

## The Puzzle of the End Times

\*My Changing position – pretribulation – the seven seals are part of the coming day of the Lord that believers are saved from so there is a secret rapture before the seventieth ‘seven’ of Daniel. (The Late Great Planet Earth; The Left Behind Series) Jesus comes like a thief in that nobody sees him come just like no sees the thief. Jesus coming in the clouds as lightning from one side to the other is actually His return to the earth at the end of the Day of the Lord.

Then I read “The Sign” by Robert VanKampen. The Sixth seal is the rapture and the seals are not the day of the Lord. He explained that seals are not the document; they are conditions on a Jewish legal document that must be met before it can be opened. The day of the Lord is not anti-Christ’s rule, for God alone will be exalted in that day. Jesus coming in the clouds is the rapture, it is the sixth seal, the signs of Matthew 24 are exactly the same as those given in the sixth seal – the day of the Lord follows which is God’s direct judgment; the day of the Lord. All the seals are future so we are here for the anti-Christ and his wrath, just not God’s wrath. It made a lot more sense of Matthew 24 – you had to explain so much to believe in a pretribulation rapture that it seemed something I was imposing on Scripture.

- I. The two rescue and judgment events described in Matthew 24. \*See this morning’s message. One would happen in their generation; there would be signs indicating it was near; the sign that would trigger their fleeing would be the abomination of desolation; it would be a local judgment on the Jewish people. After that destruction His coming would be imminent; He doesn’t know when – only that it will be delayed; there are no signs so you have to live ready; you don’t have to leave, you’re taken; it is a world-wide judgment.
- II. Daniel’s seventieth ‘seven.’
  - a. Gabriel told Daniel there were seventy ‘sevens’ left to fulfill Jewish prophecy. Jesus said that the seventieth ‘seven’ of Daniel would be fulfilled in their generation when He gave the abomination of desolation, “spoken by the prophet Daniel” as being the sign to look for to flee Jerusalem. Matt. 24:15 NIV “Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place...then let those in Judea flee.”
  - b. The decree to rebuild the city was made in 444 BC and the 69 sevens were up in 33 AD according to the lunar calendar that the Jewish people used. The seventieth seven was fulfilled between 66-73 AD in the Jewish war led by Vespasian the emperor and his son Titus. Half way through the war, sacrifices were forced to cease in the temple because it was

destroyed. When there was a military victory sacrifice was made to the ensign the Roman army fought under that carried the image and name of Vespasian. This was all in this morning's message. Now we look at the rest of the puzzle pieces of the end times.

III. The little horn of Daniel Seven.

- a. Daniel prophesied that the coming beast would be released during the Roman empire and gave us several ways to recognize him. "While I was thinking about the horns, there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them; and three of the first horns were uprooted before it." Daniel 7:8 Daniel receives this prophecy during Babylon which is represented by a lion (7:4); the next beast is a bear raised on one side representing Persia/Media (7:5); the leopard with four wings is the third beast and represents Greece (7:6); so the fourth beast, with "teeth of iron that crushed and devoured its victims", can only mean Rome.
- b. Daniel 7:19-24 NIV "Then I wanted to know the meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others and most terrifying, with its iron teeth and bronze claws—the beast that crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. <sup>20</sup> I also wanted to know about the ten horns on its head and about the other horn that came up, before which three of them fell—the horn that looked more imposing than the others and that had eyes and a mouth that spoke boastfully. <sup>21</sup> As I watched, this horn was waging war against the holy people and defeating them, <sup>22</sup> until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the holy people of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom. "He gave me this explanation: 'The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth. It will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it. <sup>24</sup> The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom. After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings....He will change the set laws and speak blasphemies."
- c. The ten horns on the fourth beast are "ten kings who will come from this kingdom;" (7:24) the little horn is "another king that will arise." (Notice that these kings are successive and not concurrent) How will we distinguish the little horn?
  - i. He will start little. (7:8)
  - ii. Three kings will be uprooted before him. (7:8)
  - iii. He will be different than the earlier horns. (7:24)
  - iv. He will change the set laws. (7:25)

