

Episode 260

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions Podcast. As you can see, Jeff, Kevin, and I are feeling very blue today. And we did actually not coordinate our outfits at all, but maybe it's appropriate because today we're continuing our series in the end times, eschatology, and we're discussing the seven seals, trumpets, and bowls. And to give a super brief summary, these are devastating judgments that occurred during the tribulation period. And I can't help but read these and get a little sad at devastation's going to come on the earth. Rightly so, but maybe there's a little connection between us wearing blue and feeling a little blue. So Jeff, the managing editor of BibleRef.com, and Kevin, the editor-in-chief of God Questions Ministries, are going to join me again today as we take you through the seven seals, trumpets, and bowls.

Shea Houdmann

And just by way of introduction, one of the more common questions we get about the end times is, one of the most popular articles is, who are the four horsemen of the apocalypse? And so I'm not doing a whole episode on those, but the first four of the seven seals are actually the four horsemen of the apocalypse, because when John is given vision, each one he sees man riding a horse, and that horse brings a particular type of judgment. So Jeff, why don't you take us through a super brief survey of the seals, trumpets, and bowls, so we get a feel for exactly how devastating the judgment and wrath of God on sin in the kingdom of the Antichrist will be during the tribulation.

Jeff Laird

I can do that, kind of take a stab at the fortune cookie version of the entire book of Revelation. What we've seen is the first four chapters of Revelation, John has a vision, writes letters to churches, he sees the throne in heaven. Chapter five is where we start seeing these seals. He sees a scroll of seven seals, and as those are opened, we see the things that you were talking about. The first seal is this white horse that's usually associated with the Antichrist. The second seal is a red horse representing war. The third seal is a black horse that probably represents economic destruction or unrest. The fourth seal is a pale horse, and the word that's in there is actually the same word that we use to talk about chlorine. So it's sort of a green sickly horse, and that is a horse that comes with death and Hades, and kills a huge number of people. The fifth seal is when John sees the souls of the martyrs wearing white robes. In the sixth seal, there's an earthquake, the sun turns black, the moon turns to blood, the stars fall, and everybody hides from God's wrath.

Jeff Laird

And in chapter seven, there's visions of heaven. In chapter eight, we have the seventh seal, which starts with this half an hour of silence, and angels then show up with trumpets, and what comes after that are the trumpet judgments. So the first trumpet is hail, fire, blood. A third of the earth is burned up. Second trumpet is a mountain that's on fire that falls into the sea, turns a third of it to blood, and kills a third of the animals, destroys a third of the ships. The third trumpet is a blazing star called wormwood that falls on rivers and springs and contaminates the freshwater. The fourth trumpet is where a third of the sun, moon, and stars are either destroyed or dimmed in some sense.

Jeff Laird

And there's a moment where you have an eagle who's flying around and giving a warning. Chapter nine gets us the fifth trumpet, which is called the first woe, where a star falls, and that star is given the key to the bottomless pit. A lot of people associate this with Satan. And out of that pit, he releases these creatures that are sort of like locusts that go around the world and torment and torture people. The sixth trumpet, or the second woe, is where these four angels who were bounded by the Euphrates River are released, and they put together an army of two million and kill a third of mankind. We get to Revelation chapter 10, there's more visions. Revelation 11 is two witnesses. Then we get to the seventh trumpet, which is the third woe, and that starts with this scene in heaven where you're seeing the temple and talks about how what God is about to do is even worse. Then we get symbolism in the next couple chapters about woman clothed with the sun and more warnings.

Jeff Laird

Then we get the seven bowls, and these are the really, really, really bad parts of Revelation. Chapter 15 shows these seven angels. Chapter 16 pretty much includes all of those bowls. The first one is poured on the earth, brings boils and sores. The second one is poured on the sea, turns the entire sea to corpse blood, and everything in the sea dies. The third is poured on rivers and the springs. Those are also turned into blood. The fourth bowl is poured on the sun, and it makes it scorch people with fire. The fifth bowl is poured on the throne of the beast, and his whole kingdom is put into darkness. The sixth bowl is poured on the Euphrates, which dries up to prepare for the battle of Armageddon, which is something we'll talk about later. The final bowl is poured into the air, and that one's poured with a statement of, it is done. It is finished. That brings lightning and thunder, the worst earthquake ever, and mountains are moved, and this great city is split. That is the end of the

description of things as seals, trumpets, and bowls. There's more after that, but basically chapters 17 through 22 are just either further explanation, or they're a detail of what happens after all those things happen. So there's the 10,000 foot speed talking survey of what happens in Revelation.

