

(Revelation) 05 Chapters 4 and 5 and the Numbered Judgment Series

by David Pawson

The sermon explores the majesty of God's throne room in heaven, the significance of the numbers in the book of Revelation, and the importance of the Trinity in our understanding of God.

Duration: 1:14:01

Scripture: Revelation 1:3-4

Topics: "End Times", "Worship God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the end times and the distress that will occur during that period. They emphasize that although believers will have sympathy for the victims of these events, they should not panic because God is keeping the days short for the sake of his chosen people. The speaker also mentions that each set of seven events in the book of Revelation can be divided into three groups, with the fourth, second, and first events belonging together. They highlight the importance of worshiping God and Jesus, as seen in the book of Revelation. The sermon concludes by mentioning the development of natural disasters during the end times, such as a scorched earth.

Transcript

With chapter four of Revelation there's a complete change of scene from earth to heaven. And John, even though his body was in chains on the island of Patmos, was taken up to heaven. Others have had that experience, Paul had it, and he didn't know whether he took his body with him or not.

But he went to the third heaven and saw things that he could never describe to other people. Too wonderful to put into words. Fortunately here, John has been able to put into words what he saw.

He was told to write it down anyway, and he's given us an amazing description of heaven. These two chapters I've just read are great inspiration to artists and musicians and all kinds of creative personalities. I picked up these pictures from the bookstall at the convention last week, and I shall happily take them home.

Did you see them on the bookstall? They're paintings by a Pat Marvenco-Smith. She's not here by any chance, is she? Maybe she was at the convention or is to he? I don't know. But here are pictures.

Twenty-five have been painted of the book of Revelation, but there's the one. It's too small for you to see, I know. Come and ask me afterwards.

Of the scene we've just read, the emerald rainbow, the great throne, the living creatures, the angels. It's almost impossible to put in a picture, but artist after artist has been inspired to try this majestic scene. Sound and light, it's got everything.

So many Christian hymns have been based on the songs that the elders and the angels were singing to God. But it is striking that in chapter four they sing the same words to God as in chapter five they sing to Jesus. Nothing could be clearer that Jesus is God, worthy of the same praise, of the same adoration as God the Father.

The deity of Christ is very precious to us. It was Thomas who first realized that Jesus actually was my Lord and my God. The first thing they did after Jesus had ascended to heaven, they worshipped him before they went back to Jerusalem.

You may not have noticed that when you read the story of the ascension because we usually read it in the book of Acts. But at the end of the Gospel of Luke, the ascension is described. The very first thing they did after the cloud received him out of their sight, they had a worship service and they worshipped a carpenter from Nazareth.

For a bunch of Jewish men to worship a Jewish man is absolutely unthinkable. It was the ultimate blasphemy, deserving death in the law of Moses. Yet here, for the first time, were Jews worshipping a Jew, men worshipping a man.

But the truth they had realized was beyond their previous possible imagination that for three years they'd been living, walking, sleeping with a man who was God. That's the amazing truth that is unique to our Christian faith, that God and man became one person in the Lord Jesus Christ. So you have an amazing two chapters of worship.

Now worship comes from the old word worth. It is a shortened form of worth-ship. To worth-ship somebody is to tell them how much they are worth to you, how much you value them, how much you owe to them, how thankful you are to them.

That is worth-ship. And when we worship God and worship Christ, we're wanting them to know how much we think of them, how we adore them, how grateful we are to them. They are both divine, but one of them is human as well.

So I want to give titles to these two chapters, but the first thing I want you to notice is the key word. When I read my Bible I always read it with a pen, a coloured pen. I'm afraid, oh this Bible is falling to bits, look at all the loose pages.

But it's awful changing your Bible, isn't it? Do you find that? I just can't bring myself to buy a new Bible. I love this one so much I find my way around and every page is just covered with my comments and notes and coloured ink underlining, and all my faith is in this book. It's like getting a new pair of slippers for Christmas and by Boxing Day you're in the old ones again, you know what I mean? The old ones were just so comfortable, but there it is.

The first thing I look for when I read a passage is the key word. So often there is one word that keeps coming. I wonder if without looking you could tell me what the word is for these two chapters I just read to you.

It occurs sixteen times. That's a clue. Anybody have a go? I'm not hearing any of you.

I'm sorry, I'll have to tell you and you will know if you're right, all right? How many of you thought of the word thrown? Great, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, great. Sixteen times in just two chapters, thrown, thrown, thrown, thrown, because that is what there is in heaven. It is where the whole universe is controlled from.

It is where God reigns and now Jesus his Son reigns along with him. In the olden days, you know, if there was trouble at some distant boundary of the Roman empire, the emperor would send his son and give him an army and say, go and defeat that enemy that's attacking that border of our empire. The son would set off as a general with an army behind him and if he was victorious and managed to defeat the enemy of the empire, when he returned there would be a triumphal procession down the main street in Rome and the crowds would turn out to welcome the conquering hero.

The conquering hero would appear first on his horse riding and behind him would march the soldiers who'd helped him to win the victory. Behind that would come the prisoners in chains and behind that would come a whole lot of slaves carrying the booty, the spoil from the battle, the things they'd taken from the enemy. That was the big procession and the emperor would sit on a high throne watching his victorious son come back.

The booty and spoil would be shared out with the public and gifts would be given so that made the crowd happy too. But then the emperor would say to his son, son you have conquered, you have upheld my rule, come and sit at my right hand. Occasionally the emperor went further than that and said, son because of your victory you may now take my place.

I give you the throne of the empire and he would abdicate and the conquering son would sit on the throne and take over as emperor. That is exactly what happened when Jesus ascended into heaven. The Ascension Day is a wonderful day but churches rarely mention it, rarely talk about it.

