

## Biblical Basis for the Concurrent Fulfillment of Revelation Judgments

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In my book, *The Church Through the Tribulation*, chapter five presents a detailed examination of the teachings pertaining to the Day of the Lord (DOL). In that chapter, the primary focus was to show that multiple events occur on this day, it is synonymous with the Second Coming of Christ, and it is one literal day in duration.

It was shown that there is an event that begins this day, described as the sun being turned to darkness and the moon being turned to blood (Joel 2:31; Rev. 6:12; c.f. Joel 2:10–11). This same sign was shown to precede the DOL in five other passages (Joel 3:15; Isa. 13:10; 24:23; Zech. 14:6; Matt. 24:29). In each of these later passages, this sun/moon event is described in slightly different terms than those used in Joel 2:31 and Rev. 6:12. Most describe it as the sun being darkened and moon not giving her light or use other slight variations on this theme. A cursory examination of the events being described in these passages shows that these slightly different descriptions of this sun/moon event are in fact all referring to the same event with just different wording.

It was also posited that the fourth vision given to Daniel (Dan. 10–12) was closed and sealed, and that we have the interpretation in Daniel 11–12. However, the vision itself is what was delivered to John in the seal judgments of Revelation. And since the interpretation of this vision brings us to the end of the Seventieth Week, including the destruction of the Antichrist and the resurrection, it was asserted that the seal judgments bring us to the end of the Seventieth Week as well, with subsequent visions in Revelation providing additional details to the events of the great tribulation. Other evidence for this was that this is how God provided prophecy to Daniel, first in rough form, and then he added additional detail in subsequent prophecies. Christ also used this prophetic layering delivery tool in the Olivet Discourse.

Based on these points, it was asserted that the two New Testament passages that reference the sun/moon event, the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:29) and the sixth seal of Revelation (Rev. 6:12), are pointing to the beginning of the DOL. It was also posited that since the sixth seal bring us up to the beginning of the DOL, the seventh seal is its conclusion. Further, the seventh judgment in each series closes out the great tribulation and ends with the same fivefold judgment (voices, thunder, lightning, an earthquake, and a great hail).

The purpose of this article is to test whether this is a biblically valid interpretation. To do this, we will begin by taking a closer look at the timing references associated with the sun/moon event and where these references place this event in the progression of the trumpet and vial judgments.

As previously stated, the sun/moon event is one of the signs given at the sixth seal (Rev. 6:12). From Joel 2, we can also place this same event after the sixth trumpet of Revelation. To summarize, the fifth and sixth trumpets release demons from the pit and from the Euphrates river respectively, which will be

allowed to torment and kill unbelievers during the great tribulation. Joel 2 symbolically shows these same judgments by demons (vv.1–9), then shows the sun/moon sign (v.10), and continues with the Lord’s return (v.11). The blessings that follow the Lord’s return fill out the remainder of the chapter, and the sun/moon sign is restated in v. 31. The sun/moon sign after the judgments by demons places the timing of the sixth seal after the sixth trumpet.

We can use this same method of comparing other Bible passages that contain both the sun/moon sign and events that occur under the vial judgments to determine where the sixth seal occurs in relation to the vials. From Joel 3, we see the armies of the world gathered for the battle of Armageddon (vv.1–14), followed by sun/moon event (v. 15), and the Lord’s return (v. 16). Similarly, the remainder of the chapter shows the blessings that follow the Lord’s return. Here the sun/moon event follows all of the armies arriving at Jerusalem for battle. This event occurs after the sixth vial since that is when the armies of the east will have a land bridge to get to Israel across a dried-up Euphrates River. This tells us that the sixth seal follows the sixth vial.

Zechariah 14 lines up the timing of the sixth seal with the battle of Armageddon as well. The context is the DOL (v. 1), we are given details of the battle of Armageddon (vv. 1–7), we are shown the sun/moon event (v. 6), and we are told that the DOL is “one day” (v. 7). The remainder of the chapter describes some of the events that will occur during the battle of Armageddon and the blessings that follow the Lord’s return. Once again, these events of Zechariah 14 place the timing of the sixth seal on the DOL and after the first six vials. It also establishes that the sun/moon event will be occurring at Christ’s Second Coming when the battle of Armageddon takes place (Rev. 19:11–21).

Isaiah 13 contains a prophecy directed at Babylon and blends the overthrow of Babylon by the Medes with the final destruction that occurs on the DOL. Verses 9–13 pertain to the events of the DOL. The DOL is specifically referenced (v. 9), the sun/moon event is shown (v. 10), we see the punishment of unbelievers (v. 11), the chastening/refining of the DOL (v. 12), and are told of the intensity of God’s anger (v. 13). These are clearly events that are describing the final worldwide judgement of nations at the seventh vial, and we see the sun/moon event associated with them, placing the sixth seal at the beginning of the DOL, immediately preceding the seventh vial.