Shea Houdmann

Jeff, that's daunting to even just listen to the different judgments, and to remember how many people, how much destruction will be occurring in the end times, the tribulation period, when we talked about the rapture, and why we hope that there's a pre-tribulation rapture, and we expect there will be God protecting His people from this time period. This is not a time period you want to have any part of. A lot of people, when they study this, they want to put everything in this great order and have Revelation perfectly figured out. It's okay, we know exactly everything that's going to happen at every point.

Shea Houdmann

So I want to point out one thing that's always really fascinated me. It's in Revelation chapter 10, so this is in between the trumpets and the bowls. There's this passage where, verse 2, seven thunders. And the seven thunders occur, John is about to write them down, and then an angel tells him, do not write down what the seven thunders said. So potentially, in addition to seals, trumpets, and bowls, there could be another series of seven judgments called the seven thunders. We don't actually know, but it's interesting, before we try to get everything, say we have everything in Revelation figured out, there's some things in Revelation that are still sealed, that God doesn't actually tell us everything that's going to happen. So it could be even worse. As bad as what you described was, it could be even worse. So Kevin, why don't you help us with this. What is God's grand overarching purpose for the seals, trumpets, and bowl judgments?

Kevin Stone

Yeah, I just would like to say first that my takeaway, when I read Revelation 6 through 16, read about the tribulation period, it's hard to really approach it purely academically, because it is so overwhelming. The descriptions of the terrible plagues and the devastation, the worldwide devastation that's pictured there, is just jaw-dropping. And if I did not know Jesus as my Savior, if I did not know that I was on God's side through all of this, I'd be scared to death. This is definitely not a time, Shea, as you mentioned, it's not a time you want to be around. This is the worst time the world has ever seen. In fact, Jesus said in Matthew 24 that unless those days were shortened, that no flesh would survive. All humanity would be wiped out if God let this continue in His mercy. And Jesus says specifically, for the sake of the elect, those who are

being saved during the tribulation, for their sake, those days are shortened. And so God has mercy, even in this terrible judgment.

Kevin Stone

But what's God doing here in Revelation 6-16? What's the purpose of all of this, this tribulation period? Well, we can say several things. One is, God is reminding humanity of who's in charge. This is God's world, and we have spent how many thousands of years messing it up, and doing our own thing. And then finally, with much warning, God has been warning us about the day of the Lord for a long, long time. Finally, that day arrives, and God steps in, and God says, okay, we're going to take care of the sin. We're going to take care of the transgressions that have been piling up through the centuries. We're going to start making things right. This is the corrective for the wickedness of man. So that's one purpose, just a very broad purpose. God's reasserting His sovereignty, or at least showing us that He is the Creator, and He's the one who's in charge of the world.

Kevin Stone

There is also the purpose of causing people to repent. Over and over in those chapters of Revelation, we have a mention, John mentions that the nations of the world refused to repent. They kept on with their idolatry and their other sins. And so that's one of the reasons why God is putting the pressure on, is to cause people to repent. Unfortunately, in their stubbornness, and their confirmed wickedness, and following the Antichrist, they don't repent, the majority of people. There are people being saved in the tribulation, and we praise the Lord for that. But by and large, it looks like their repentance just isn't coming.

Kevin Stone

God even, at one point, sends out an angel. I think it's Revelation 14. God sends out this angel who, from the highest point of the heaven, proclaims the everlasting gospel so that the whole world hears it. Every single person in the world will hear the gospel clearly spoken from the highest point of heaven, the zenith of heaven. This angel proclaims the gospel so that everyone knows the good news. Everyone has a chance to repent, to turn to God, and yet they still fail to do so. But God is extending that grace. He's extending mercy, even in the midst of these terrible judgments.

Kevin Stone

We also have the fact that God is dealing with Israel. And this is, when we go back to the book of Daniel, Daniel's 70-week prophecy, this would be the 70th week that is determined for Daniel's people, for the Jewish nation. In fact, Jeremiah calls it the time of Jacob's trouble. So God is finishing out all of his plan for the nation of Israel. Paul said that in the end, all of Israel will be

saved. That is, there's going to be a remnant, and the book of Revelation also mentions the remnant, that will be saved. Israel will turn to Christ. They will recognize Jesus as their true Messiah, and they will be restored to the place where God wants them to be. So this is a time of judgment of sin on the whole world. It's also a time of discipline on the nation of Israel to get God's people back to where they should be in recognizing Jesus as the Messiah. And it's also just God saying, hey, I'm in charge. I'm the Creator, and don't you forget it.

