

DRAFT

Timelines in *Revelation*

A pre-publication Draft of an Appendix to *A Revelation of Love: A Bible study on the book of Revelation*, by Karl Schank.

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Body text in Georgia font.

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Seals, bowls, and trumpets

How do the seven seals, trumpets, bowls, etc. fit together in time? How does *Revelation* fit together in time? No one knows for sure, but many have strong opinions about it. Here are some of the options:

1. Sequentially as written

This view takes it sequentially and literally as written in the book:

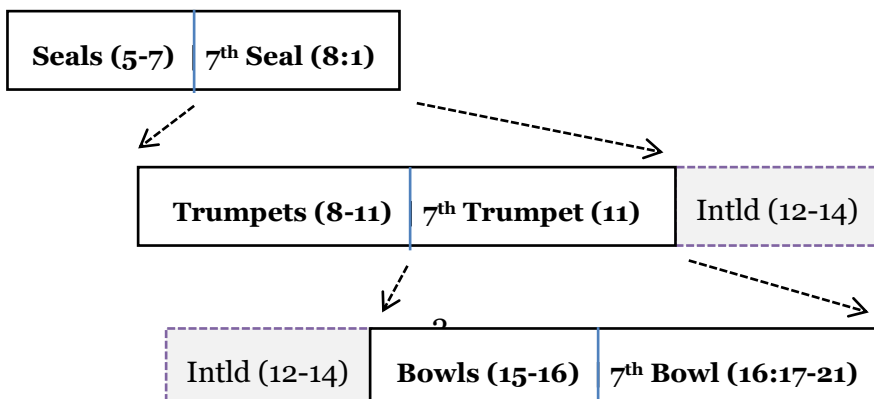
- The seven seals (Rev 5:1-8:1)
come before and lead to ...
- the seven trumpets (Rev 8-11),
which come before and lead to ...
- the interlude of the unholy trinity and battle in Heaven and the wrath and vengeance on followers of the beast (Rev 12-14),
which come before and lead to ...
- the seven bowls of God's wrath (Rev 15-16),
which come before and lead to ...
- the harlot "Babylon" (Rev 17-18),
which comes before and leads to ...
- Jesus' Second Coming and Judgment (Rev 19-20) and the New Heaven and New Earth (Rev 21-22)

Diagramming the timeline is simple and looks something like this:



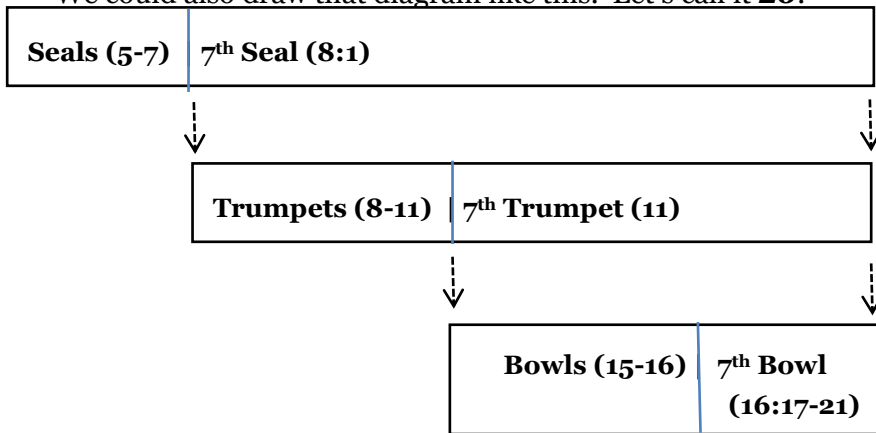
2. Overlap

The next option observes great similarity between the ordeals of the seals, trumpets, and bowls. It views all seven trumpets as occurring during the time of the seventh seal; and all seven bowls as occurring during the time of the seventh trumpet. So it would look something like this. Let's call it **2a**:



What happened to the chapter 12-14 interlude? Is it part of the trumpets or the bowls? Neither, actually. But in this view, we'd probably consider it to be associated with the end of the trumpets. (Or perhaps the beginning of the bowls?)