The sun/moon timing reference is also found in Isaiah 24. This chapter in Isaiah is a prophecy of the DOL and once again ties the sun/moon event of the sixth seal to the events in Revelation 19:11–20:3. Verses 17–23 in Isaiah 24 are particularly telling since we see events that will occur at Christ’s Second Coming. Verse 18 shows the destruction of the Antichrist (“he that cometh up out of the midst of the pit”), and vv. 21–22 show Satan and his demons being thrown into the pit (“the host of the high ones that are on high”) as well as the leaders of the nations being destroyed in the judgment of nations (“the kings of the earth”). And v. 23 shows the sun/moon sign specifically associated with these events of the DOL as well as Christ’s reign from Jerusalem that follows: “Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the LORD of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously” (Isa. 24:23).

Our final reference to the sun/moon event is found in the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:29). Christ states that this event will occur immediately after the great tribulation (“the tribulation of those days”) and follows with a description of his return (“coming in the clouds”) and the resurrection and rapture of the church (“they shall gather together his elect”) (Matt. 24:30–31).

In summary, we now have seen multiple data points that tie the sun/moon event of the Olivet Discourse and the sixth seal to other specific prophecies in Revelation. In particular, the timing of the sun/moon event occurs after the sixth trumpet and after the sixth vial and is identified with the events of the seventh trumpet (the initiation of the kingdom of God), the seventh vial (the judgment of nations), the battle of Armageddon and the destruction of the Antichrist (Rev. 19:11–21), the binding of Satan in the pit (Rev. 20:1–3), and the resurrection and rapture of the church (Rev. 20: 4–6).

Another event that occurs at the sixth seal bears notice. It is the prophecy of all the kings of the earth and great men running in fear and hiding themselves in the rocks of the mountains (Rev. 6:15–16). This is exactly what we see in Isaiah 2. Isaiah 2 is a prophecy of Christ’s Second Coming. It is specifically referred to as “the day of the Lord of hosts” (Isa. 2:12), and we see the same descriptions of men running in fear and hiding among the rocks of the mountains and caves (Isa. 2:19–21). This timing reference sets the sixth seal directly at Christ’s Second Coming on the last day, the DOL.

Luke also presents these events in his recounting of the Olivet Discourse: “Men’s hearts failing them for fear” (Luke 21:26). He follows with the Lord’s return in the clouds “with power and great glory” (Luke 21:27). He concludes by telling us that when we see all these things “then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh” (Luke 21:28). Translation—when that sixth seal comes, the Lord is returning to save his people.

The sixth seal closes out by telling us the reason they are running and hiding in fear: “And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” (Rev. 16–17).

This is important! Notice the specific language used: “The wrath of the Lamb.” This only shows up once in the Bible. It is speaking of Christ’s Second Coming and describes the judgements that he will deliver on the DOL at the battle of Armageddon, and they know this is the “great day of his (Christ’s) wrath”. It is extremely important to notice this and differentiate it from the prophecies of Revelation 15–16, which are called “the wrath of God” (Rev. 15:1; 16:1). Both Christ and the Father will have individual and separate roles they will perform during the great tribulation. Christ’s involvement occurs all on the last day when he crushes the armies of the world at the battle of Armageddon. The Father’s wrath, shown as being poured out of vials, will occur over some period of time during the great tribulation.

If we fail to make this distinction, we are likely to conclude that the DOL will occur over some period of time rather than all on the last day. This is the reason for the preceding, painstaking presentation of all of the timing references that pertain to the sixth seal. The purpose was to show that God’s Word

teaches that the DOL is literally the last day of this world, Christ's Second Coming, with the sixth seal announcing its beginning, and the seventh, its conclusion.

Once we realize that the seventh in each series of judgments (seals, trumpets, vials) is speaking of the same last day (DOL), we must conclude that the preceding judgments of the trumpets and vials are providing additional details of the events that will be occurring during the great tribulation, and the fivefold judgment that occurs at the end of each (voices, thunder, lightning, earthquake, great hail) is the same event being told to us, with greater detail provided each time.

This is exactly how God told us the future in Daniel. Daniel 2 ended with a very symbolic image of Christ's return and the destruction of the Antichrist, the stone that was cut out without hands crushing the feet and toes of the great image. Then each subsequent prophecy layered more detail upon this framework. We see this same tool used by God with the seventh seal's very symbolic image of the great hail (the angel who throws fire from the altar down on the earth), and the seventh trumpet and seventh vial each add additional events of the DOL and provide greater detail of the great hail and the fivefold judgment of the end.

The problem I always had when studying Revelation was that I kept running across clear indicators of the end of the great tribulation presented, yet I kept reading as if there were more judgments to follow. This is exactly how historicist teachers have presented their interpretations and dispensational teachers as well. We also have the beautiful, hand-drawn charts of Clarence Larkin confirming this way of thinking and entrenching the idea of the consecutive fulfillment of the judgments.