It was Jesus' coronation day, the day he went back as the son of the emperor of the universe, conquering. Paul even takes that picture from Rome and puts it in his letter to the Ephesians and says that when Jesus ascended on high he led prisoners captive and gave gifts to men. It's exactly that picture.

It was the day that God the Father handed over authority in heaven and on earth to his conquering son, returned from that terrible battle with Satan, having won. That's the ascension and it's very precious to me so I wrote a book about it called *Where Is Jesus Now and What Is He Doing?* So often we try and drag Jesus back to earth as if he's living in my heart and down here again. He's not.

He's at the right hand of the Father on high. All authority, he said, in heaven and on earth is given to me and because he became obedient unto death God has exalted him above everyone else and given him the name above every name and he is now controlling the universe. There's a human being in control of the entire universe now.

The wonder of it is astonishing. Well, here in chapter four we have God lifted up and worshipped and in chapter five immediately afterwards his Son is there in the midst of the throne and equally receiving praise

and worship, which would be utterly misplaced, indeed utterly wrong, if Jesus were not God. The angels time and again appear so wonderful to John in prison that he is tempted to worship the angels and the angels rebuke him every time, don't worship me, I'm just an angel, one of God's messengers.

But Jesus never talked like that. He never said, don't worship me. He accepts the worship of men because he has a right to it.

Well now my title for chapter four is The Creator and His Creatures Holding a Worship Service. The Sovereign Lord is another title. The scene is breathtaking.

It's beautiful, it's colourful. An emerald rainbow, a green rainbow around the throne and that glassy sea, sea without a ripple stretching as far as the eye can see. If you've ever seen the sea in a dead calm, that's the picture that it conjures up here.

It's a picture of tremendous power with lightning, with rumbling and peals of thunder, but it's a picture of tremendous peace as well. The power of the universe is being displayed but the peace of God is all around it. The reason John was given this picture is because God wanted him to be absolutely sure that everything was all right in heaven, that God was still in complete control, that the earth was not out of God's control, that heaven is still heaven and God is still God and his sovereignty now invested in his Son is still as strong as ever it was.

When we face terrible difficulties and dangers and disasters in the world, this is what we need to be absolutely sure of. If you only look at what's happening in the world, you will be disturbed, your heart will be troubled. You need always constantly to be recapturing the vision John had here that God's still on the throne, the power is still in his hands, no one can do anything down here without God's permission.

Even Satan has to have God's permission before he touches a single human being. That comes out in the book of Job. He wanted to touch Job and he had to ask permission first.

Do you realize that Satan can do nothing to you unless God permits it and gives him permission? That is why God is able to make a promise which Paul mentions to the Corinthians. He promises that you will never be tempted more than you can cope with. I think that's a terrible challenge because it means that God is controlling Satan's tempting of me and will keep it within my capacity to resist, which means I have no excuse whatever for giving in to temptation.

That's the challenge of it. If God is controlling the tempter and only allowing him to tempt his people within their capacity by his grace to say no and to resist the devil, then that means God's people are left without any excuse for giving in to temptation. But I counsel many Christians who say, it's all too much for me and they want deliverance and they want all kinds of things and they are really saying, I'm tempted more than I can cope with.

Listen, when you became a believer, God promised that will never happen because he's in total control even of Satan. Therefore, we have to say that God gave Satan permission to take this world over as his kingdom. Why would he do that? I can think of two reasons.

One is his justice and the other is his mercy. After all, we deserved Satan to rule over us when we said to God, we don't want you. You will not tell us what's right and wrong.

You will not forbid us to do what you think is bad. We will find out for ourselves. We'll decide for ourselves what's good and evil.

Taking the tree, the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, is virtually saying, I'll decide for myself what's good and bad for me. I'm not going to listen to God, I will decide. That's the essence of sin, doing your own thing, doing what is right in your own eyes instead of doing what is right in the Lord's eyes.

In the book of Judges, you find again and again they got into trouble through doing what was right in their own eyes. They decided for themselves what was good and what was bad for them to do. That's the essence of sin, to decide for yourself in moral matters and it's very widespread as you well know.

Well now, back here. The scene is colourful, beautiful, powerful, peaceful, remarkable. Picture in your mind is conjured up and as I say, many artists have tried to capture it.

I have to say that I'm disappointed with every attempt, but I do admire an artist who tries because in a sense it's beyond portraying. You almost need to just let your imagination play. Now, the numbers in the book of Revelation are very significant.

We've already encountered the number seven and that's God's perfect number. It means completeness. Six is what falls short of God's glory and 666 really does fall short, but 777.

A friend of mine chose that as his phone number because he wanted to remind people every time they rang him of the perfection of God. But here are two other numbers that come up. First of all, the number twenty-four.

That's going to be a very significant number throughout the book of Revelation. We'll come across it again right at the end in the New Jerusalem. Twenty-four, twenty-four, twenty-four.

Why twenty-four elders? Well I'm sure you've already guessed what it means. There were two peoples of God in the Old Testament and the New. One is Israel, one is the Church, and one was based on twelve sons of Jacob and became twelve tribes.

The other people of God in the world today is the Church, which was based on twelve apostles. Twelve plus twelve is twenty-four, and the twenty-four elders in heaven must surely represent Israel and the Church, the two peoples of God which will one day be brought together into one flock under one shepherd. So here we have the twenty-four, twelve sons of Jacob, twelve apostles of Jesus.

All those twenty-four names will be inscribed on the gates, the walls, and the foundations of the New Jerusalem. Then there is the number four, four living creatures. Four throughout the Bible refers to the whole earth.

