tribulation Have Not Been Met

The final question we will ask is whether there are any prerequisites that must be met before the tribulation can begin, and if so, have they been met? The answer is: Yes—there are prerequisites, and, No—they have not been met. Note the following examples:

We learn from Daniel 9:24-27, the prophecy of the seventy weeks, that the destruction of Jerusalem and the second temple, the temple of Jesus’ day, would occur after the conclusion of the 69th week and before the beginning of the 70th week—the tribulation period. Accordingly, the tribulation could not begin until sometime after the A.D.70 destruction of Jerusalem and the

temple. Since the tribulation begins with the signing of a covenant between the Prince to come (the Antichrist) and the nation of Israel (Dan. 9:27), it is apparent that the tribulation cannot begin until Israel comes back into national existence at a time when that final world empire is in place to make the covenant. The presence of the third temple is also a prerequisite to the fulfillment of prophecies from the midpoint of the tribulation forward. Note that the abomination in the temple, originally described in Daniel 9:27 and referred to by both Christ (Matt. 24:15) and Paul (2Thess. 2:3-4), cannot take place unless the third temple is in operation. Let us see how this is derived from Daniel 9:24-27. [Explanations in brackets added.]

[Dan. 9:24-27] (24) “Seventy sevens are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy. (25) Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven sevens, and sixty-two sevens. It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. (26) After the sixty-two sevens, the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. [This refers to Christ’s death] The people of the ruler who will come [the Romans] will destroy the city and the sanctuary. [Referring to the destruction of Jerusalem and the second temple in A.D.70] The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. (27) He will confirm a covenant with many for one seven. [The Prince to come, i.e., the Antichrist, will make a covenant with Israel for a seven-year period.] In the middle of the seven he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.” [After 3 ½ years he will break his covenant by desecrating the temple. This event must happen in the third temple since it is represented as occurring after the destruction of the second temple, cf. v.26. Since the third temple has not been built, the fulfillment of this prophecy must be in the future.]

In an effort to avoid the implications of this passage some place the fulfillment of the abomination in the intertestamental period, when Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) desecrated the temple in 167 B.C. However, that interpretation directly contradicts Christ’s later statement that the abomination spoken of in Daniel was yet future (Matt. 24:15), as well as Paul’s statement to the same effect (2 Thess. 2:3-9). Also, since the second temple is to be destroyed before the seventieth week begins (Daniel 9:24-27), the abomination during the seventieth week (the tribulation) must take place in the third temple; Antiochus’ abomination occurred in the second temple. We should also point out that Christ did not come with his angels to rule the earth anytime during the second century B.C. Since the third temple has not been built, it is not possible that the tribulation could be in the past.

The Relationship of the Tribulation to the Millennium

Scripture presents the judgment aspect of the tribulation and the blessings of the millennium as two aspects of the same period called “the day of the LORD.” For this reason

many passages describe the tribulation and the millennium together (Isa. 1:24-2:4; 24:1-25:12; 34:1-35:10; Joel 2:1-32; Zech. 12:1-13:9). The Old Testament knows no other relationship than that the beginning of the day of the LORD is the prelude to the establishment of the earthly kingdom rule of Christ.

A study of the second coming also sheds light on the chronological relationship of the tribulation to the millennium. Many passages that deal with the second coming picture it as the consummation of the tribulation and the beginning of the millennium (Zech. 14:1-11; Rev. 19:11-20:6; see also Isa. 35:4-10; 61:2b-3; Joel 3:9-21; Zech. 2:6-13); given this information, along with the purpose of the tribulation period as a time for Israel to undergo a national conversion in preparation for Messiah's coming (Isa. 1:24-2:4; Zech. 13:7-9; Ezek. 20:33-44), it is apparent that the tribulation immediately precedes the return of Christ and the establishment of the kingdom.

Internal Chronology

The internal chronology of the tribulation period presents the most challenges to the student of future prophecy. That's because the chronology of the period is not laid out in a single passage, or even in a single book of the Bible. One problem that is frequently seen in proffered chronologies of the tribulation is the tendency to work from the book of Revelation, without giving proper consideration to the timeline given in Daniel 9:24-27. Another difficulty is the failure to recognize the rather complex chronological scheme employed in the book of Revelation, as well as in other passages that bear on tribulation chronology, such as Matthew 24:4-31. Our examination of internal chronology will focus on three areas: 1) determining the length of the period; 2) noting the major divisions of the period; and, 3) development of an approximate timeline of events.

The Length of the Tribulation Period

The book of Daniel is crucial in determining the length of the tribulation. Not only does the information in Daniel allow us to deduce the length of the period, it gives specific events that signal the beginning, middle, and end of the period. Because of the critical role of the book of Daniel, it is rightly viewed as the "key" to the study of the tribulation.

Daniel's Seventy Weeks (Daniel 9:24-27)

The prophecy of the seventy weeks (Dan. 9:24-27) is perhaps the most important prophecy of all in understanding tribulation chronology. This prophecy was given for the purpose of conveying specific chronological information concerning God's future plans for the Jewish nation, which was then in captivity. The prophecy was conveyed to Daniel by the angel Gabriel (9:21) in response to Daniel's prayer for understanding concerning the future of the Jewish people.