- v. He will speak blasphemy and oppress the saints. (7:25)
- d. So what happened in history? Vespasian began as Nero's general. After Nero's suicide in 68 AD there were four Roman emperors in one year, 69 AD: Galba, Ortho, and Vitellius followed by Vespasian. Vespasian was different from those in Caesar's line because he was from a different family, the house of Flavius. He changed Jewish law forever by destroying the Jewish temple where sacrifices were made (many of the laws were about those sacrifices!) and he blasphemed God by setting up a Roman ensign in the wing of the temple declaring that Caesar as divine. He oppressed the saints (set apart ones) for the seven year war against the Jews.
- e. There were many Roman leaders in the empire's existence to that point – how do we know which ten horns Daniel is referencing? Judah did not come under Roman dominion until 63 BC when Pompey attacked and desecrated the temple. From then on they were part of Rome, first as a client kingdom, and later under direct supervision. If we start with Pompey, here are the ten before Vespasian but none were called kings:
  - i. Pompey – his title was “sole counsel.”
  - ii. Julius Caesar – his title was “Dictator.”
  - iii. Octavius – who became Augustus which was a title similar to “Emperor.”
  - iv. Tiberius – Emperor
  - v. Caligula – Emperor
  - vi. Claudius – Emperor
  - vii. Nero – Emperor
  - viii. Galba
  - ix. Ortho
  - x. Vitellius
- f. The eleventh ruler after Judea became part of the Roman empire was Vespasian, he arose after the ten; three were uprooted before him; he was different than the others because he was from a different family line; he started out as a general (a little horn) before becoming king. He finished the war Nero put him in charge of against the Jews (through his son, Titus) and destroyed the temple changing Jewish law. He blasphemed God by having his image on the Roman temple that was sacrificed to on the wing that outlined the temple after its destruction.

#### IV. Problems.

- a. Vespasian's reputation in history. His reputation does not seem like he was a beast but one of the good emperors of Rome. Wikipedia –

Vespasian led a Propaganda campaign: “Construction projects bore inscriptions praising Vespasian and condemning previous emperors. Vespasian approved histories written under his reign, ensuring biases against him were removed. He also gave financial rewards to writers. Those who spoke against Vespasian were punished. A number of stoic philosophers were accused of corrupting students with inappropriate teachings and were expelled from Rome. One pro-republic philosopher, was executed for his teachings” All the writers of that period: Josephus, Tacitus, and Suetonius were on his payroll. Josephus was his adopted son. \*I don’t think we can trust what current history tells about Vespasian.

- b. The beast’s body is destroyed and is thrown into the blazing fire when the Messiah, the Son of man, returns. (Daniel 7:11; 13) In Thessalonians he doesn’t just appear in the temple and call himself god, he does signs and wonders and is destroyed by the second coming. In Revelation as well the beast is destroyed at the return of Jesus. But none of that happened during the reign of Vespasian. He ruled from 69 AD until 79 AD when his son Titus took over for him. Are we to conclude that because all of this hasn’t happened that the beast has not appeared? Or is it possible that he appears twice, just like Jesus did?
- V. The two comings of the beast.
- a. “The beast which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come out of the abyss and go to his destruction.” Revelation 17:8 The Apostle John writes Revelation after one of the rescue and judgment events has already occurred in history (the fall of Jerusalem), and before the final one (the second coming). The early fathers tell us he wrote from Patmos during the reign of Domitian in about 95 AD. Vespasian, Domitian’s father, has long passed away and the Jewish war he had led was already history at the time. Yet John assures us that the beast who comes up out of the abyss, and once was (had already appeared), and now is not (“not” clearly means inactive, not non-existent – he is in the abyss) will appear again before he is destroyed.
  - b. John’s definition of the beast. The beast is not just a man, he’s a demonic personage. The fact that he comes out of the abyss was established earlier in Revelation where he is again called, “the beast that comes up from the abyss.” (11:7) Does this phrase, “up from the abyss,” only mean he is inspired by hell, or does it mean he literally comes out of a place called the abyss? In Revelation 9:2 an angel opens the abyss and demonic locusts come out of it and torment those on the earth. Is it possible that the beast who inspired Vespasian in the past has been

locked up in a real place called “the abyss” since that time until he reappears in the end times? Is there any precedent of a demonic person ever appearing; then for a season being locked in the abyss, before reappearing in the timing of God?