We still use the phrase, the four corners of the earth. That doesn't mean that we think the earth is a cube, we know it's round. But it's a colloquial phrase for every part of the world.

We talk about coming from the four winds, we have the four points of the compass, north, south, east, and west. All this is artificial, but it's, I think, based on the Bible where four covers every part of the earth. And there are four creatures here, one like a bird, two like animals, and one like a man, and yet all sharing wings and other unusual features.

Who are these? Well the answer is they represent all God's creatures on earth. I have a picture that I want to show you about this. If ever you come to England, go to a place called Coventry and look at the very unusual new cathedral that has been built in place of the one the Germans obliterated during World War II.

It has become a unique centre of reconciliation. A man called Andrew White is travelling the world reconciling enemies. He has just been spending time in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem with the holed-up Palestinians and the priests.

He's a remarkable man. Coventry Cathedral has become known as a centre of reconciliation and they seek to bring peace wherever there is conflict. It's a remarkable story and above all, Andrew White is a friend of Israel and looks forward to the days when both peoples of God will become one people again.

Now here is a tapestry at one end of the cathedral. It's the largest tapestry in the world. It has millions of stitches, every one put in by hand.

To give you the size of it, there is a human figure there which is life-size, about six feet high. So you can judge the tapestry and women sewed every stitch of this tapestry. I can't say I'm over fond of the artistry, but I do admire what the artist was trying to achieve.

He was wanting to achieve the risen, ascended Christ of the book of Revelation. Here you have the four living creatures that I've just mentioned all around the throne. They are unusual creatures, but one represents an ox, another the eagle, another looks like a man, what's the fourth again? The lion.

So here we have a representation by a contemporary artist of Christ in glory, Christ in heaven, with all authority in heaven and earth. It looks much better in real life, the tapestry, a remarkable piece of work, but it was done out of love for Jesus, largely by French women who are better at tapestry than the British apparently, so there we are. But if you ever go to Coventry, do go and see that.

I've got something else from Coventry Cathedral to show you in a moment. The whole of chapter four is worshipping God, and you notice that when they call him holy, they always call him holy three times. The Trinity of God is at the very heart of our understanding of God.

He is Holy Father, Holy Son, and Holy Spirit. Holy, holy, holy. He is the God who encompasses all time, the God who was and is and is to come.

In just a very short chorus, they have summed up the most profound theology about God. You know, nowadays I speak a lot about Islam and about the contrast between Islam and Christianity, and the biggest difference is this. Though they have many points in common, Islam believes in a God in heaven, they believe in judgment and heaven and hell, and many people are fooled into thinking that Allah is the same as the God of the Bible.

Please be more discerning than that. But the big and most obvious difference is this, that for Islam God is only one person, but for Christians God is three. Now you say, well isn't that just theoretical doctrine? No, it's very, very practical.

It means that the Muslim can never say, God is love. Why not? Because one person by themselves cannot be love. Love is a relationship.

Only the Christian can say it, even the Jew can't say it. Only in the New Testament do you find the statement, God is love, because he is three persons who have always loved each other. When there was no one else around to love, Father loved the Son and Son loved the Father.

God is love and that is why if you read the entire Koran you will never find the word love, even when describing human relationships, because we get our understanding of love from a God who is love, a God who is three persons in love with each other. That's amazing isn't it? But that means that Allah and our God are totally different. Indeed the Koran says, God isn't a father because he never had a son.

That's why a Muslim can never call God Father, but you can call him Father because the Son told you to. The Son by adoption has become your brother and he's given you the authority to pray to Abba, Father, Dad. So we are introduced to a God who is Father and a God who is love because we believe in the Trinity.

It's not a bit of intellectual doctrinal debate. It's the most profound and wonderful aspect of our Christian faith that we can call God Father and we know that his very nature is love. So whenever they praised God, it's holy, holy, holy.

It's addressing all three persons in the Godhead. He is the God who encompasses the past, the present, and the future, and the God who is three persons in one. Let's move on to chapter five.

The focus switches now and it begins with a problem which causes John the Apostle to burst into tears, to weep and weep with frustration, with frustration. There is a picture of a scroll written on both sides of the parchment and then rolled up but sealed tight with seven seals. John by instinct or by revelation knows what that scroll is about.

It's about the end of the world. It is God's program for the countdown of world history. He knows that inside that are written the end time events which will wind up this present evil age.

What makes him weep is that no one can open that scroll because God wants a human being to open it. God has entrusted or delegated most of the major world events to human beings and he wants a human being to start the countdown of world history, to break those seals and begin to unwrap the scroll and let loose the final events of history. Well, who is worthy? You know during the Cold War, which I referred to yesterday, we were scared stiff that somebody was going to press a button of atomic or hydrogen bomb and unleash the power that would bring the end of the world.

God will never entrust that task to an unworthy human being. So I am not scared that some man is going to bring us all to a cosmic catastrophe that will destroy us all. God won't allow it.

He will only allow a person to break the seals who will not be corrupted by the power. Unfortunately, most human beings who get power to destroy unleash it unwisely. And John realises this, that in fact history can't be ended.

There is no one worthy to break the seals. It's going to go on and on and on like it is at the moment. That's a terrible prospect.

We want someone to bring this evil age to an end. We want history to wind up and something better to take its place. We want that deep down.

The thought that the world is going to go on like it is for our children and our grandchildren and the thought is awful. Who wants this world to go on indefinitely as it is? But until we find someone worthy to break those seals, it will do. John is weeping uncontrollably at the sheer frustration of it, God I want this all to end.

Why can't somebody open that scroll and start it ending? And then he realises that his tears are wasted. An angel tells him, you don't need to cry. God has found a human being he can trust.