While this prophecy might seem cryptic at first look, we must bear in mind that Gabriel was communicating details of events, some of which would not be fulfilled for hundreds of years and others which would not be fulfilled for thousands of years. It will help if we identify the

various elements of the prophecy before trying to decipher the chronology. The phrase “your people” refers to Israel, and “the holy city” is Jerusalem. The statement, “to put an end to wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy,” refers to the historical progression of events leading up to the promised kingdom. The “Anointed One” refers to Messiah the Prince, who will come to rule (cf. Isa. 9:6-7). The Anointed One being “cut off” is a reference to Messiah’s death. The destruction of the city and the sanctuary is a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70, after Christ’s death. The “ruler who will come” is the Prince to come (the Antichrist) who will come to power during the tribulation (cf. Matt. 24:15-22; 2 Thess. 2:3-4; Rev. 13:1-9). The “covenant” is a treaty made between Israel and the Prince to come (the Antichrist). The last, or seventieth seven (v.27) represents the length of the tribulation period. “Desolations” refers to the destructive events that will take place during the tribulation period. The “abomination on a wing of the temple” or as alternately rendered, “one who will come on the wings of abomination” refers to the Prince to come seating himself in the temple and claiming to be God (cf. Matt. 24:15; 2 Thess 2:3-4; Rev. 13:1-9), and likely to the setting up of an image in the temple (Rev. 13:14-15). “The end that is decreed” is a reference to the destruction of the Prince to come at the second coming of Christ, who will crush the Antichrist’s kingdom and establish God’s kingdom on earth (cf. Dan. 2:44-45; 7:1-27; Rev. 19:19-20).

Having identified the key elements of the prophecy, we are now able to tackle the chronology. The “sevens,” or “weeks” (vv.24,25,27) are references to units of seven “years,” in which one “seven” equals approximately seven years (or 2520 days, cf. Rev. 12:6). This is apparent because Gabriel said there would be 69 units of seven (7 “sevens” + 62 “sevens”) from the time of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah is “cut off” (i.e., killed). This is the amount of time from the decree of Artaxerxes on Nisan 1, 444 B.C. to Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the temple on Nisan 9 (March 29 in the Julian calendar), A.D. 33, just five days before his crucifixion. One possible calculation of the 70 weeks prophecy is as follows: (The intermediate result in each calculation is given as an integer, since the least significant figure in the prophecy is an integer; also the starting date assumes that the decree was issued on the first day of the month, since no other date is specified.) The last half of the 70th week is 1260 days (Rev. 12:6 cf. 12:14 and Dan. 7:25); since half of the 70th week is 1260 days, one week equals 2520 days (2x1260 days). Thus, there are 476 solar years in the first 69 weeks (calculated as the integer result of 69 “weeks” x 2520 days per “week” / 365.24219 days per solar year). This amounts to 173,855 days. When 173,855 days are added to the start date of Nisan 1, 444 B.C., the result is Nisan 9, A.D. 33, (March 29 in the Julian calendar, March 27 in the Gregorian Calendar), which is the date of the triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem five days before his crucifixion on Nisan 14 (April 3), A.D. 33. [To verify this computation, note that Nisan 1, 444 B.C. is Julian day number 1,559,344; that day plus 173,855 days (the number of days in 476 solar years) results in Julian day number 1,733,199, which was Nisan 9 (March 29), A.D. 33.] One of the important features of this prophecy is that it confirms the length of the tribulation period; since the events of the first 69 weeks fit perfectly with history when a “week” equals 2520 days, it confirms the accuracy of the 2520-day length of the tribulation period. (For additional information on the prophecy of the 70 weeks, see: “Daniel 9:24-27-The Prophecy of Daniel’s 70 Weeks,” by the author, Biblical Reader Communications, 2007.)

Other Evidence Confirming the Length of the Tribulation Period

It is possible to confirm the length of the tribulation from the book of Daniel. Daniel 7:25 refers to the fact that the saints living in the tribulation period will be given over to the Antichrist (for persecution and martyrdom, cf. Rev. 13:5-7) for a period designated as “a time, times, and half a time”; this expression is equivalent to three and a half (“a time” = 1, “times” {Heb. dual} = 2, and “half a time” = ½), the unit of time is not specified. That this represents approximately 3.5 years seems to be confirmed in Daniel 12:11, where Daniel is told that the number of days from the abomination that causes desolation (at the midpoint, cf. Dan. 9:27) is to be 1290 days, which is approximately 3.5 years. The difference in the 1290 days given in Daniel 12:11 and the 1260 days given in Revelation 12:6 may be due to the fact that one figure extends to the second coming, while the other extends to some unspecified event thirty days later, possibly the conclusion of the judgment described in Matthew 25:31-46, or the resurrection described in Daniel 12:13 and Revelation 20:4. [The 1335 day figure given in Daniel 12:12 apparently extends from the midpoint to the beginning of the millennium; thus, there is to be a seventy-five day interlude between the conclusion of the tribulation and the beginning of the millennium (1335 days - 1260 days = 75 days)].

Another confirmation of the length of the period comes from Revelation 13:5-7. Here the authority of the Antichrist to overcome the saints and to compel the inhabitants of the earth to worship him is said to extend for forty-two months (v.5). It is clear from a comparison of Daniel 9:27, Matthew 24:15-22, and Revelation 13:5 that this persecution begins at the midpoint of the tribulation. This would mean that the second half of the tribulation is approximately forty-two months, or three and a half years, which comports with Daniel 7:25. Thus, with this information we are able to confirm that the length of the tribulation period is seven years; and as we have seen, the chronological information from Daniel, Matthew 24:4-22, and Revelation is consistent.