- c. As a matter of fact there is. Satan himself now has freedom to deceive mankind but will one day be locked in the abyss (when Jesus comes) and will be restricted there for a thousand years only to be released again at the end of that time to fulfill God’s purpose. “He (an angel) threw him (Satan) 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.” (Revelation 20:3)
- d. In a similar way, it seems that during the future rescue and judgment coming to this planet, the beast which has already appeared through Vespasian will come up again from the abyss and be allowed to blaspheme God and persecute the saints. (Revelation 13:6-7)
- e. Why has no one talked about the beast coming twice?
  - i. Preterists say he’s already been here – usually Nero. Nero committed suicide so he was struck down by the sword and destroyed. Problems are multiple – you have to make John writing during his reign and you have to say Jesus already came in the clouds.
  - ii. Futurists say he’s coming. Just like the Jews didn’t believe in Jesus because He didn’t fulfill all the prophecies that Messiah would fulfill, futurists don’t believe he’s come because he hasn’t done all that the beast would do. To this point I have been a futurist for that very reason.

## VI. The first six seals of Revelation.

- a. If Revelation stood alone I would conclude that the seven seals are all future as many commentators believe, but the rule of Scripture is that clear truth interprets obscure passages and not the other way around. I believe the first five seals of Revelation 6 have already been opened by Jesus. The five seals correspond exactly to what Christ said would happen in their generation before the fall of Jerusalem. They were opened by Jesus in the first century; they were still open when John wrote Revelation from Patmos in 95 AD; and they’re still open today.
- b. The first seal is the white horse with a rider who goes out to conquer. “For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will mislead many.” Matt. 24:5-6 Jerome, an early father writes: “At the time of the Jewish captivity by Rome, many Jewish elders claimed to be the Christ.

There were so many, in fact, that there were three distinct camps of them when the Romans besieged Jerusalem.” (Ancient Christian Commentary, 2002, pg 197) \*Who is the man on the white horse that John saw? It could very well be the coming anti-Christ because that seal is open and will be until the day of the Lord. Deception is part of the atmosphere God has allowed in this present darkness to contrast the light of His Word.

- c. The second seal is a red horse and brings war. “You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars...nation will rise against nation.” Matt. 24:6-7 War broke out in the Roman empire – not just the Jewish war but in 69 AD there were three wars that led to four different emperors. Wars and rumors of war have been part of our world ever since.
- d. The third seal was a white horse that brought famine. “In various places there will be famines and earthquakes.” Matt. 24:7 In the reign of Claudius there was a “great famine all over the world.” (Acts 11:28) The famine within Jerusalem when the siege set in led to cannibalism. Earthquakes: Pompey in 63 AD; writers of the period tell us of earthquakes in Colossae, Smyrna, Miletus, Samos, Laodicea, Crete, Rome, and Judea. Earthquakes, plagues, and natural disasters are still part of our present world.
- e. The fourth seal was the pale horse which was the accumulated deaths from the second and third seal. Josephus says that over one million Jews were killed during the seven year war. Death by plague – cancer; death by war; death by natural disaster – a fourth of humanity. The life of the gospel is preached in this time of death.
- f. The fifth seal is the martyrdom of those who were killed “because of the word of God and because of the testimony they maintained.”
  - i. “Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My Name.” Matt. 24:9 In 64 AD Nero led an empire-wide persecution of Christians for burning Rome that lasted for three and a half years.
  - ii. John is writing to people that are in danger of being martyred under Domitian’s rule. He writes to them as one who is a fellow partaker “in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus.” He is on the island because of “the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” (Revelation 1:9) He is writing because the Lord’s coming is very near – He ends the book with the words of Jesus: “I am coming quickly.” After the fifth seal has been opened John sees those who have been martyred and hears their question: “How much longer?” There has been a delay and they are waiting for the coming day of the Lord to avenge their deaths. The answer:

