

Episode 257

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions Podcast. Jeff, the Managing Editor of BibleRef.com, and Kevin, the Editor-in-Chief of Got Questions Ministries, are joining me today to continue our series on questions about the end times. We're going to kind of be going chronologically through the end times, different events, just focusing on what the Bible says, how we can be prepared, what we need to know, what we don't necessarily need to spend a whole lot of time focusing on.

Shea Houdmann

So last week, we discussed the rapture, what it is, and when it'll happen. Just kidding. The rapture did not just happen, but that would be pretty cool if it actually were to happen sometime when we're recording. But today's episode, we're going to be discussing sort of the next big event after the rapture, and that's the tribulation. The tribulation is, when most people think of the end times, all the different events, whether it's the Antichrist, the seals, the trumpets, the bowls, the two witnesses, 144,000, all of those things happen during the seven-year tribulation period. But the best way to start this conversation, I think, is to, where does the idea of a seven-year tribulation come from? So Jeff, where do Bible prophecy scholars, eschatologists get this idea of a seven-year tribulation?

Jeff Laird

Yeah, those guys. When you read the book of Daniel, and a lot of times we forget that Revelation is not the only book of prophecy in the Bible. There's a lot of things in the Old Testament that give us a little bit more insight into what's supposed to go on. Very important one of those is Daniel, and Daniel is praying in chapter nine of that book, and he winds up getting this vision where he's told about Israel's future, and he's given this description of 70 weeks, and the weeks in there are almost always interpreted as meaning a representation of 70 weeks of years, so 490 years. The question after that is, how do we divide those up? Where do those come in? Are they all together? Are they separate? So it seems from the way we generally interpret that is that 69 of those weeks have already occurred, and that there's this final week, and there's a mention of a final week in this passage.

Jeff Laird

So the interpretation of that is that there's some time period that goes along, and then there's sort of a pause in this prophetic timeline, which then starts again and comes up with these final seven years. So that's where we talk

about things like the tribulation. We're talking about that last week, that final 70th week, that group of seven that's in there.

Jeff Laird

So there's been some interesting speculations on how all that works. I've seen people do calculations that say if you use a prophetic year of a certain number of days, you can go from the decree of a particular king that's mentioned in the prophecy, and you add that number of days, and you come up precisely when Jesus' triumphal entry was into Jerusalem. Other people say that you get it to within the same year of the crucifixion. One way or the other, there's reasons within and without scripture to think that that's what they're looking at. So the tribulation is going to be this final week of the 70 weeks, and that is where there's going to be all sorts of terrible things happening. Within that, we then talk about a separation into a tribulation versus a great tribulation, which is a little bit of a separate thing.

Jeff Laird

But that's the general idea of how we get to this idea of saying, okay, where do we get seven years from? We put that together with all of these things that the Bible says about taking the church away and all the awful things that are going to happen at the end times and all the things we're going to have to do. And that's where we come up with this idea of saying, okay, seven years, and that's where we're going to experience.

Shea Houdmann

Jeff, thanks. The great survey of Daniel chapter nine, I think it's verses 24 and 27 that really go into this. But yeah, with the tribulation versus great tribulation, even in that passage, there's time, times, and half a time.

So one year, two years, and half a year. So some people see the great tribulation as the last three and a half years. I've even heard some people say the first three and a half years were the time of Jesus' ministry on earth, which was approximately three and a half years, interestingly enough. Whether the tribulation itself is seven years or three and a half years, the 70th seven mentioned in Daniel chapter nine is where Bible scholars, Bible teachers get the idea of this tribulation. Kevin, what else does the Bible say about this time period? What can we know for sure?

Kevin Stone

Well, we know for sure it is going to be a terrible time of God's judgment. The tribulation period is part of what we call the day of the Lord. Scripture talks about the day of the Lord quite often, and that is the time when God personally intervenes. He steps into human history to start making things right. And for one example of one description here of the tribulation time, I'm going to read from Zephaniah chapter one, verses 15 and 16, says that will be

a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness, a day of trumpet and battle cry. So a terrible time upon the whole world as God is pouring out His judgment on a rebellious world and judging sin as people continue to rebel, even during that time.