Major Divisions Within the Tribulation

Not only does the prophecy of the seventy weeks provide the data needed to determine the length of the tribulation, it also contains the most important key to the internal chronology of the period—that the abomination in the temple marks the midpoint. Since several important prophecies reference this event (e.g., Matt. 24:15, 2 Thess. 2:3-12) or are linked in some way to prophecies that do, without this information it would be impossible to construct a useful chronology. Because the abomination in the temple occurs at the midpoint of the tribulation, and because it marks a turning point in the character of the period (cf. Matt. 24:15-22, esp. v.21), outlines of the tribulation are generally organized according to this subdivision; such is the arrangement Christ gave in Matthew 24:4-31.

There is no special designation given for the first half of the period. Christ referred to it in Matthew 24:5 as “the beginning of birth pangs,” but that was not intended as a period title. The second half is described as a time of “great tribulation” (Matt. 24:21), though that too is a description rather than title; and, as we have seen, the second half is also referred to as, “a time, times, and half a time” (Dan. 7:25; 12:7; Rev. 12:14).

Understanding the Chronologies of Daniel, Matthew 24:3-31, and Revelation 6:1-20:3

Before we can determine how the chronological details of the various prophecies fit together, we must first understand them individually. The three major tribulation prophecies that convey significant chronological information are: Daniel 9:24-27, Matthew 24:3-31, and Revelation 6:1-20:3.

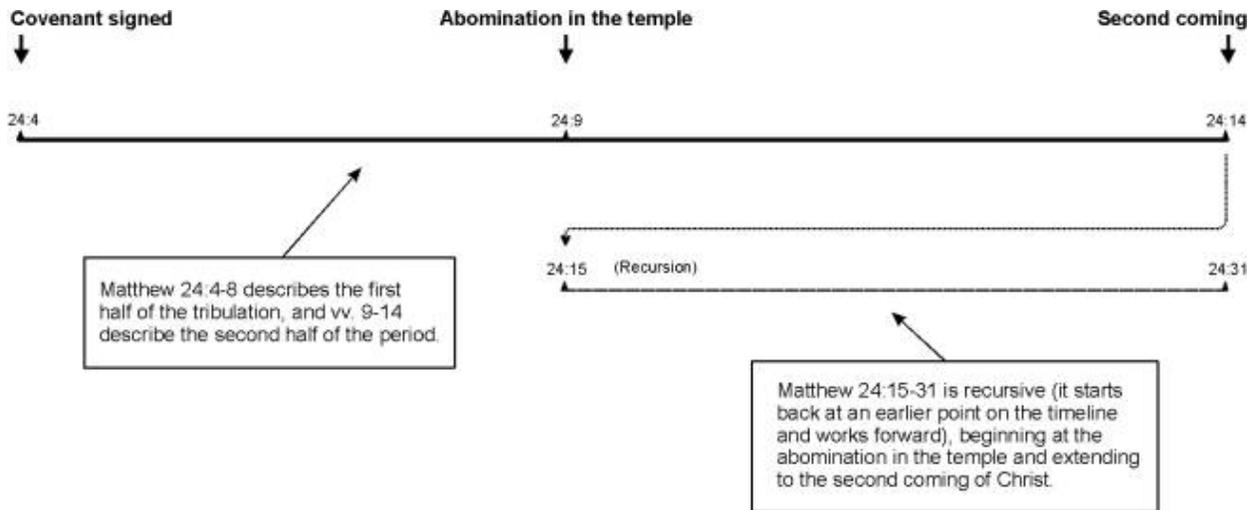
The Chronology of Daniel

While many details about the tribulation are revealed throughout the book of Daniel, the basic chronology of the period is presented in the prophecy of the seventy weeks (Dan. 9:24-27). Daniel identifies three key events that are linked to the timeline of the period: 1) the signing of a treaty between Israel and the Prince to come (the Antichrist), which begins the period; 2) the abomination that marks the midpoint; and, 3) the close of the period, marked by the destruction of the Antichrist. Based on information contained in this prophecy and in the book of Revelation (cf. Rev. 12:6,14) we can determine that the length of the tribulation is seven round years (360 days each), and that it naturally breaks into two equal parts (Dan. 9:27). Daniel mentions in 7:25 that the saints will be given into the hands of the “little horn” (i.e., the Antichrist) for three and a half times (years), which correlates with the second half of the period. (For a more extended discussion of the calculation of the seventy weeks prophecy in Daniel 9:24-27, see: [The Olivet Discourse: A Reconstruction of the Text from Matthew, Mark, and Luke, with Commentary](#), by the author, pp. 201-207.)