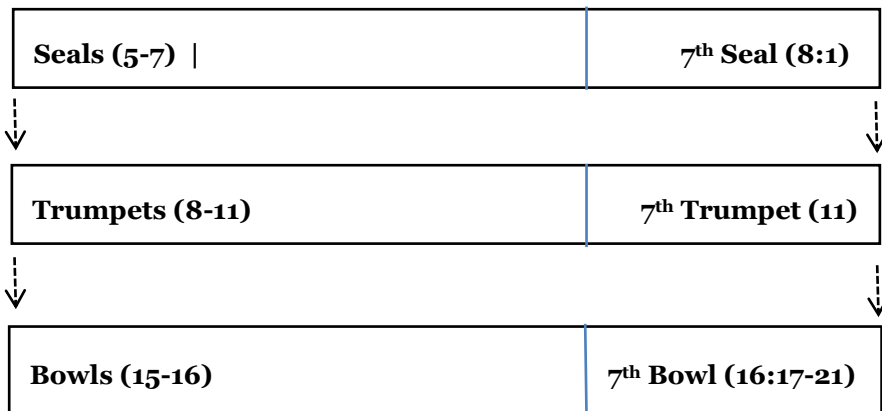
We could also draw that diagram like this. Let's call it **2b**:



Where did the chapter 12-13 interlude go this time? It's harder to tell. It would probably be somewhere between chapters 11 and 14, but how to show it is less than obvious.

3. *Parallel but different points of view*

But there are more similarities to the seals, trumpets, and bowls than just between the seventh of one and the whole of the next, as above. The entire seals section seems somewhat similar to the entire trumpets section, which seems somewhat similar to the entire bowls section. So in this case, the three sections would be completely parallel, viewing a single common reality from three different points of view. It would look something like this:



But are they *that* much alike and that strongly related? The differences seem more significant than that.

4. *Independent*

Finally, many see the different visions of *Revelation* as being independent of each other and not necessarily even in the same time sequence. The chapters may (or may not) be in the sequence that John saw and experienced them, but quite different in actual timeline and in relation to each other. For instance, it could be that in reality, the bowls depict something that actually happened before the seals, but John saw the seals vision first, then later saw the trumpets, then later still the bowls. (Or any other sequence.) Perhaps it's something like a flashback or flash-forward wherein we see things out of the sequence of their actual occurrence.

In this case, the three sections cannot be easily diagrammed; at best, they would look random and unrelated.

Which is it?

So which way is it? Nobody is *actually* sure (probably not even John), though many theologians and commentators make vehement arguments for one view or the other. (But they can't all be right, right?)

Personally, I take the simple, sequential view of the first option: It is in sequential order as John wrote it. However, some portions (notably the seventh of each group) are previews of *what* is to come, and the following group is the details of *how* it happens. This viewpoint seems consistent with Occam's Razor, Einstein's Razor, and what I'll call Lucado's Razor, all of which say that the simpler view is preferred. So to my sense, view #1 is the better approach.

Occam's Razor

"All else being equal, the simpler of two competing theories or explanations must be preferred."

*-- William of Ockham, c.1330
(paraphrased in modern English)*

Einstein's Razor

"Things should be made as simple as possible, but not any simpler."

-- Albert Einstein

Lucado's Razor

"When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, we will seek no other sense."

-- Anon.
 (Recounted by Max Lucado) in
What Happens Next?, 2024

Tribulation

When, then, does the Great Tribulation occur? It depends in part on which of the above viewpoints we take.

Some say that the entire sequence from chapter 5 through chapter 16 is *all* the Great Tribulation.

Some (myself included) note that Revelation 7:14 ¹ introduces a “great multitude” that has “*come out of the Great Tribulation*”. For that to happen, the Tribulation would have to come *before* chapter 7 (and probably before chapters 5 and 6 because all three chapters depict the same seven seals vision). Of course, that assumes at least some sense of sequence in *Revelation*. If the fourth viewpoint above (random, independent) were the case, we couldn’t make that assumption and couldn’t say anything about the timing of the Tribulation.

Placing the Tribulation after chapter 7 (or chapter 5, for that matter, see above) or in the entire span of chapters 6-16 is usually done for what I’ll call external reasons. That is, it might make other passages in the Bible easier to understand (see below), but there’s nothing in *Revelation* itself that requires this.

So for internal consistency in *Revelation* and for simplicity (see above), I tend to assume that the Great Tribulation comes some time before chapter 5 (or at least before chapter 7).