Kevin Stone

But then there's more to it than that, because at the same time that God is dealing with the world's wickedness, He is also working with His people Israel to bring them to a place of repentance and accepting Jesus as their Messiah. He's going to be working with Israel to bring them to a place where He can then finally bless them and restore them. After that repentance, after that restoration, there's going to be a time of blessing for Israel and the Abrahamic covenant is going to be finally fulfilled in its entirety. The Davidic covenant is going to be finally fulfilled in its fullness. It's going to be a wonderful time when Jesus is ruling from Zion and there's a time of peace and prosperity and Israel is going to be blessed. And it's going to be a wonderful time that comes out of this terrible time of judgment. That's one of God's specialties, isn't it? To bring something good out of something terrible.

Kevin Stone

But this future seven-year tribulation time is going to be a very, very tough time. The judgments include the seven seal judgments. In the book of Revelation, chapters 6 through 16, picture the judgments that Jesus meets out from heaven as being three sets of seven judgments. The first set is seven seals, and these will include the arrival of the Antichrist, war, famine, death, martyrdom, and earthquake like nobody's ever seen before. And then the seventh seal will usher in the next set of seven judgments, and those are called the trumpet judgments. So, a third of the earth, trees, and grass are burned up. A third of the sea creatures die. Waters are polluted. Sun, moon, and stars are darkened. So, there are signs in the heavens as well. There are going to be some demons that are released from some type of a prison, a holding cell, and they're going to kill one-third of humanity. I mean, this is going to be a terrible time on earth.

Kevin Stone

And then the seventh trumpet ushers in the next set of seven judgments, which we call the bowl judgments, because they're pictured as being poured out from heaven by these angels who hold these bowls or vials, and the judgments are poured out upon the earth. Painful sores upon people. The sea becomes as blood. The freshwater springs are turned to blood as well. The sun scorches people. There's darkness and intense pain that affect humanity, and these just intensify. It seems like each set of seven judgments is more

intense than the previous until we finally culminate there in that final bowl where there is a severe earthquake. It splits the city of Jerusalem into three parts. Cities fall. Severe hail drops from heaven, and then the judgments are finished. It's at that time, we believe, that as the tribulation is ending, that Jesus will come again with the armies of heaven to set up his kingdom here in this world. But it's going to be a terrible time. Revelation 6 through 16, you don't want to be here.

Shea Houdmann

My point exactly, Kevin, exactly what I was going to say. So last week's episode, which I encourage you to listen to, we are not pre-tribulational because we want to avoid this, but I think you can see why we had hoped that the pre-tribulational viewpoint is correct, because I really want nothing to do with the tribulation. I don't want to experience this. I don't want to witness this. I mean, it is truly devastating. Kevin was only mentioning the seals, trumpets, and bowls. There's more to the tribulation than that. I can't remember if it's between the seals and trumpets or trumpets and bowls, but in Revelation 10, it refers to the seven thunders, and the angel tells John to seal up what the seven thunders said. So could that be a whole other series of seven other terrible judgments? So all that said, the tribulation is really bad. This is God pouring out His wrath against sin, against the wickedness. For 2 Peter, it talks about God is not slow, rather He is patient, wanting basically as many people as possible to come to repentance. When that number is done, then God shows His wrath against sin, and that's what the tribulation is all about. That is why not only do we think the Bible teaches a pre-tribulational rapture, we also hope so, because anyone who's read Revelation chapter 6 through 16, you should want nothing to do with it. You don't want to be here when the tribulation starts.

Jeff Laird

Yeah, the concept that most people have of the end times, especially when they're thinking from a biblical standpoint, I think it's fair to say that most people, when you say end times or you talk about the end times, they're thinking of the tribulation. Most of the things that are involved in the tribulation, that's what people are considering, that and the Antichrist. So when we talk about this, it's sort of the general, the overall framework for what's going to happen in this.

Jeff Laird

Now, strictly speaking, the end times involves a lot more than the tribulation. We made the point before that we are in the end times in a sense now, and then after the tribulation, as we interpret the Bible, there's going to be a thousand years before God's plan is entirely complete. But usually when

we talk about the apocalypse or the end of days, people are usually thinking about something along the lines of the tribulation.