Shea Houdmann

One of the most interesting things about these judgments is that in a few places, like you said, Kevin, it talks about how even though the people knew that these judgments were from God, even though they feared God, even though they were hiding themselves, yet they refused to repent, refused to repent of their witchcraft, their sorcery, their immoralities, all these things. It's like there's a God who is pouring out His wrath, and you recognize that fact, and yet you still would rather cling to your sin than repent. You'd still, even though there is an angel, or I think in one possible an eagle, so some sort of creature declaring the gospel around the whole world, so many miraculous things, you still refuse to repent.

Shea Houdmann

And you're like, how could this even be possible? I know we've talked a few times about comparing some of the things in Revelation with the plagues of Egypt. Well, Pharaoh was an example of this, is how many different times did God send Moses to warn Pharaoh, to tell Pharaoh, here's what's going to happen next if you don't let my people go. And yet Pharaoh, again and again and again, hardened his heart, refused to bow the knee before God. So the same thing is happening in the Book of Revelation. Despite the most devastating judgments clearly from God in the history of the planet, people refuse to repent. It's rather cling to their sin than admit that there's a God who's judging the world and demands that they repent.

Jeff Laird

I think that's part of the point that God is making, not just in the Book of Revelation, but in what He does in Revelation. One of the most common excuses that we always have as human beings with God is, I didn't know, or you didn't tell me, or if you'd only given me more. We always want to put it on God for saying that the reason I either don't believe or I don't follow is your fault, because you didn't make it clear enough. And I think between what you see in the parallels with the plagues of Egypt and then in Revelation, is God is just continually reinforcing, demonstrating how absolutely false that is. That He can have a situation where He will bring all of these epic level disasters on

the world, and people will see them, and on some level, they'll even recognize exactly why they're happening, but they still will refuse to follow God. And actually, even what we see in Revelation is there's a point where Jesus comes back, rules the world in person for a thousand years, and after that, there's still a rebellion against Him. So I think part of the point of this is this idea that human beings are so absolutely, utterly stubborn that those who are not going to accept Christ, who are not going to submit to God, are not going to submit no matter what. And nobody gets to stand in front of God and point a finger at Him with an excuse.

Kevin Stone

Yeah, there will be no excuses. Everyone will know exactly what's happening in the tribulation, and they make a very clear-cut choice to either follow the Lamb of God or follow the pretender, follow the Antichrist, follow the one that exalts himself and defies God at every turn. In fact, that's really what taking the mark of the beast will be all about. When people choose to take that mark, they do so with the full knowledge that they are rebelling against God, that they are taking the mark of the devil, basically, the mark of the beast, and they are turning their backs on the truth, turning their backs in rebellion on God Himself.

Kevin Stone

But it's the divisions between those who trust in the gospel, those who turn to Christ during that time, and those who cling to their rebellion are going to be so clear. In Revelation 6, John talks about two contrasting groups of people, and they both ask a question in the same passage here. These two groups ask a different question. The first group of people are those who have been slain by, quote, the inhabitants of the earth, and so the martyrs. There's a group of martyrs that's pictured here in Revelation 6. This is part of the sixth seal, I believe, where they have been martyred by the inhabitants of the earth, and the other group, of course, would be the inhabitants of the earth themselves, and so the ones who killed the martyrs.

Kevin Stone

But they each raise a question. Those who had been martyred ask, how long, sovereign Lord, until you avenge our blood? Verse 10. So, they're waiting for vengeance. Vengeance belongs to the Lord, and they're crying out to the Lord for vengeance, you know, how long until our blood is avenged? And they're pictured as being souls under the altar, probably the altar of incense there in heaven, which represents the prayers of God's people. But the rest of the people here, the inhabitants of the earth who are in their wickedness, they also ask a question on their day of judgment. They are crying out, the day of God's wrath and the Lamb's wrath has come upon us, and who can withstand

it? Verse 17. So, quite a telling question there. Number one, they understand that this is the wrath of God that they are experiencing, and they know that it's a judgment from heaven. And then their question is simply, how in the world can we get through this? It seems impossible for us to survive this. And they're right in that. It's going to be so destructive.

Kevin Stone

But very interesting with the two groups of people that John presents here. One group that is persecuted here in this world and says, Lord, how long until we're avenged? And then the group who is practicing the wickedness, and they say, how can we get out of this judgment that we have brought upon ourselves?