Rapture

But you really wanted to know when the Rapture occurs, and especially when it occurs in relation to the Tribulation. That’s much harder. The Rapture, you see, is never mentioned in *Revelation*. It is in *other* books of the Bible, but not *Revelation*. Because it isn’t even mentioned in *Revelation*, it is impossible to determine with certainty *when* it occurs in *Revelation*’s End Times timeline. (See also “A note about Rapture” in Appendix ___.)

Sorry.

That does not at all imply that the Rapture is invalid or heretical. It is indeed in other books of the Bible and is genuine. However, we can’t fit it into this timeline easily nor without making a lot of other assumptions.

Many theologians, for various apparently-valid reasons, place the Rapture before the Tribulation. Others for equally-valid reasons place it after. Still others validly place it in the middle. As with the Tribulation,

¹ **Tribulation:** [Revelation 7:14](#) -- “Sir,” I answered, “you know.” So he replied, “These are the ones who *have come out of the great tribulation*; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. [emphasis added]”

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they are very vehement about which it is. But again, they can't all be right, and as noted there's no certain way to know for sure.

I don't even attempt an answer to this one. To me, it's something that God knows but we don't. And we *won't* know until we experience it.

That doesn't bother me; in a sense, I don't care. Sure, like everyone else, I'd *prefer* to be "raptured out" before the horrors of the Tribulation. But even if we're not, God will take care of us and will be with us every step of the way. That doesn't mean it'll be easy or that we'll be immune from the troubles. However, I explain elsewhere, the troubles are not directed at us. Rather, they're intended to drive unbelievers to God, begging for relief. They're intended to make unbelievers turn to God in repentance and accept Jesus for Who He really is!

Unfortunately, that doesn't mean there won't be collateral damage. If we are still on Earth when the Tribulation occurs, it will hurt. It will be almost unbearable (but He will help us bear it). We may even be casualties; but in that case, we'll be with the Lord in Paradise, Heaven, or whatever exists at the time. That's a win!

So when does the Rapture occur? I do not know; God does. And that puts it in the very best possible hands.

The Rapture

A note about rapture

The word “rapture” does not appear in *Revelation* but it does in other books of the New Testament (e.g., the term “caught up” in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 ² is translated in Latin as “rapture”; there are other verses, too). Its lack in *Revelation* makes it difficult to resolve the timeline. Where would the rapture fit in *Revelation*’s timeline? (See Appendix __, “Timelines in *Revelation*”.)

But what *is* the rapture, anyway? It’s when Jesus returns and “we meet him in the air” (1 Thes 4.17). (Actually, the Greek word literally means “snatched” or “violently snatched”. That does not imply that the rapture of 1 Thes 4.17 will be violent, though it will be sudden and unexpected.)

Meeting Jesus (less the “snatched” part) sounds rather like what happens when a conquering hero or king returns to his city in triumph. The people all come out to meet him and join the procession bringing him back to the city.

And *that* sounds very much indeed like Jesus’ Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem in Matthew 21 (and Mark 11 and Luke 19). As He approached the city on the donkey, the people came out to meet Him, threw palm branches and their coats in His path as a sort of red carpet treatment, shouted hosannahs, and joined Him in joyful procession into Jerusalem. (This description seems to very well fit both Revelation 14 and Revelation 19-21.)

And then He went back to Bethany for the night³ (which we often forget)! Not permanently, of course; He’d be back in Jerusalem every day of Passion Week.

Could Revelation 14 be like that? And if it is, is He coming so we can escort Him to Earth for the last battle, millennial reign, and final judgment? Or are we joining Him in the air so that He can escort us up to Heaven to be with Him forever? (And first, to be judged by Him there.)

Either way, I can’t definitively say that a Triumphal Entry type of escort is what happens as opposed to more traditional interpretations. But for now just ponder what would be the implications of that and we’ll get back to it in Revelation 19-21.

More to follow ...

[Remember, this is still a draft.]

² **Rapture:** [1 Thessalonians 4:17](#) -- After that, we who are alive and remain will be *caught up* together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord. emphasis added

³ **After the Triumphal Entry:** [Mark 11:11](#) -- Then Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, *He went out to Bethany* with the Twelve. [emphasis added]