Then he sees this mixed picture on the one hand of a raging lion, on the other hand not a little white few weeks old lamb, but a fully grown male sheep with seven horns. It's a very strong picture. Here is someone who combines a lion and a ram and yet is a human and yet looks as if he's been dead but is now very much alive.

And of course we know who it is. And immediately the worship that was being directed to the Father in chapter four is now being directed to someone else as well, and we know who it is. It's Jesus.

At last there is someone who can be trusted with the power to bring this world to an end in the right and proper way, in the way that God has planned, in the way that God has ordained, in the way that God decided from the beginning. Now it can happen. Now someone is worthy, worthy of worship and worthy to handle the control of the universe.

I can't help thinking about Philippians chapter two where it says that Jesus won this position by his choices, and you can tell a man's character by his choices. And Jesus made three choices which showed he could be trusted with the entire power in the universe. First choice, to become a human being.

What that must have meant to the Divine Son I can hardly imagine. When my three children were little I tried to explain it to them. They asked me the question and we had a tropical fish tank and everything went well until we chose, was it a Siamese fighting fish? And it was such a beautiful fish and I foolishly bought it and popped it in the tank and from then on it was chaos.

I'm afraid some of the smaller guppies became breakfast and the children were so upset. It was at that stage that they asked me about the Son of God becoming a man. I said, listen.

I took them to the tropical fish tank and I said, look at those fish fighting each other now and killing each other. I said, don't you want to stop it? And they all said, oh yes Daddy. I said, would one of you be willing to become a fish so that I could put you in there and you could stop them all killing each other? I might.

And I said, even though I told you that they would kill you when you tried, oh, not so much now. But I said, if it meant that you had to stay a fish for the rest of your life, would you do it? So you couldn't come back and be what you are now again, that you'd have to stay a fish. Well it was a silly way perhaps to try and teach them, but when God, the Son of God, chose to become a human being like us, he was choosing that not for thirty-three years but forever.

He is still a human being and he always will be. That was his choice. And he being the only person who chose to be born, you didn't choose to be born, I didn't.

Therefore you didn't choose your parents, neither did I. Therefore you didn't choose your social standing of the family you were born into, you had to accept that. So did I. But Jesus, choosing to be born, chose his parents and chose the social level at which he would be brought up. He chose not a palace but a little

carpenter's shop in a village called Nazareth.

That was his choice. He chose to serve people. He took the form of a slave.

When did he do that? Well, when they came for a meal, as I've explained to you already, they had to lean on their left elbow to eat with their right hand. They lay alongside each other and their feet were next to the next person. So you always had to wash your dirty, smelly feet after walking the dusty roads before you sat down to eat.

We always wash our hands, they washed their feet. But it was a very undignified service and so it was kept for the lowest slave, the lowest servant. The servant next to that, the second lowest servant, their job was to take the shoes off, to loose the sandal.

Then the lowest servant of all came with a bowl of water and a towel. Do you remember that John the Baptist said of Jesus, I'm not worthy to loose the sandal? He was saying, I don't feel worthy to be the second bottom slave or servant. But the one he was talking about chose to become the bottom servant or slave and took a towel and a bowl of water.

Peter was horrified, you shouldn't be doing that. It's not your place, you're not going to wash my feet. And Jesus said, unless I wash your feet we can't be partners Peter.

Oh, then wash my hands, wash my head. Typical Peter, one extreme to the other. But Jesus loved him and prayed for him.

But that was the Son of God who chose to be born a human being, chose to be the son of a carpenter and his new wife, chose to wash feet. And above all, he chose to die at the age of thirty-three, quite voluntarily, and to die the most shameful, horrid death, nailed up in public view, stark naked and laughed at. He chose all that and God said, he's my man.

Therefore God super-exalted him, that's the Greek word, super-exalted him and gave him the name which is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow. And now God has a human being he can trust with the power to bring this age to an end. And Jesus comes to break the seals on the scroll.

No wonder they worship him, worthy, worthy, worthy. Well now this is the background to the big trouble because as soon as the first seal on the scroll is broken, the big trouble begins, or what is called the Great Tribulation. And we must now go through this solemn section of the book of Revelation because it was written, given by Jesus to John to prepare us, not just for the big trouble which we may not live to see, or we may, but to prepare us for the troubles that foreshadow the big trouble.

And indeed in some parts of the world the trouble is as big now for the people concerned as it will be for the world when the big thing comes. And we need to remember that. There are people in southern Sudan who are suffering the big trouble already and thousands of Christians are being killed as I speak.

There are Christians being killed all over the world, they're in big trouble already. And it is interesting that in China for example, the book of Revelation is the favourite book of the New Testament. Somehow it prepares them to cope with the trouble by looking beyond it to all that God has in store for those who love him.

But I'm glad that chapters four and five have given us a glimpse of heaven, given us a stability, a foundation. When we're sure of what's happening up there, we can face what's happening down here in quite a different way. We know it's going to be all right because God is still in total control and Jesus, a human being, our brother, is now running the entire universe.

Nothing can happen unless he allows it or causes it. All authority in heaven and on earth is given to him. And so let's now turn to chapters six to sixteen which describe the worst of the big trouble.

Now when you get into this section it becomes more difficult to understand and even more difficult to accept. There is something in us reacts against bad news. We protect ourselves against bad news.

We don't like to hear it, especially if it's going to affect us. And so there is a negative reaction from now on to the book of Revelation but that's running away from facts. And Jesus above all needs disciples who face facts, who face reality, who don't kid themselves, who don't like ostriches hide their head in the sand, but who face up to the future with courage.