Shea Houdmann

It's so interesting because those people, they could have gotten out of this had they believed. And when you, again, look back at the rapture, we believe being a believer before Christ returns in the rapture will deliver you from having to spend the time of this period. And for those, our brothers and sisters in Christ who have a different view, who believe Christians will go through the tribulation period, there can still be a supernatural protection of believers through not experiencing the wrath of God. You see this again in the 10 plagues on Egypt, where the, this plague or this plague happened everywhere except to the children of Israel. So we can see being a believer, being a follower of Christ can, we think, keep you from this, the hour of trial, this entire time period, or it can also protect you in the midst of it. Other believers hold that view. So super interesting to think that these people are crying out, Lord, who can deliver us from this? They're like, well, you had your chance. Now it's too late now.

Shea Houdmann

And then one other thing I still want to point out, not that we need to make this sound any worse than it already is. Several years ago, I taught a series on the end times at our church, and we were going through the different seals, trumpets, and bowls, and just kind of doing the math, I think, made this even more sobering. World population right now is approximately 8 billion people. Well, in the seal judgment at one point, it says a quarter, quarter of the people in the world are killed. That's 2 billion people. I mean, of course, assuming that rapture happened, some people were taken out, but let's just use those numbers.

Shea Houdmann

And you get into the trumpets, then it says a third. So 6 million people left, a third of that, another 2 billion people are killed. And the bowls don't actually give a number, but since they're worse, a lot of Bible scholars say, well,

potentially a half of people who are killed in those judgments. And then throughout, there's other people being killed, martyred, and so forth. So like Kevin said in Revelation 24, how those days not been cut short, no flesh would survive. So imagine literally billions of people being killed due to the wrath of God and His judgment on sin. Horrible. So do everything you can to escape this judgment, which we believe is trust in Jesus Christ, your Savior now, and you will not have to experience this hour of trial.

Kevin Stone

During the midst of this tribulation time, John takes us to heaven and shows us some heavenly scenes that are taking place during this time. And one of those scenes, there are people wearing white robes. They've been given the righteousness of Christ. They're standing before the throne. They're holding palm branches, which is a sign of victory and celebration. And they're saying, salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. And what a great reminder in the midst of these judgments that the judgment can be avoided. Salvation belongs to God, and He will save all those who call on Him. That's the promise.

Jeff Laird

Interesting also when you see so many of the events that happen in this are environmental, which I just, it's curious to me. So much of it is that it's striking the plants and the water and then the sun or the sky and things like that. But to what you were saying, Shea, about the scope of this and what it means is, especially when you look down to where the bowl judgments get to, where it says all of the seas turned into blood, like blood in a corpse, and everything in the oceans died. Well, biologically speaking, that right there, that's a fatal blow to the entire planet. If everything in the sea dies, we don't have enough food, we don't have enough oxygen, we don't have the right weather. I mean, that is a death sentence for the planet. And then on top of that, all of the freshwater turns into blood.

Jeff Laird

So when it gets down near the end of this, God is really creating a scenario where there is absolutely zero hope whatsoever outside of Him, not just in eternity, but even just in the physical sense. This is all coming down to a point where it is unsurvivable. If God doesn't intervene, just like we were mentioning before, had those days not been cut short, if God just destroys all the waters of the sea and all the plants on the field and all the freshwater, and then sits back, that's the extinction of the human race. And that's the end of it. But He does come back. And that's where we get into all the other things that are on there. So I do also think it's interesting that so many of these things are

striking at the environment and setting up something where we literally have no chance of surviving without God's intervention and people will still ignore it.

Shea Houdmann

Yes. Thank God He does intervene. We'll get to that in a few weeks. It's like an episode like this where we're talking about so much judgment and wrath and devastation and destruction. It makes you long for can we get to Revelation 19, 20, 21, and 22, please? Because that's where the hope is. So this has been the God Questions podcast on the four horsemen of the apocalypse, the seven seals, trumpets, bulls, maybe even thunders.

Shea Houdmann

My theme verse for this is from Revelation 22, right towards the end. Amen. Come Lord Jesus. Seeing what's described in these passages. One, we believe there's a hope. There is a way to escape this, to not have to suffer the wrath of God, to be delivered from the hour of trial. And that is by trusting Christ as your Saviour. Now, today. Today is the day of salvation. So you don't have to experience this, but a lot of the world will. And that's a terrible thing.

Shea Houdmann

So get out there, share the gospel, declare the truth, and then rejoice that Jesus will come back, he will deliver us, and he will save our planet, save the human species, as Jeff was saying, for without that act of mercy, everyone would perish. So I usually close with, I hope our conversation has been encouraging to you. I know this was kind of a hard one for that, but ultimately, this is the word of God. So we are, you know, it's true, and we believe it, and therefore we are encouraged by it. Got Questions? The Bible has answers, and we'll help you find them.