“a little while longer until all those who will be killed like you is complete.” The second coming is imminent but delayed.

iii. There have now been 70 million martyrs since the resurrection. The fifth seal is already opened. The gospel is preached in the midst of persecution.

g. The sixth seal is the rapture. Then John sees the sixth seal opened and the very signs Jesus gave for the rapture happen before his eyes. The earth prepares for the wrath of God while the saints are suddenly found before the throne of God. “I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues standing before the throne and before the Lamb.” Rev. 7:9 Jews come to Christ as a Spirit of mourning comes upon every tribe when they see the One they had pierced. “I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel.” (Rev. 7:6)

i. “And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.” Zechariah 12:10 We learn more of these 144,000 (whether that is the actual number or a representative number for all the Jewish people no one knows) in Revelation 14 when the sixth seal is retold:

ii. They are given a new song of redemption; They have been purchased by God and follow the Lamb wherever He goes; They will be His witnesses in the hour of judgment coming to the earth. Revelation 14:6-7 “And I saw another angel flying in mid-heaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; and he said with a loud voice, “Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters.”; They are joined by the two witnesses to give testimony during the hour of judgment. “And I will appoint my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.” Revelation 11:3

VII. The coming hour of judgment and the seventh seal.

a. Jesus promised the church that they would be saved from the coming hour of judgment. “Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the

whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth. I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown." Revelation 3:10-11 NIV

- b. Before we look at the seventh seal I want to establish that the hour of judgment lasts for 1260 days or 42 months. The ten horns on the beast who reappears, are ten concurrent kings who receive authority with the beast for one hour.
  - i. Revelation 17:12 "The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast."
  - ii. Revelation 13 establishes how long that hour is: "Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns...and on his horns *were* ten crowns, and on his heads *were* blasphemous names...There was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him." Revelation 13:1; 5
  - iii. The ten kings rule with the beast and then under the beast for the hour of judgment which is 42 months or three and a half years or 1260 Biblical days.
- c. The seventh seal is a half hour of silence in heaven. The first half hour of the coming judgment is not the day of the Lord, but the opening of the seventh seal, a time where hell gets to do whatever it wants on earth and heaven is silent. What happens when Jesus opens the seventh seal?
  - i. The first half hour of God's judgment is released; it's God's passive judgment, like the wrath against Jerusalem in the first century.
  - ii. Satan has been cast down to the earth and he knows he has only a brief time to express his "great wrath." (Revelation 12:12) How long exactly does he have to chase Israel (the woman who gave birth to the Messiah) and those who "hold to the testimony of Jesus"? "Time, times, and half a time (12:14)." This is one more way to express three and a half years.
  - iii. The beast is released from the abyss; the ten horned empire arises. He receives a fatal wound and is raised from the dead beginning a tyrannical, one man reign. Beast worship is released all over the earth and a mark is needed to buy or sell. He does signs and wonders done through the false prophet. "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand, they, too, will drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath." Revelation 14:9-10



VIII. The Day of the Lord.

- a. The first half hour of judgment on the earth is during the seventh seal and is marked by the silence of heaven. Hell does what it pleases.
- b. The second half hour of God's judgment is the day of the Lord that could not be opened until all of these seven seals were broken and the conditions met that they required. At that time the direct wrath of God comes, and the kingdom breaks into this earth. The trumpets, bowls, and return of Christ are all part of the day of the Lord. He alone will be exalted in that day. (Isaiah 2:19)
- c. This is not a judgment against Israel, but against Babylon. The Jews experienced God's wrath from 66-73 for rejecting Christ – now the Gentiles experience God's wrath for rejection Christ.
- d. The beast is destroyed by the second coming to earth by Jesus. We will come back with Him as the rewarded bride. The beast is cast into the lake of fire as John, Daniel and Paul prophesied. The first time he appeared in Vespasian during the Roman empire; the second time he will appear in a future anti-Christ and lead a ten nation empire before being judged forever. (Look at slide show)