The Chronology of Matthew 24:3-31

In his final discourse Christ gave an overview of the tribulation and the judgment of the nations following his second coming (Matt. 24-25; Mk. 13; Lk. 21:5-36). The structure of Matthew 24:4-31 is of considerable importance in understanding tribulation chronology. Several schemes have been proposed for the chronology of this passage, including the following: 1) One proposal suggests that verses 4-14 refer to events in the Church age, leading up to the tribulation period, which according to this scheme are described in verses 15-31. The problem with this view is that it places events clearly associated with the second half of the period into the first half, and events associated with the first half of the tribulation into the period prior to the tribulation. 2) Another proposal is that only verses 4-8 refer to the Church age. The difficulty with this view is that it jumps from the Church age (vv.4-8) directly to the second half of the tribulation period (vv.9-31), with no mention of the events of the first half of the period. (The time of severe persecution described in verse 9 clearly falls into the second half of the period, cf. Dan. 7:25 and Rev. 13:1-18.) 3) Yet another proposal is that verses 4-14 describe the first half of the tribulation, whereas verses 15-31 describe the second half. This view faces the same difficulty as the first view above, in that it places events clearly associated with the second half of the period (vv.9-14) into the first half of the period (e.g., the martyrdom of the saints, cf. Dan. 7:25). 4) A better option (see illustration 1 below) is that verses 4-8 refer to the first half of the tribulation and verses 9-14 refer to the second half, with verse 15 jumping back to the middle of the period and continuing on to the second coming (vv.15-31) in order to highlight certain aspects of the second half.

Illustration 1: The Chronological Structure of Matthew 24:4-31



[Notes on Illustration 1: Matthew 24:9 begins the second half of the seven-year period (we know this because Daniel 7:25 establishes that the time of severe persecution and martyrdom begins in the middle of the period and extends to the end). Therefore, verses 4-8 refer to the first half of the period. (Note the transition between verses 8 and 9.) Verse 15 picks up at the abomination (which begins at the midpoint, cf. Daniel 9:27) and from verses 15 to 31 the details of the second half of the period are expanded upon.]

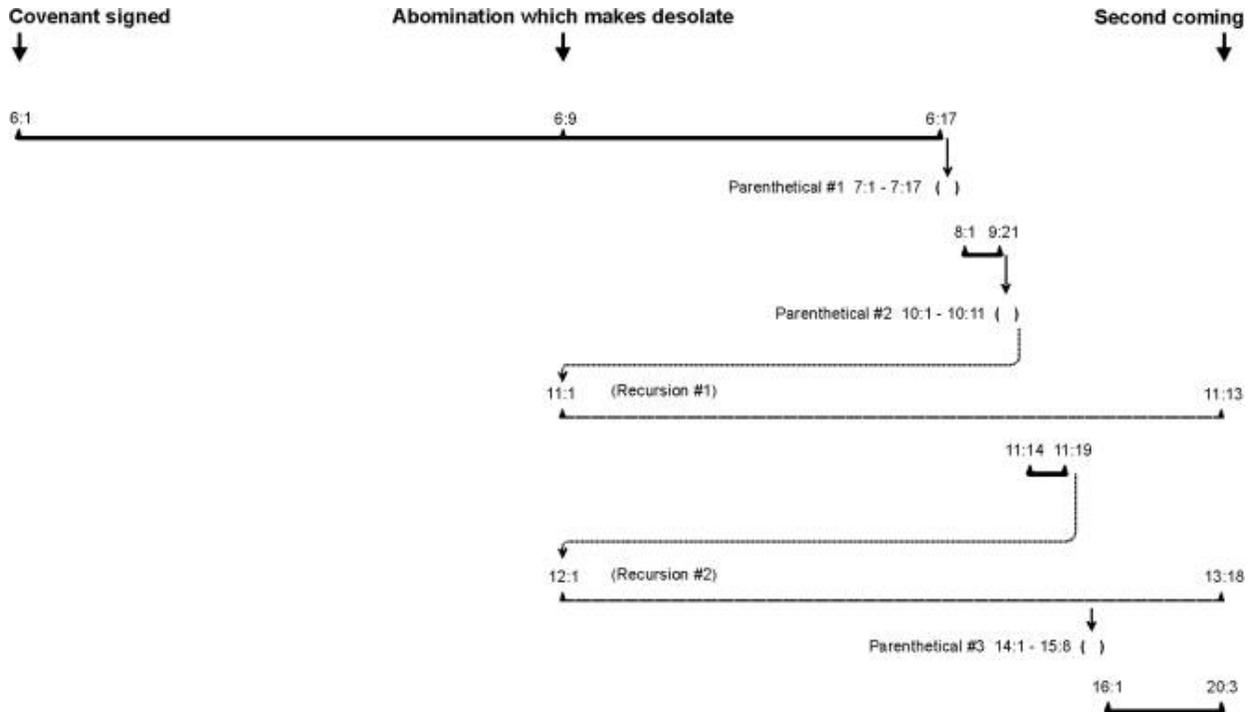
That this view is correct is confirmed by the following: 1) It does not require events in one period to be shifted into another period. 2) It recognizes the natural breaking points between verses 8 and 9, as well as verses 14 and 15. 3) It recognizes that recursions are natural in this type of literature, perhaps owing to the inherent problems of explaining multiple historical threads. One important observation from this chronological structure is that there is overlap between 24:9-10 (the survey of the entire period) and 24:15-21 (the recursive section that backs up to the midpoint), such that the apostasy mentioned in verses 9-10 follows on the heels of the abomination and persecution in verses 15-21. Thus, the order of events is: the abomination, severe persecution, and apostasy. Note that Paul refers to this apostasy in 2 Thessalonians 2:3.