Now many of these things which I have labelled as a section, things will get much worse before they get better, many of the things here are not too difficult to understand. There are wars, famines, earthquakes, hailstorms with hailstones weighing a hundred weight each. Well I don't know if you've noticed there are an increasing size of hailstones in our world today, some up to cricket balls.

Well hailstorms, polluted rivers and oceans we're going to have to face. We are facing them already. It says oceans will turn to blood.

Did you notice about four years ago the National Geographic magazine produced here in your country had photographs of the Pacific Ocean, blood red, all the way up the coast of South America? Did you see that article? I've kept the photographs because though it was limited, it was a huge area, thousands of square miles which were blood red, something to do with El Nino, the current crossing the Pacific that affects South America badly in weather. But somehow a different kind of algae that were not green but blood red, grew in the different temperature of the current and the ocean turned blood red. Whenever I see a photograph like that, it's not the fulfillment again, it's a foreshadowing.

But oh, what a foreshadowing it gives. It's not beyond imagination that the whole ocean should be turned blood red, but what a sight that will be. What an extraordinary natural phenomenon.

Then there are diseases and epidemics, one of which kills a quarter of the human race and another kills a third of the remainder. Can you imagine such a thing? Well, if you go to Central Africa today where AIDS is a raging epidemic out of total control, you can imagine these things happening quite easily. In fact, forty years ago, much of this scenario seemed crazy to the world.

Actually, even Hollywood now has made apocalyptic credible. Even Hollywood is picking up themes from the book of Revelation to make horror films. Isn't that interesting? 666 is now becoming widely known, not through preachers but through films.

So Revelation becomes increasingly credible. I told you about the town near us forty miles away from my home that is the first town in the world to do away with money and cash, and you buy and sell with a number. That was foretold in the book of Revelation two thousand years ago, and even fifty years ago it was unimaginable.

Now, everybody knows it's just round the corner, the cashless society. But the problem when you read this section is to discover the relationship between the events, and I want to deal with that in detail. There are altogether twenty-one separate tragic events recorded over the next few chapters.

In three series of seven, seven seals are broken on the scroll. Later, seven trumpets are blown, and a trumpet in scripture is always a warning. It's the ram's horn called the shofar.

I've got one at home, I can play it too. It's a sound that can be heard about a mile and a half away, and it is always used in the Bible in history to announce an event, but particularly to sound a warning. It's the equivalent of the air raid siren in World War Two in our country.

It's the sound of an enemy coming, of a disaster near at hand. You've got your own ways now on in America of warning of tornadoes and other things. People need to be warned about what's coming.

The trumpets are warnings and they are followed by seven bowls of God's anger tipped over and poured out on the earth. Now how do these three sevens relate to each other? Do they follow each other? Do they happen simultaneously? How do they all relate? There are puzzles here that we'll have to unravel. It's complicated by three facts.

First, that there are digressions, interludes, which come off track and look at something else. There are inserted parentheses which we shall have to look at. Broadly speaking, the twenty-one disasters happen to the whole world.

But of course one of the questions is, what is happening to Christians while all this is going on? And if you love the Jews, you will also be asking, what will be happening to the Jewish people while all this is going on? And the parentheses are about God's people. So every now and again, the twenty-one disasters stop and a few chapters are inserted to tell you what will be happening to God's people, Jewish and Christian, while all that is happening. And then there are recapitulations in the middle, looking back to earlier things from time to time, and there are also anticipations looking forward.

For example, suddenly in the middle of the twenty-one the Battle of Armageddon is mentioned and up to that point no one has heard about it. And we don't know what it means until we get right through to chapter nineteen and then we find out what the Battle of Armageddon is. So there's a little anticipation there of something that is not fully explained.

And suddenly in the middle of the twenty-one disasters an angel announces, Babylon has fallen. Where's Babylon? What's all that about? Well we find all that in chapters seventeen to eighteen, but it's mentioned before it happens. So there are all these complications and it's a little difficult to get the thread.

Many Christians have tried to put it all on a chart and get it all related so they know exactly which event will follow and when, but these charts have a curious way of contradicting each other because there are difficulties in making it all very neat. Let's look first at the twenty-one disasters impartially and just look at what is going to happen before we decide on what order it's all going to happen. Three series of seven, let's move it up so you can see them all, three seals that are broken and each introduce another event, and then three trumpets, sorry seven trumpets, seven seals, and finally seven bowls.

But each of them is explained quite clearly. And the first thing I want you to notice is that each seven is made up of four, two, and one. And the four belong together, and then there are two, and then there's one.

In each case, we treat the seven in three groups. Four things that happen, two things that happen, one final thing that happens. The next thing I want you to notice is that the last three in each case are called woes.

That's a very important word in Scripture. Woe is the opposite of blessed. To bless someone is to release God's blessing for good in their life, it's a benediction.

But to say woe is a curse, it's a malediction, it's a bad thing to say to people. And I just want to add that parents should never say that to children, it's a curse word. I've had parents, I don't know if it happens over here but in England, I've had so many parents say to their children, woe betide you if you do that again.

Is that a common phrase here, Bobo? No. And I've wanted to say to those parents, you're cursing your child. Jesus said woe as many times as he said blessed.

In fact, he sometimes said them together. Sometimes he said, blessed are you poor, but woe to you rich. Blessed are you who mourn, but woe to you who laugh now.

And he said a lot of woes to the Pharisees, woe to you who like the chief seats in the synagogue, woe to you who like to dress up in special clothes, woe to you. And one of the most interesting things is this. If you go to Galilee today, you will love it.