Jeff Laird

And there's interesting conversations that happen about that. One that's interesting to me is the idea of some people discuss whether these seals, trumpets and bowls are 21 consecutive events or whether they overlap to some extent. Some people ask, do they overlap completely? In other words, is the first seal, first trumpet, first bowl in some sense, all happening together? Are they mixed together in an overlap? I've heard suggestions that the seventh seal is the seven trumpets and the seventh trumpet is the seven bowls. We aren't really given a whole lot of chronological detail in there. So that's another place that all these things come together.

Jeff Laird

I also think it's interesting to look at these judgments that happen and notice that a lot of what's going on in the tribulation is environmental. And I know we'll get into the seals, trumpets and bowls later, but it's interesting to see that so much of what happens in the end times involves the destruction of the environment. In some sense, you have polluted waters and destroyed plants. And by the time you get to the end of the tribulation, you're looking at a planet that's basically uninhabitable. It's just completely destroyed by all these things that have happened. And curious that so many people are going to respond to that without actually believing all the things it's meant to point to. But usually when you see the cartoons, you see the movies and things like that, and people talk about the end times or something like that. It's usually the tribulation that they're thinking of. So this is a good topic to use as that broad framework.

Kevin Stone

And Jeff, you mentioned how the planet's going to be basically uninhabitable by the end of this. And that goes right along with what Jesus said concerning this time. I'm reading from Mark chapter 13 verses 19 and 20. Jesus says, those will be days of distress, unequalled from the beginning when God created the world until now, and never to be equaled again. If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. This is how terrible it is. It's a time unlike any that's gone before. It'll never happen again. It's a very severe and specific time where God is judging the world. It's the day of the Lord.

Kevin Stone

Back to Daniel chapter 9, as Daniel is being given this vision of the coming events in the 70th week that we're still waiting on here of the tribulation time, the angel tells Daniel that these are 70 weeks that are determined for your

people, for Daniel's people. So, for the people of Israel, as God works with them to bring them to repentance. And those of us who keep a distinction in Scripture between Israel and the church, this is one of the reasons why we believe the church is not present during the tribulation, because this is the time that is designated for Daniel's people. It's also called in the book of Jeremiah, time of Jacob's trouble. The children of Jacob are going to be experiencing this distress.

Kevin Stone

But Daniel chapter 9 and verse 24, God gives the purpose for these judgments. It is 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. That's the purpose of the 70 weeks in total.

Kevin Stone

Now, some of that has already been completed. We have seen the atonement made for wickedness, Jesus' death on the cross. That's already been completed. But we have not seen the bringing in of everlasting righteousness yet. We have not seen an end of sin yet. So, there's parts of this prophecy that have yet to be fulfilled. And that's why we believe that the tribulation, Daniel's 70th week, is still future. God is going to finish up what he promised to Daniel.

Shea Houdmann

Exactly, Kevin. The prophecy in Daniel 9, as we introduce this episode discussing that and continuing, even like Matthew 24, where all of the discourse when Jesus talks about the end times, and he discusses some things that have not occurred yet, we will place those in the seven-year tribulation period, the end times temple, an abomination of desolation. We can go on and on and on and on. We'll be covering each of these topics in future episodes.

Shea Houdmann

One of the more frequent questions we get about the end times, one of our most popular end times articles, is about the four horsemen of the apocalypse. And the four horsemen of the apocalypse are actually the first of the four seals, where the lamb, Jesus, breaks the seal, and a horseman is released, and terrible things happen. Except for the first one. The first one seems to be the Antichrist, who comes in peace and doesn't reveal who he truly is until later.

Shea Houdmann

But the tribulation is the time period where, as Jeff was saying, everything that people think of when they think of the end times, other than the millennium,

the thousand years, the new heavens and the new earth, and perhaps maybe the Gog-Magog battle at the end of the millennium, other than those events, everything else people think of related to the end times is occurring within the seven-year tribulation period.