IX. The implications of my position.

- a. Division, if not held with humility. \*Non-essential verses essential. \*AW Tozer \*Why not focus on what we agree on? Preterist/Futurist – it values the history of the preterist and many things about the futurists:
  - i. It shares imminence with the pretribulation position.
  - ii. It shares the called to be unoffended with the posttribulation position. \*Mike Bickle – the Bridal Identity.
  - iii. It shares the call to be fearless with the kingdom now or panmillennial position. Bill Johnson: “Our destiny is heaven but our mission is bringing heaven to earth.”
- b. Israel will be saved not judged in the events after the rapture. There is no need for the Jewish temple to be rebuilt. One of the pieces has to be explained: 2Thessalonians 2:1-12 NIV “Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, <sup>2</sup> not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us—whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter—asserting that the day of the Lord has already come. <sup>3</sup> Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness<sup>[a]</sup> is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. <sup>4</sup> He will oppose and will exalt himself over

everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? <sup>6</sup> And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. <sup>7</sup> For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. <sup>8</sup> And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. <sup>9</sup> The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, <sup>10</sup> and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. <sup>11</sup> For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie <sup>12</sup> and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness."

- i. Paul writes to the Thessalonians sometime between 50-60 AD, before both rescue and judgment events have occurred. The coming rapture of the saints was a main topic of the first letter he wrote and now he alludes to it again, but this time in very similar words to those Jesus used. He references "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together with Him." Here are the words of Jesus in Mark 13:27: "And He (the Son of man) will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens."
- ii. Paul's confidence that the apostasia occurs before the rapture comes from Jesus' own order of events.
- iii. There are two ways of translating the Greek word "apostasia." One is "a falling away, or rebellion, which is where we get our word apostasy. The other is simply, "a departure." Both happened – there was a falling away spiritually under Nero – men's hearts failed them for fear; and there was a departure when the Roman army surrounded Jerusalem.
- iv. As the Christians departed, the abomination of desolation was set up in the holy place and Caesar was declared to be god. The order Paul gives of coming events is the exact order Jesus gives: first – apostasy or departure; then – the man of lawlessness in the temple declaring himself to be god; and then the rapture. Jesus said this about the rapture: "Following the distress of those days...men will see the Son of man coming on the clouds...and He will gather His

elect from the four winds.” Jesus said the rapture would only become imminent after the destruction of the temple. It wasn’t when Paul wrote Thessalonians, but it was when John wrote Revelation, and still is today. There is not a rebuilt Jewish temple – maybe that’s why God allowed the Dome of the Rock to be built on the temple mount?

- c. We’re not looking for signs, we’re looking for Jesus and falling more in love with Him and each other as we come into the bridal identity. Jesus said He didn’t know, only the Father did. Acts 1:6-7 NIV “Then the disciples gathered around him and asked him, ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’ He said to them: ‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.’”  
\*When the Holy Spirit tells you what’s going to happen in the future it might not happen because the Father could tell Jesus to come back and that thing would never happen.
- d. We should expect growing darkness as the tares grow; we should be braced for tribulations (the five seals are open); but we won’t face God’s wrath including His passive wrath in releasing the anti-Christ.
- e. We need to stay awake.
  - i. Luke 21:34-36 NIV “Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. <sup>35</sup> For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. <sup>36</sup> Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”
  - ii. The foolish virgins. Trim your wicks and freshen your oil.  
Revelation 3:1-3 NIV “To the angel<sup>[a]</sup> of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits<sup>[b]</sup> of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. <sup>2</sup> Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. <sup>3</sup> Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.