This little sea, 13 miles long, 8 miles across, shaped like a harp and the Hebrew word for harp is Gennesaret, which is why that sea is also known by that name. It's the most beautiful sea surrounded entirely by hills. It's below sea level already, the Dead Sea is lower still, but Galilee is already below sea level and it nestles this beautiful lake provided you don't go there in the afternoon when as the hot air that the sun has heated by shining on the water rises suddenly and draws cold air in down all the valleys from the hills and the whole sea erupts into a storm.

It looks so peaceful at other times. They tell you not to go swimming in the afternoon or to go out in a little boat in the afternoon in case that happens. And of course we have examples in the Gospels when it did happen and the disciples thought they were going to drown and Jesus rebuked them for being of little faith and rebuked the storm.

And he didn't say, Peace be still. That's a bad translation. He said, Get muzzled as if you were talking to a naughty puppy dog.

Get down. And the storm got down. A wonderful moment.

Well now, the Sea of Galilee looks beautiful but it's nothing like it was in Jesus' day. In Jesus' day it wasn't green fields with just one little town, Tiberias, on the western shore. There were a quarter of a million people living round the shores of Galilee in Jesus' day.

It was highly populated. There were cities every few miles all round the sea, even Greek cities on the far side, the eastern shore. But there was Capernaum, Chorazin, Bethsaida, and little cities all around.

A quarter of a million people living there because it was on the main road from Asia to Africa and that's where the customs were and the tax collectors like Matthew were there to collect the customs dues. It was a crowded place. Why is it not crowded now? Why is the only town in which you can stay Tiberias where

all the hotels are? Why? I'll tell you why.

Because Jesus said, woe to you Capernaum, woe to you Chorazin, woe to you Bethsaida because if the mighty works that have been done in you had been done in us where they'd have believed, but you don't believe. When he said that he was cursing the towns in which he had performed miracles, in which the sick had queued up filling the main street waiting to be healed by Jesus. But they didn't believe and he said, woe to them.

The result is that the only trace of Capernaum is a pile of ruined stones. The only trace of Chorazin is an odd stone or two that you have to look for in the grass. Bethsaida has disappeared.

There is only one town in Galilee today, it's Tiberias, because it's the only town that Jesus didn't say woe to because he never went there. It was Herod's country holiday home, Tiberias. Jesus would have nothing to do with Herod, never talk to him, even at his trial before his death.

He wouldn't open his mouth to Herod. So he never did a miracle there. So he never said woe to Tiberias and it's still there.

Woe is a terrible word. And here we have the last three seals, the last three trumpets, the last three bowls are called woes, woes, woes. They are curses of God on his world.

We're dealing with serious stuff here aren't we? Let's run through them one by one The Four Horses. They're well known from Albrecht Durer's lithograph painting, which is very famous in Europe anyway, called The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. It's again an artist trying to capture what really can't be captured.

What are these four horses and what is their significance? They ride through the earth. As soon as the first four seals are broken, these horses are released. Well the white horse and the significance of the horses is the colour.

They have riders, but the significance is not in the rider at all. He's simply the one who's guiding the horse. The significance is in the colour of the horse.

And the first colour is white, and white horses have always been used by military conquerors, imperialists who wished to extend their territory or for one reason or another go to war against another country. When you see the pictures of all the famous conquerors in history, you'll always find them on a white horse. I don't know why, but that's what they chose.

It is the symbol of military aggression, and when the first seal is broken, military aggression is released through the earth. That inevitably leads to the red horse which follows, which is the colour of blood. Because whenever anyone goes to war, blood is going to be shed.

Lives will be lost on a horrific scale. And of course we know from two world wars when millions died what blood was shed. The symbol of memorial days in England, you have your memorial day here yesterday, the symbol in England is a red poppy because on the fields of Belgium and France where millions were slaughtered in World War One, all the trees were destroyed, all the grass was destroyed.

But the one thing that grew up in the mud were red poppies, blood red poppies, so that where millions of soldiers had died there was a field of these blood red poppies. This is the significance of the second

horse. Military aggression will lead to widespread slaughter of human beings, to bloodshed, and that will be followed by a black horse which is the horse of famine.

We are told this, the shortage of food that comes with every war, and we're told in detail what it will cost to buy food when that black horse is riding the earth. It is the colour of famine, it's the colour of flesh that has no food. The black horse follows the red and the white.

Finally, the grey-green horse is released and that is the colour of epidemics, of disease, of typhoid, of all the diseases that flood in when the three horses have vanished. Now these four horses are running in local areas already. I could take you to parts of the world where you'd see all four colours in terms of human life, but they're going to ride through the earth when the seals are broken.

Now there's a complete change. Those first four seals belong together, but now complete change. Five, surprisingly, is persecution of God's people and their anguished cry to God, how much longer? How long will this go on? How long will you allow them to do this and not take vengeance? For vengeance belongs to God, not to us, and he will repay.

But God doesn't always repay cruelty by next Friday. The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly small, said a German poet. Number six here refers more to unbelievers and refers to earth tremors.

Now I was once in Seattle at the top of their tower. I think you know the tower in Seattle, do you? And there was an earth tremor while I was up at the top. And I tell you, I was scared stiff.

At first I thought I was having a dizzy spell because I started swaying, and then I realized that everybody else was swaying around me. And I tell you, when you're at the top of a tower like that and looking down and it starts moving, boy, you really know what's coming. I haven't been in many earthquakes.

I suppose that was the nearest I have been. But it's very frightening, isn't it? You've had them here, San Francisco, sitting on top of the Andreas Fault. You know that earthquakes can shake and destroy.

There are many parts of the earth that are having earthquakes now, but the amazing thing is that there are more parts having them that have never had them before. We're even getting tremors in England now, tremors and terror that it brings. Somebody told me who had been in a very bad earthquake, the most frightening thing was that there was nothing to hold on to because everything was shaking.