Shea Houdmann

So, like I mentioned earlier, we have two witnesses, 144,000. We've got seals, trumpets, bowls. We've got abominations. We've got the Antichrist. We've got the beast. We've got the mark of the beast. We've got the false prophet. All of these things, or all these individuals, are in these seven-year end times tribulation periods. So, please continue to tune in to these episodes. We'll kind of survey these, go a little more in-depth than we are now. We're just mentioning them in passing.

Shea Houdmann

But, I don't know, Kevin and Jeff, what are some of the things, if you studied the tribulation, what's an event or something that particularly stands out to you or you think would be helpful for our audience to be aware of and to be thinking about?

Jeff Laird

The thing for me that's interesting is the idea that there are going to be believers on Earth during this time period. And what's interesting about that is that you're going to basically reset faith in God on the planet. It's going to start from zero and go from there. But you're going to see these levels of persecution going on. So, Christians sometimes today have a tendency to overuse the word persecution. And we've talked about that in other podcasts and articles and things like that. But even the persecutions that have happened in the world up to now are going to have a hard time holding up to what's going to happen in the tribulation. So, it's interesting to me to see that we're going to get to a phase where the world is so overtly hostile to faith in the true God, the one real God, that it's going to get to the point where if you are not willing to denounce that, that participating in society at any level is going to be impossible. Not just to buy and to sell things, but that it's the death penalty if you're just found to believe in those things. And that this is all going to continue to roll forward until the end.

Jeff Laird

So, that's something that I find interesting is this idea that there's going to be people who are here who are going to be experiencing not just all of these awful environmental disasters and everything else that's going on, but also the idea that there's going to be believers here who are going through significant persecution for their faith as they try to continue to promote and to preach the Word during the worst possible time.

Kevin Stone

Yes, Jeff. And going right along with that, I see in the tribulation time, mercy in the midst of judgment. I think we see this all through Scripture. When God judges, He always has the extension of mercy as well. When Jericho fell, Rahab and her family were spared. There was always a merciful act of God. Mercy was available. Grace was available, even sometimes during the time of judgment.

Kevin Stone

And we see this in the tribulation as well, as people are being saved. And we have the two witnesses that are sent, and they have quite a ministry for looks like three and a half years, that first part of the tribulation. Then we have the 144,000 who are sealed Jews who are witnessing for the Lord. And it looks from the book of Revelation like there's a great multitude in heaven that is there because of the witness of these 144,000 individuals.

Kevin Stone

And then we have an angel. The book of Revelation speaks of a very powerful angel that flies through the whole earth, and he proclaims the everlasting gospel, and everybody hears it. So God is still extending the invitation. He's still extending mercy, the opportunity for salvation to those who are under judgment even. And unfortunately, it looks like most of the world continues to shake their fist at God, and they continue to experience those judgments. But the opportunity for salvation is there. It's a wonderful thing.

Kevin Stone

And then, as God is working with Israel, the book of Zechariah says, when Jesus comes again, they will look on the one whom they had pierced, and they will mourn because of him. They will realize that they made a mistake in following the Antichrist and putting their stock in him. They realize that they had missed Jesus, the true Messiah. But here he comes, and he will defeat the enemies of Israel. He will fulfill all of his promises to Abraham and David and the people of Israel, and there is a wonderful time of blessing and restoration that comes out of it all. So it's just the goodness of God seen even in the midst of the most terrible judgment the world has ever seen.

Jeff Laird

And Kevin, to kind of bring that back even again is, I think for me, when I read what's in Revelation, there's this theme going on that God is demonstrating his power and his authority graphically around the world. And every single time he does it, the world in general refuses to cooperate with it and refuses to listen to it. And there's the mercy that God is extending, in a sense, by showing these things, giving people opportunity to see and to learn and to know.