The Chronology of Revelation 6:1-20:3

The book of Revelation, from 6:1 through 20:3, is essentially in sequential order. However, there are four features to the chronology of Revelation that must be given special attention. 1) Revelation 6:1-20:3 contains three parenthetical sections (7:1-7:17; 10:1-10:11 and 14:1-15:8), which do not advance the timeline. 2) Revelation's account of the tribulation also contains two recursive sections (11:1-11:13 and 12:1-13:18); in both cases these recursions return to the midpoint of the period and continue to the end. 3) Time compression and expansion can present problems in that a relatively short section of the book may cover a much longer period of time than a more extended section. Note that the first half of the tribulation occupies

only eight verses. 4) Some events may overlap since it is not necessary for one event to completely run its course before another begins.

Illustration 2: The Chronological Structure of Revelation 6:1-20:3



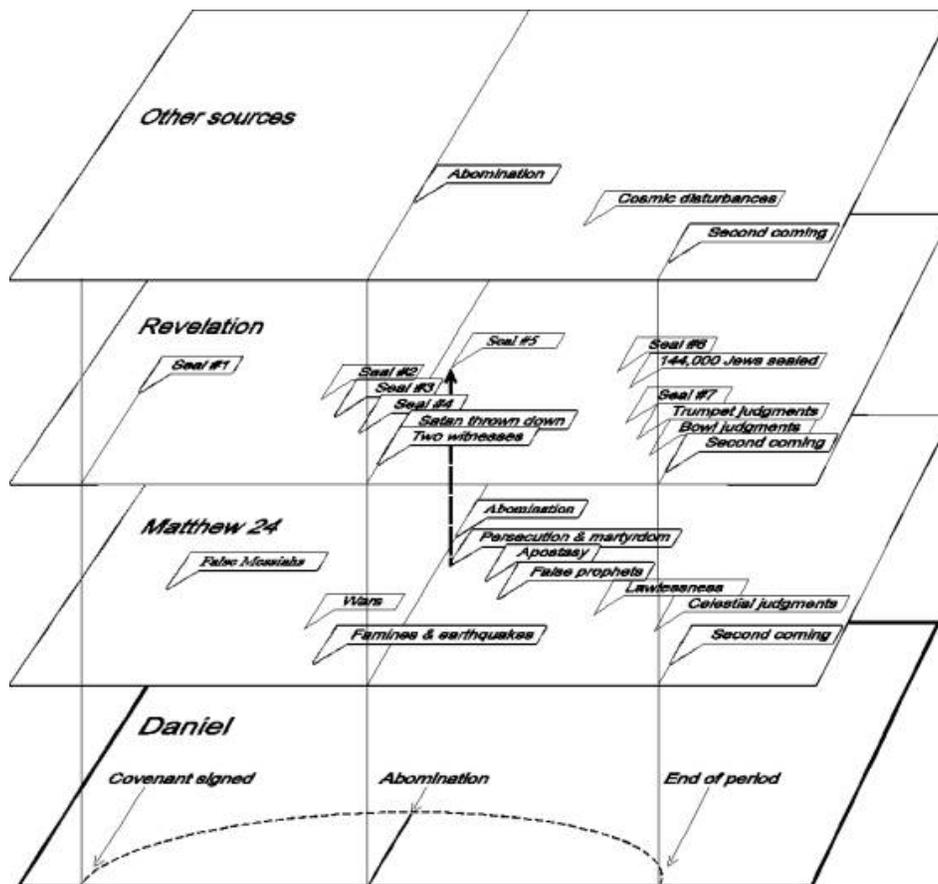
[Notes on Illustration 2: The four solid lines in this figure represent four forward movements in the Book. These four movements form the base timeline of the seven-year period (as far as the Book of Revelation is concerned). In addition to the base timeline there are three parenthetical sections that do not advance the timeline, as well as two recursive sections that return to a previous point and continue forward. While this structure may seem cumbersome, it simply illustrates the difficulty of explaining multiple historical threads in a linear medium.]

One major difficulty with the chronology of Revelation is that it mentions only one of the three chronological markers given in Daniel—the end of the period. The abomination described in Daniel 9:27 is alluded to in Revelation 13:1-10, but that statement is in one of the recursive sections of the book, which makes aligning the events of Revelation with the events of Daniel more difficult; however, Matthew 24:4-31 is helpful in that respect.

How an Overall Timeline Can Be Constructed

Because the book of Daniel gives the most specific chronological information regarding the tribulation period, Daniel's chronology serves as the foundation for the timeline. To that timeline Matthew 24:4-31 can be added. The reason for adding Matthew 24:4-31 next is that while both Matthew 24:4-31 and Revelation refer to many of the same events, Matthew 24:4-31 indicates the place in the sequence of events where the abomination occurs, indicating the midpoint in relation to those events. We can then add the book of Revelation and any miscellaneous references from other sources. Of course we must bear in mind that it will not be possible to place every event on the timeline precisely. While a few events can be placed with a fair degree of certainty, many can only be placed in approximate locations.

Illustration 3: A Combined Tribulation Chronology



[Notes on Illustration 3: The Book of Daniel serves as the “base timeline” in developing an overall chronology of the tribulation; next Matthew 24 is aligned. Since Matthew 24 mentions both the “abomination” and many of the events of Revelation, the proper alignment of Matthew makes possible a more precise placement of Revelation. Finally, events from other sources can be matched to the timeline; however, these are mostly duplicate references to events already described in Daniel, Matthew, or Revelation.]