Yet, the events of the sixth seal were clearly what Christ referenced in the Olivet Discourse. And the text of the sixth seal tells us that "the wrath of the Lamb" has arrived. But we are all told to just keep reading because this really isn't the end. If this is not really the announcement of the end, then Christ made a glaring omission in the Olivet Discourse—he neglected to give us any more signs of his return—and that was the entire purpose of the discourse. He was giving us the signs that would precede his return so that we would be prepared and not fall away during the persecutions or fall to the rampant deceptions.

When we get to the seventh trumpet, we are also told to just keep reading, despite the clear teaching that the end has arrived: "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever," "And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name" (Rev. 11:15,18). How does it make any sense that we should ignore these clear statements that the Lord's kingdom is beginning, the time of judgment has come, his wrath has been fulfilled, and he has glorified his believers?

The same thing happens at the seventh vial, where God clearly states, "It is done." The events include Jerusalem being divided into three parts, all the cities of the nations falling, Babylon being punished, and every mountain and island being destroyed. How could this possibly not be the judgment of nations prophesied so vividly in the Old Testament on numerous occasions? But we're told, "Just keep reading—there's more to come." Yes, more detail, especially about the harlot religious system, the battle of

Armageddon, and how God plans to deal with the Antichrist, the leaders of the world's nations, and Satan. But as far as the timing goes, I kept seeing that we have been brought up to the end now on each occasion.

The only explanations that I was able to find that supported the concurrent-fulfillment model were that it was the universally accepted Semitic style of the day and that this method of bringing the reader up to an endpoint, while never quite reaching it, to build tension, and then releasing that tension by doubling back and repeating the process was the style used in apocalyptic writing. This second method considers the judgments to be generally recapitulatory, i.e., showing the same events from a different view or perspective. But this didn't really fit what I was seeing happening in Revelation either since it was clear that the events in each series of judgments were different and were being performed by different participants in the great tribulation. Further, I wasn't willing to have my understanding of how to read Revelation based solely on a similarity to an accepted writing style.

Thankfully, God had already provided the evidence that I was looking for in multiple Old Testament prophecies. And after a little bit of detective work, I think the evidence provides strong support to the assertion that each series of Revelation judgments brings us up to the end, and God provides additional detail through multiple, concurrently developing prophecies.

When we read the judgments sequentially, it is difficult to support any rapture timing assertion since wherever we place it within the judgments of Revelation there will be some "loose ends" that don't fit. A pre-wrath or mid-trib teacher may assert that the rapture occurs after the sixth seal, with everything that follows being God's wrath. How can we square that with the fact that God's wrath doesn't begin until the first vial? or the teaching that the rapture/resurrection will occur at the last trumpet? both of which are still in the future according to the consecutive-fulfillment model. And how can we assert that the rapture occurs before the resurrection? Paul tells us that "the dead in Christ shall rise first" (1 Thess. 4:16). Christ tells us the resurrection will happen on the "last day" (John 6:40), which is exactly what we see in Revelation 20:4-6. And how can we explain that the saints will be removed from the earth before the end of the 3.5 year persecution by the Antichrist, when Daniel 7 teaches that the saints (whose characteristics line up exactly with New Testament believers in Christ) will be persecuted for 3.5 years?

Under the consecutive-fulfillment model, the post-trib assertion is equally troubled with "glitches" when we attempt to locate the rapture in Revelation. If we say it's right after the sixth seal, according to the Olivet Discourse, then it's not really post-trib at all since we're also saying that many other events happen after this. The seventh trumpet doesn't work either unless we come up with some explanation for the vials that follow, at least one of which will take some time to unfold since the armies of the east must travel to Jerusalem over the dried-up Euphrates River.

All of this confusion can lead to only one of two possible conclusions: 1) God is an ineffective communicator, or 2) we all have something wrong in our methodology. I choose to rule out the first alternative and focus on the second.

But when we realize that the seventh judgment in each series occurs on the last day, then everything else falls into place. We can now show that the rapture happens after the sixth seal (Matt. 24:29–31) as well as at the “last trumpet” (1 Cor. 15:52) and that this coincides with the beginning of the DOL (Rev. 19:6-9) and is on the same day as God’s final vial of wrath and the battle of Armageddon. We can point to a recapitulation of the resurrection/rapture at the beginning of the millennial kingdom (Rev. 20:4-6) and show that this is the “first resurrection” (Rev. 20:6). This is symbolically shown to be the harvest at the end of the church age in Revelation 14:14–20. And we are now in complete agreement with the Lord when he said that he would raise the dead on the “last day” (John 6:40). We no longer have to make excuses for why our rapture theory is always contradicted by some other text in the Bible. The concurrent-fulfillment model solves these problems and clears up all of the “loose ends.” It points assertively to only one rapture theory—post-trib.

It is well understood that the parentheses between the sixth and seventh judgments in each series provide additional information about the great tribulation and that the interludes of Revelation 12, 13, 14, 17, and 18 do the same. But for some reason, it is fully entrenched in the minds of modern readers that the seals, trumpets, and vials must progress chronologically, each series following the one that precedes it. My sincere hope in presenting this article is that people may begin to challenge those strongly held beliefs and question whether the judgments of Revelation really may be layering information for us.