Jeff Laird

And it's similar to what we talk about in evangelism. We say to people, why do you bother to talk to some people about faith if you don't think they're going to answer? Or knowing that most people are going to ignore faith. I've done work in apologetics where it's the same thing. The vast majority of the people that you talk to don't have any interest in what you have to say. But you're still participating in God's mercy and love by presenting those ideas. But in a scary way, you're also participating in God's judgment. Because every time we do something like that, we present people with less and less excuse to say, I didn't know, nobody told me, I wasn't aware. And in the end times, you're going to see God making it as absolutely explicit as it could possibly be. And I think one of the reasons he does that is to demonstrate how deep his mercy truly is. Because he's going to show that, look, humanity is so depraved against me that even when I turn the world upside down like this, they will still refuse. There is nobody in the world who will ever have an excuse to stand in front of God and say, I didn't accept you, I rejected you because of your fault, God. It's never going to be a valid excuse. And revelation is kind of that whole thing writ large. And the tribulation gives us a lot of those high points that say, here are the things that God's going to do to prove and to show. On one side, that's merciful. On the other side, that's another part of his judgment and just proving that humanity is always going to be left without an excuse and we'll still find reasons to reject him.

Shea Houdmann

That's right. For sure. Repeatedly in the book of Revelation, usually after one of the really big seals, trumpets or bowls, there'll be a short little snippet that says, and yet the people still wouldn't repent of all their evil acts. God's giving people this plainly, explicitly clear evidence that this is his judgment and this could possibly give, and yet people still refuse to repent.

Shea Houdmann

I've always seen a lot of parallels between the 10 plagues of Egypt and some of what's going on in Revelation where Pharaoh was hardening his own heart and then God hardened Pharaoh's heart further. But in the tribulation, nowhere does it say that God is hardening people. People are hardening themselves despite this overwhelming evidence that God, just like Pharaoh, ignored the overwhelming evidence that the God of the Hebrews was more powerful than the Egyptian false gods. Same thing is happening here in the tribulation that despite all the evidence, people will continue to prefer, I want to live how I want to live and I don't care what God thinks.

Jeff Laird

To insert something in there with Exodus is to remember that when Israel, the Israelites saw all of those miracles during the plagues, and then when they left Egypt, they spent a lot of time complaining and despairing and saying, we're all going to die out here. God doesn't love us. It's all over. Even during the course of that, God was doing miracles, providing them with food and with water and other things like that. So I think it's a really good parallel to remember that before we start sneering too hard at people in the end times and going, oh, those idiots are never going to believe. Even as Christian believers, there are times when we sometimes respond to God in sort of a faithless way and we forget all the things that he's done and we don't remember those and we get angry or we get upset about things that we shouldn't. So Exodus is a really good parallel for both of those. And it's a good humble reminder for us that when we say humanity has a tendency to resist God at every turn, that includes me and other believers too.

Shea Houdmann

Well, that's an excellent point, Jeff. I hear it more frequently with pastors preaching the gospels and I've done this myself. I'm like belittling the disciples. How many times, how many miracles of Jesus do you have to see before you'll actually believe? And yet how often do we do some of the same things? So yeah, that's an excellent point.

Shea Houdmann

I saw in the news the other day, maybe I'll conclude with this. Evidently a few years from now, there's a meteor asteroid that has a seven to 1% chance of actually hitting earth. And I can't remember which plague, which bowl, trumpet, seal, whichever involves something that sure sounds like a meteor crashing into the earth. But I was listening to this guy, completely secular. I have no idea what his faith is, if he has any, describing what some of the after effects would be were this to hit. And if it were to hit land, it would do this. If it were to hit in the ocean, it would do this. What he was describing sounded eerily similar to what the Bible describes in the book of Revelation. Just what would happen to sea life, what would happen to waters around, what would happen to the sun, moon and stars being darkened by all the dust in there, all of these sorts of things.

Shea Houdmann

And this reminds me of some people will want, just like they did with the plagues, try to come up with a natural explanation for everything. Granted, some of what's going on could have a natural explanation, but people can't forget this is God's doing. This is God pouring out his wrath against sin, against weakness, against the Antichrist in his kingdom. Whether there's

natural explanations for some of these or not, it's all miraculous because it's all happening in this time period, these seven year end times tribulations.

Shea Houdmann

So again, as Jeff, Kevin and I said in the upcoming episodes, we'll go take a deeper dive into some of these events, some of these individuals, some of the things that are going on to help you understand more what the book of Revelation and elsewhere in scripture is talking about. This episode is kind of the, I don't know, the survey of the tribulation. So I hope our conversation today has been helpful to you in understanding what the Bible says about the end times tribulation. Got questions? The Bible has answers and we'll help you find them.