There was total insecurity. There was nowhere to go, nothing to hold on to, to brace oneself against what was happening. It just seemed a total threat of insecurity.

That's number six. Number seven is so horrific that it says there was silence in heaven for half an hour. That's extraordinary.

It's saying to us that even heaven seems to be taken aback by what they're watching happening below. It is a worldwide earthquake, not just tremors here and there, but a worldwide earthquake, the whole earth being shaken. That has never happened before.

But when you see pictures of this earth from outer space, it looks just like a little floating balloon, doesn't it? And you can see that God could so easily just put his hands out and shake the whole thing. We move on then to the trumpets. I'm still not answering the question how they relate to each other.

Let's just look at them individually first. We now see certain developments in the world of nature. Much of this is human activity, but now it seems as if nature begins to become disoriented and disturbing.

Natural disasters are the next four. First we have a scorched earth, many fertile areas becoming a dust bowl, and you understand what that means in America, in this central belt. Places that were fertile, dry and barren, a scorched earth.

Now it doesn't tell us what particular natural factor will cause that, it simply states the result. An earth that no longer supports life, an earth that no longer provides food. Do you remember that to Noah God promised that while the earth remains, seed time and harvest, summer and winter will not fail.

He will provide food for his people, for the whole earth, and he has kept his promise. But when history begins to wind down, that will radically change. A scorched earth followed by polluted seed.

Boy, you don't need to be taught about pollution today. In the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, which as you know contains the Gulf Stream going round and round, whenever you get something circulating in nature there is a still centre. In a tornado or cyclone you've got the eye of the storm where everything is at peace.

It's remarkable really when you consider the force that is being used to circulate the wind or the sea or whatever. And here we have in the Atlantic a circular stream of water constantly. It brings up warmth from the Gulf of Mexico to Britain.

We're far further north than you, but we have a mild climate because of that stream. There are now scientists saying that stream is going to change direction, and we could face an ice age I guess. But we are far further north, but the warmth of your country comes to our country via that stream.

But in the middle, the Atlantic Ocean is absolutely still. The eye of the water is stationary. It's called the Sargosso Sea, and mariners crossing the Atlantic dreaded when there were sailing ships being caught in the Sargosso Sea.

They could be stuck there for days until a light breeze released them. And so the Sargosso Sea was full of seaweed growing, thick seaweed that can grow in still water. But alas now if you go to the Sargosso Sea or if you get stuck in it, or if you fly over it, you'll see it's one big garbage heap of plastic, of stuff we've thrown into the Atlantic from the coasts around it which have gradually... is it centrifugal force that casts out? It's the opposite of that, centripetal force which brings all the floating stuff into the middle and dumps it there, and it literally looks like a gigantic garbage dump.

We are already polluting the oceans, but here we have a widespread pollution of the sea, and the sea is really our cleansing agent for the world. Thirdly, we have contaminated water on the land. Do you know that wars are going to be fought over water in the twenty-first century? Fresh water is getting scarcer than food.

Clean water is essential to health. And maybe the first war over water will be in the Middle East because the Arabs and the Jews are nearly on the verge of fighting for the Jordan River. The Jordan River is the life of Israel.

But the Arabs want water from it as well, and there's not enough for both of them. And this is going to happen around the world. Clean water is going to be at a premium.

The way we are squandering it now, the amount of water we each use in the Western world, it's something like twenty gallons a day or more, to wash, to cook. It's essential. But contaminated water will be our lot.

We'll have to boil every bit of it. Finally, reduced sunlight. That will have an amazing effect.

Again, we're not told how that will happen. Some change in the atmosphere will reduce the sunlight, and of course an increased carbon dioxide content could do that. Reduce sunlight.

Well, there are four natural things. But then with five we turn to quite different things. There is mention of a locust plague, insect plague.

What does all this remind you of? Have any of you been thinking about the plagues of Egypt? It's almost as if the plagues of Egypt were a foretaste of all this. God did it then and he will do it again. I was telling you how I was in Kano in northern Nigeria and suddenly at eleven o'clock in the morning, or twelve o'clock it was, the sky went black and the sun went out.

I was convinced I was in an eclipse, but it wasn't an eclipse. It was a locust swarm and I have never seen anything like it. I had heard about it, but frankly you have to see one and be in it to appreciate the danger of it.

Just little insects like gigantic grasshoppers, four inches long, and I could hear them eating. A bunch would descend on a tree and leave a minute later and not only were there no leaves left, there was no bark left on the tree either, it was just a white skeleton. I couldn't believe it.

The poor Africans were beating them off with sticks to try and save their gardens and their few vegetables, but it was a losing battle. I reckoned the speed by my watch of their travel. They were flying at twelve miles an hour and they blotted out the entire sun for over one hour.

That's to give you some idea how many millions in just one swarm, and they told me it wasn't a big swarm. My, no wonder you read locust dangers in the Bible in the books of Joel and Amos and others. And they were there in Egypt too, and they will be there at the end in countries that have never had them.

Do you know that we in England have received the first locusts that England has ever seen in just the last three months? They are spreading further than they have ever been. Go to Africa and it's common, but we've been getting them. In England it's unheard of.

Number six, an invasion from the East, from the Oriental world of an army of hundreds of thousands of men. They're not identified. We don't know which nationality they are, but an invasion of the Middle East from the Orient is clearly one of those last events which we're being warned about.

They will cross the Euphrates, clearly intent on doing some mischief in the Middle East. Well, I don't find it difficult to believe that an army of that size can come from the Orient. After all, a quarter of the world's population is in China and the Indian population is multiplying at a phenomenal rate.