Chronological Aspects of the First Half of the Tribulation

1. The covenant made with Israel (Dan. 9:27)

The tribulation begins with the signing of a treaty between Israel and an alliance of Eurasian/Mediterranean nations (Dan. 2:1-45; 7:1-28; 9:27).

2. The First Seal (Rev. 6:1-2)

The seals do not represent events; they are movements within the tribulation, i.e., time periods during which God will sovereignly allow certain events to take place. This is apparent from the description of the scroll of which these seals are a part (Rev. 6:1-14). As a seal is broken, the scroll can only be unrolled so far before the necessity of breaking another seal. The events that are permitted during the time of each seal are the things written on the scroll, and only those events “unlocked” by the breaking of a seal can transpire. This clearly symbolizes God’s sovereignty over the events of the period. The first seal (Rev. 6:1-2) is the first movement. A comparison of the seals with the sequence of events in Matthew 24:4-31 indicates that the time of the first four seals will occur before the abomination in the temple, which occurs at the midpoint of the period. (The fifth seal, persecution and martyrdom, immediately follows the abomination at the midpoint, cf. Matt. 24:15-23, and is therefore the first event of the second half of the period.)

3. Spiritual Deception

Jesus mentioned spiritual deception as the first characteristic of the period (Matt 24:4-5). Because the reference to false messiahs is plural, this is probably a general characteristic, extending at least until the middle of the period, after which the claim to deity by the Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:4) will eclipse, and likely pre-empt all others.

4. The Third Jewish Temple Built

Although there is no reference to the actual building of the temple in any tribulation passage, there are several passages that presume the temple to be in operation by the middle of the period (Dan. 9:27; 12:11; Matt. 24:15; 2 Thess. 2:3-4; Rev. 11:1-2). Since the abomination must take place in the temple, and since as a part of the abomination the regular sacrifices will be halted, it is apparent that the third temple must be built and in operation sometime prior to the midpoint. Actually, the construction of this temple could begin anytime as long as it is sufficiently complete for sacrifices to be offered prior to the midpoint. It is possible, perhaps likely, that the covenant made with the Antichrist at the beginning of the period allows the construction of this temple to take place.

Illustration 4: Combined List of Major Tribulation Events (in Sequence)

Daniel	Matthew 24	Revelation		Combined List of Events
9:27		6:1-2		1. Covenant made with Israel
	24:5			2. (Seal #1) political conquest
[9:27]	[24:15]	[11:1-2]	[2 Thess. 2:3-4]	3. Spiritual deception
	24:6	6:3-4	Ezek. 38-39?	4. {Jewish temple rebuilt}
	24:7	6:5-6		5. (Seal #2) war
		6:7-8		6. (Seal #3) famines, earthquakes
		12:7-17		7. (Seal #4) death
		11:1-14		8. {Satan confined to earth}
9:27	24:15		2 Thess. 2:3-4	9. {Two witnesses begin ministry}
		13:11-18		10. Abomination in the temple
	24:15-22	12:13-14		11. {Ministry False Prophet begins}
7:25	24:9,15-22	6:9-11		12. Judean believers flee for refuge
	24:10			13. (Seal #5) persecution, martyrdom
	24:11	13:11-18 cf. 17:1-18	2 Thess. 2:8-12	14. Apostasy
	24:12			15. Spiritual deception/false prophets
	24:29	6:12-17	Isa. 24:17-23	16. Lawlessness (moral?)
		7:1-8		17. (Seal #6) cosmic disturbances
		8:1-6		18. 144,000 Jews sealed
		8:7-13		19. (Seal #7) the trumpet judgments
		9:1-12		20. (Trumpets #1-4) cosmic events
		9:13-21		21. (Trumpet #5) demonic affliction
		11:15-19		22. (Trumpet #6) war
		16:1-11		23. (Trumpet #7) the bowl judgments
		16:12-16		24. (Bowls #1-5) plagues
		16:17-21		25. (Bowl #6) preparation war
[7:13-14,26-27]	24:30-31	19:11-21	Zech. 14:1-11	26. (Bowl #7) global destruction
		19:17-21		27. Second coming of Christ
9:27		19:20		28. Armageddon
		19:21	Zech. 14:1-4	29. Judgment on Antichrist, False Prophet
		20:1-3		30. Judgment Antichrist's armies
				31. Satan confined to the Abyss

[] = implied, { } = position in sequence is only approximate

5. The second seal (Rev. 6:3-4)

The second seal allows war to break out, and seems to correspond to “wars and rumors of wars” in Matthew 24:6. These wars likely represent the geopolitical reconfiguration of the initial alliance of nations into the empire of the Antichrist.

6. The third seal (Rev. 6:5-6)

The time of the third seal allows for great famine (corresponding to “famines and earthquakes” in Matthew 24:7). All we know about the chronology of these events is that they fall between the second and fourth seals.

7. The fourth seal (Rev. 6:7-8)

During the time of the fourth seal one fourth of the world’s population will perish. This appears to be the last seal prior to the midpoint of the period, since the fifth seal, the persecution and martyrdom of the saints, seems to correspond to the martyrdom of Matthew 24:9, which will be the first event after the abomination. (The recursive structure of Matthew 24:15-31 results in the events described in verses 9-10, the persecution and apostasy, occurring after the abomination referred to in verse 15, since verse 15 returns to a point earlier than what is described in verses 9-10.) It seems likely that the fourth seal closely follows the abomination at the midpoint.