There are plenty of peoples whom this could refer to, but God wisely doesn't tell us who it is. But it's going to complicate the political situation immensely. Funnily enough, the seventh trumpet is exactly the same as the seventh seal.

It is a worldwide earthquake. However, it is not greeted by silence this time, but by a loud shout, the kingdom has come. That is an extraordinary statement.

With the whole world shaking, the kingdom has come. It reminds me of a verse in Hebrews 12 where it predicts that the whole world will be shaken, but we have received a kingdom that cannot be shaken. When everything else is shaken, the one thing we'll be sure of is that the kingdom of God is coming at last.

It's going to be established on earth as it is in heaven. So much for the trumpets, we move on to the bowls. Here it seems as if nature is taking even more control of the situation, or rather God through nature is causing real suffering of the people on earth.

We're told about the human effect of some of these developments. First of all, boils on the skin. I presume it could be something like skin cancer, widespread.

Again, we're not told what will cause it, whether the ozone layer will disappear around the world as it has disappeared over parts of the southern hemisphere. Skin cancer is almost indigenous in Australia now. People just talk about it as if I've had a cold and they go and get it dealt with.

But clearly, we're going to be afflicted on our skin by the changes that are happening in the atmosphere around us. Secondly, we have blood from the springs. The one source of fresh, clean water is of course the springs welling up from the water table beneath the surface.

They will spew out blood, whether it's simply water with that imperfection that has coloured it, I don't know. But it's all part of a horrible picture. Then we have--sorry, blood in the sea, I've mentioned it.

Then blood from the springs, then the fourth bowl of wrath is burning from the sun. The sun gets too hot for us altogether and we are burnt. Of course, nowadays we rather like getting out in the sun and getting sunburnt, but we won't be then.

I think people are beginning to realise the danger of the sun, but it will become more dangerous. The whole poise of the sun in relation to planet earth leaves me worshipping God. He's keeping it at exactly the right distance from the earth for us to be able to live.

If we were a little closer to the sun or a little further away, life would be totally impossible. Who is holding planet earth in its revolving around the sun at exactly the right distance for you and me to be able to live? Christ is. It is by his Word that he upholds the universe and maintains the world in which we live and keeps the earth just at the right distance.

But how easily he could just move the earth slightly closer? Perhaps that's what will happen behind this. We come to number five and now in contrast, darkness covers the earth. The earth gets too hot and too dark at the same time.

I tell you, that's a foretaste of hell itself. Then we have number six, and that's the first time Armageddon is mentioned. But we're not told what it is, where it is, what it's all about, and I'm not going to say anything at this stage.

We shall come up against this later. And then to our surprise, number seven is the same as number seven here and the same as number seven there. A worldwide cataclysm, a universal catastrophe of an earthquake shaking the whole globe.

Well I've taken you through it and as I said to you last week, you now know the worst. And it is a comfort to know the worst, as I told you. When my wife was suffering from a fatal cancer, we wanted to know the

worst.

And the surgeon told it to me and I told it to my wife, and it was then that she was able to cope with it, to face it, and adapt to what the future seemed to be for her. As I told you, God had mercy on us and has removed it entirely and she is now totally free of it. And this happened in 1975, so I think by now I can claim that God healed her and had mercy on us.

But he didn't show the same mercy to my daughter when she developed leukemia. And once again, my wife and I had to say to the doctor, please tell us the worst, and he did, or she did rather. And we could then face the future and prepare for it, though it's always unnatural and hard to see your children die before their parents.

But we wanted to know. We were more at peace and more able to cope when we knew. Would you rather have a doctor who hid the truth from you? Well unbelievers seem to prefer that, and I can understand that because what have they got to look forward to? But for Christian believers, they want to know the truth.

A friend of ours in Buckinghamshire in England said to his doctor, now come on doctor, tell me the truth. And the doctor said, you have about two weeks to live. And our friend wrote to all his relatives and invited them to come and stay in his rather large house.

At the end of each letter he said, come and see how a Christian dies. What a man! What a bold, courageous thing to do. But he knew that the way a Christian dies is as important as the way a Christian lives, because death somehow reveals the real faith, the real character whether we really are Christian or not.

So he said, come and see how a Christian dies. He now knew the worst, but he faced it by looking to the joy set before him what lay beyond and wanted his relatives to know that he was dying in peace and looking forward to glory. Well, you now know the worst that can happen.

Nothing worse than this will happen. Well, aren't you glad? But look, you now know. And when these headlines appear in the press and when the announcements are made on television, you will be able to say, I knew that was coming.

And your heart will not be shaken and disturbed. The unbelievers will be terrified by all this. But as Jesus said, these are the pains of childbirth, not the pains of death.

They are the beginnings of a new world. They are beginnings of a complete change. They're pains that should teach you to look forward.

So therefore he said, when you see all these dreadful things happen, lift up your heads for your redemption is drawing near. That will mark out the Christians when these things begin to happen. They will not be shaken.

They will not have troubled hearts. They will have sympathy for the victims of all these things and do their best to help because they love people. But they will not panic because they will know this is for a short time.

It will soon be over. God is keeping those days short for the sake of his chosen and therefore we can stick it. We'll see it through because of what lies beyond.

It's five o'clock. I think that would be a good time to stop. We'll pick up the story tomorrow morning with the question, how do these relate to each other? Do these twenty-one things follow after each other, but then the seventh in each case was the same thing? So perhaps that's not the whole story.

I'll pick up the story tomorrow morning and we'll also look up the parentheses, the insertions that tell us about the Jewish and the Christian people during this very short but terrible time, which Jesus said is a distress such as the world has never seen before and will never see again. For more information on Friends of the Bragg Room visit our website at www.fotv.com

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