Chronological Aspects of the Second Half of the Tribulation

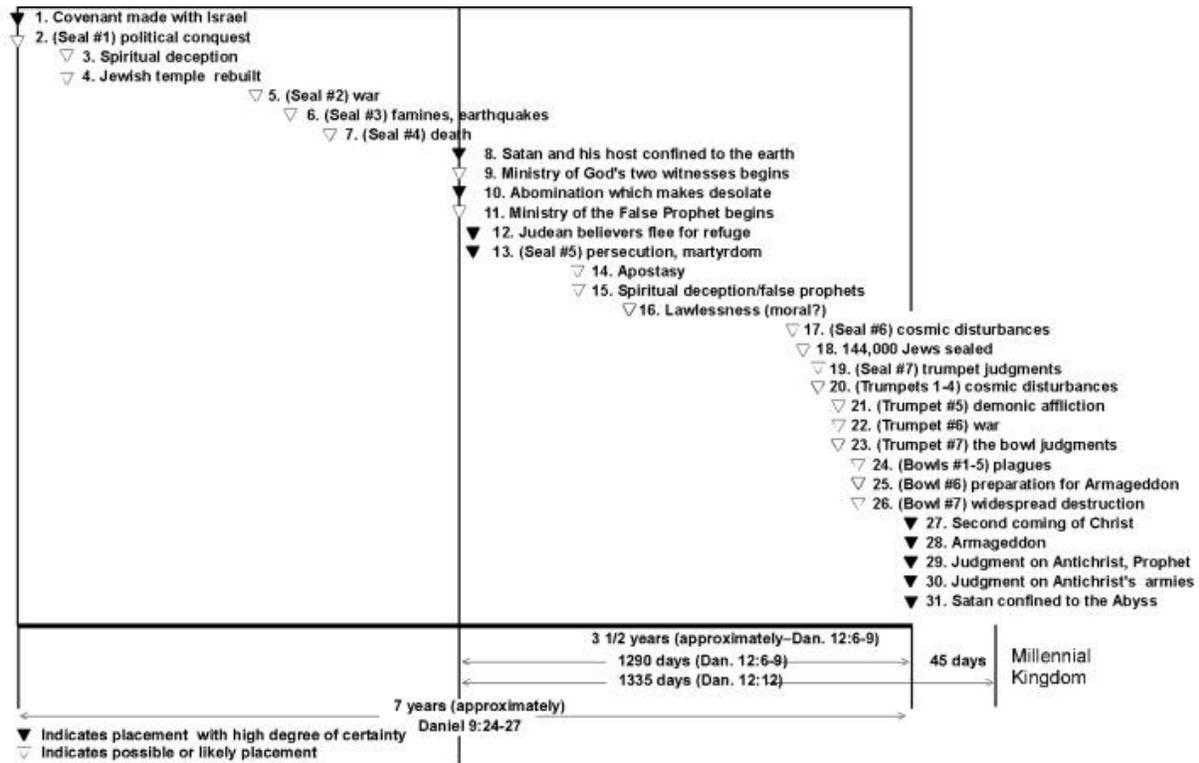
8. Satan and his host confined to the earth (Rev. 12:7-17)

The confinement of Satan and his host to the earth occurs near the middle of the period. Although the account of this event (Rev. 12:7-17) follows the sounding of the seventh trumpet in 11:15, this event, which is recorded in one of the recursive sections of Revelation, actually occurs well before the trumpet judgments. [Revelation 12:1 to 13:18 is recursive, returning to the middle of the period and continuing forward. Failure to recognize this could lead one to misplace the seventh trumpet at, or near the middle of the tribulation, or to incorrectly assign Satan’s confinement to the earth to a time later than it actually occurs. The angelic conflict occurs at, or very near the middle of the period, as is indicated by Revelation 13:4-5, where the reference to forty-two months corresponds to the last three and a half years of the period. (For confirmation that this conflict occurs near the middle of the period, note that Revelation 13:4-6 indirectly refers to the abomination, and verse 7 indicates the persecution immediately following the abomination. Daniel 7:25 indicates that this persecution will begin three and a half years from the end of the period.)

9. *The ministry of God's two prophetic witnesses (Rev. 11:1-13)*

The ministry of God's two prophetic witnesses is said to extend for 1260 days (Rev. 11:3), which seems to be associated with the forty-two months during which the Gentiles will tread down Jerusalem (11:1-2), a reference to the last half of the tribulation period. This indicates that the two witnesses will begin their ministry at or near the middle of the period in close connection with the abomination in the temple.

Illustration 5: Possible Chronology of the Tribulation



10. *The abomination in the temple*

The abomination in the temple occurs at the midpoint of the period (Dan. 9:27; Matt. 24:15; 2 Thess. 2:3-4). This event is easy to pinpoint since it is one of the three events for which the time is specified in Daniel 9:27.

11. *The work of the false prophet begins (Rev. 13:11-18)*

The beginning of the work of the false prophet is closely connected with the abomination in the temple, and also with the martyrdom of the saints who refuse to worship the Antichrist

(Rev. 13:11-18). This places the beginning point of the false prophet's public ministry close to the middle of the period.

12. The flight from Jerusalem

Matthew 24:15-22 indicates that the emergency exodus from Jerusalem will take place immediately when the abomination occurs. The reason given in Matthew is that the abomination will mark the beginning of the period of severe persecution (Rev. 6:9-11), undoubtedly the most severe persecution of believers the world has yet seen.

13. The fifth seal (Rev. 6:9-11)

During the time of the fifth seal God will allow the Antichrist to overcome and kill many who have placed their faith in Christ. This corresponds to the persecution and martyrdom mentioned in Matthew 24:9, and verses 15-22. In Matthew this persecution is pictured as following on the heels of the abomination, indicating that it will begin shortly after the midpoint of the period. Daniel 7:25 also indicates that the time of severe persecution will begin three and a half years prior to the end of the period and continue to the end. Likewise, Revelation 12:13-17 indicates that the onset of severe persecution begins at the middle of the period and extends for three and a half years. While it might seem strange to equate an event in Revelation 12:13-17 with one in 6:9-11, we must keep in mind that 12:13-17 is one of the recursive sections of the book, hearkening back to an earlier point.

14. Apostasy

The apostasy mentioned in Matthew 24:10 is said to be the result of severe persecution beginning at the midpoint of the tribulation; thus, it is connected to the events of the fifth seal of Revelation 6:9-11, i.e., the martyrdom of Christians. Since many Christians will be put to death, those who merely profess belief in Christ, but are not genuinely redeemed, will fall away.

15. Spiritual deception

Spiritual deception will follow the apostasy (cf. Matt. 24:11). Although many false prophets will mislead large numbers of people, the epitome of the spiritual deception is embodied in the ministry of the false prophet (Rev. 13:11-18). This individual, referred to as "another beast" in Revelation 13:11, will promote the worship of the Antichrist through deceptive miracles (v.14-15). He will also devise a scheme to put an identifying mark on those who worship the Antichrist; they will receive a mark on their right hand or forehead. Only those who receive this mark will be able to make financial transactions (vv.16-18). The nature of the mark is stated in Revelation 13:17-18; it is either the name or the number of the Prince's name (the number being six hundred and sixty-six). Revelation 14:9-11 says that all who worship the beast or receive his mark will be tormented forever. A description of the awful state into which this apostate religious system will fall, and its final end, is provided in Revelation 17:1-18.

16. Lawlessness

In Matthew, Jesus referred to a general condition of lawlessness that will result from spiritual deception (Matt. 24:12). The reference is most likely to spiritual and moral lawlessness resulting from a nearly complete defection from biblical morality.

17. The sixth seal (Rev. 6:12-17)

The cosmic disturbances during the time of the sixth seal (Rev. 6:12-17) will likely occur sometime in the middle of the second half of the period. The reason for placing them there is that in Matthew 24:9-31 they seem to be closely associated with the second coming, yet there has to be a sufficient amount of time left for the remaining events to occur.

18. The 144,000 Jewish witnesses (Rev. 7:1-8)

The 144,000 Jewish witnesses are sealed in order to protect them from certain aspects of divine wrath to come (Rev. 7:1-8). Revelation seems to indicate that this occurs after the breaking of the sixth seal (cf. Rev. 7:1, "After this...") but before the breaking of the seventh seal. It is interesting that the 144,000 are sealed at this point in the period, re-enforcing the suspicion that the day of the LORD begins with the breaking of the seventh seal.

19. The seventh seal (Rev. 8:1ff.)

The seventh seal contains the seven trumpets and the seven bowls. It cannot be closer to the end of the period than five months, since the fifth trumpet alone requires that amount of time (Rev. 9:1-12). In addition to the five months required by the fifth trumpet, additional time must be allowed for the other six trumpets and all seven bowls. While there may be overlap in these events, realistically, it would appear that the breaking of the seventh seal must occur one to two years prior to the end of the tribulation period.

20. Trumpets 1-4 (Rev. 8:7-13)

The first four trumpets involve cosmic disturbances similar to those during the sixth seal, but more severe. Chronologically, we know only the sequence; there is no hint of how much time each event might require.

21. Trumpet 5 (Rev. 9:1-12)

The demonic affliction associated with the fifth trumpet (Rev. 9:1-12) will require a minimum of five months (v.10), and additional time must be allowed for the remainder of the trumpet and bowl judgments, though some of these could overlap.

22-26. Trumpet 6 through bowl 7 (Rev. 9:13ff.)

There are no chronological clues that allow us to place the remaining events through the seventh bowl on the timeline with any more accuracy than to say that they occur in sequence

between the fifth trumpet and the end of the period. However, this entire movement of war, plagues, more war, and destruction, seems to be tightly connected.

27-31. Events associated with the second coming of Christ

The remaining events of the period are directly associated with the second coming (Rev. 19:11-20:3). The sign of Christ will appear in the sky (Matt. 24:30). At his return he will defeat those that oppose him (Rev. 19:21, cf. Zech. 14:12-15 and Isa. 11:4), and the Antichrist and his false prophet will be cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 19:19-20). Those already in Hades, the place of the dead, will not be cast into the Lake of Fire until after the millennium (Rev. 20:11-15). Satan, along with his host, will then be bound and confined to the Abyss where they will remain for a thousand years until he is released near the close of the millennium. The second coming of Christ is the concluding event of the tribulation.

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