

The Second Coming of the Lord Jesus: What Every Person Should Know

Introduction

This paper analyses texts from the New Testament (NT) and relates them to world-historical events of the time since about 1880, showing that the next period of human history will most probably be the so-called "Great Tribulation Period".

This scripture wants to point out that it will not be absolutely necessary for those who are alive then to suffer through those uniquely terrible times. However, salvation from it requires constant prayer and a lifestyle of genuine devotion to the Lord Jesus.

Where do we stand with regard to the end times?

I am aware that many people have already published some kind of calculation or prophetic announcement about when Jesus will allegedly return, and the end of the world will take place finally. Now, with a glance at the New Testament, we can immediately see that such dates will most probably be wrong, because Jesus said: "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in the heavens, nor the Son, but the Father alone". (Mt 24:36, and analogously Mk 13:32). Jesus connected this statement with the call to *always* remain awake and sober in view of his return. (Mt. 24:42-44)

I certainly do not presume to be wiser than the Lord Jesus and the angels of God. No, I do not know the day and the hour when Jesus will return and begin his judgement.

On the other hand, the NT contains quite extensive and detailed statements about the end-time events, and these are given to us so that we can do something intelligent with them. Jesus himself wanted to make this clear to his disciples by telling them in a parable: "Watch the events and recognise by the signs that that day is approaching" (Mt 24:32.33).

Even if we do not know the exact day and hour, we may and should observe the course of events in the world attentively in order to verify the progress towards the end. And in the same way, we may and should also draw conclusions for our own lives from our observations. If we become aware of how close He is to us, this could, for example, spur us on to prepare ourselves even more intensively for His arrival (even though we should actually always be prepared...). That is what this little scripture invites and encourages us to do.

The first chapters of the Revelation of John at a glance

It is indisputable that the New Testament book "Revelation of John" contains the most detailed description of the events of the Last Days. If we therefore take a brief look at this last book of the NT in a rough overview, we can recognise the following structure in the first chapters:

- Chapter 1: Preface and Introduction
- Chapters 2 and 3: in the form of letters ("Epistles"), Jesus sends his feedback to seven Christian churches of the time, conveying praise as well as admonitions and encouragement.
- Chapter 4: here a change of perspective takes place; John receives a vision of the heavenly spheres, with the throne of God at the centre

- Chapter 5: John sees Jesus Christ being given a book during a very solemn ceremony in heaven, the seals of which He alone is worthy to open; with the subsequent gradual opening of the seals of this book, from then on the final history of the whole earth and the humanity living on it unfolds
- Chapter 6: the first six of the seven seals of the book are opened and the events that accompany them - especially wars, famines, epidemics - are described.

For further understanding it is very important to understand that at the end of this sixth chapter, and after the sixth seal has been broken, the return of the Lord Jesus to earth will be described. Jesus will be endowed with great power and glory --- and with the authority to judge. For in the last verse of the sixth chapter it says: "For the great day of their¹ wrath has come. And who can stand?" (Rev. 6:17).

This means that from chapter 7 of Revelation - beginning with the opening of the seventh seal - the final judicial action of God is revealed to us step by step!

Now one may ask the question: What happened to the first six seals? Terrible things already followed from them. Do these events not yet describe judicial action? My answer is this: It is true that the opening of the first six seals already led to severe punishments for the earth and its inhabitants - but from the seventh seal onwards the tribulation becomes *unavoidable*. The events that took place with the first seals were a final and an urgent warning from God - and everyone who reads them would do well to take them very seriously. But despite all the horror that accompanied them: people could be saved from them.²

To put it casually, one could say: When the events of chapter 7 and the following begin, the "fun" is finally over. If God still has a lot of patience and grace until then, not only for those people who have profoundly and truly converted to Jesus, but also for sinners, for the disobedient and rebellious, the latter will end at that very moment. After that, life on earth will become *truly* terrible.

So, we can now rephrase the question posed at the beginning: "Where do we stand with regard to the end times?" into: "Where do we stand today according to the course of chapter 6 of the Revelation of John?" One thing we can already say with certainty: Jesus has not yet come back; so, we are not yet in verse 17. But it will be helpful to check how far the predicted events of that sixth chapter of the Revelation to John have already developed to this day.

The sixth chapter of Revelation

Therefore, I begin by taking a closer look at the sixth chapter of Revelation. In verses 1 to 8, riders on horses of different colours are sent out one after the other. These riders symbolise events that will be brought upon the earth and its inhabitants from God. It seems to me that the meaning of the rider on

¹ These are God Himself and the Lamb on the throne, i.e. Jesus.

² In relation to the horrors of the first four seals (Rev. ch. 6), there were still protection and escape possible. For example, there are not a few accounts of how God miraculously helped believing - and sometimes unbelieving - people during the World War II or under the communist dictatorships, thereby saving them from bad things. In my opinion, an essential difference to the later events is this: *From the seventh chapter of Revelation onwards there will be no escape!* Whoever then lives on earth and is under God's judicial action will have to suffer this to the bitter end. The hot tears of that time of tribulation will only be dried in heaven!

the first, white horse, is the least easy to understand. Therefore, I will first turn to this phenomenon in a little more detail.

Revelation 6, verses 1 and 2: "And I beheld as the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say as with a voice of thunder, "Come"; and I looked, and behold a white horse, and he that sat on him had a bow; and there was given unto him a crown of victory; and he went forth conquering and to conquer."

The person on the white horse is an allegory of the anti-Christian spirit. Now anti-Christian spirits are nothing new or surprising in themselves; already Jesus himself as well as the apostles of the early Christian times announced them, and at the same time they warned urgently against them.³ Let us note that spiritual seduction is mentioned first in this chapter 6: Even before the material judicial action of God comes in the form of war or famine, the white horse appears with the spiritual seducer.⁴ And this seducer is shown to us as victorious, i.e., he will succeed in drawing many to his side.

Since my present little paper is mainly concerned with the events of the time period since about 1880, I would now like to look more closely at how this anti-Christian spirit manifested itself in the late 19th century, and how much the symbolism of verse 2 is consistent with this. People like Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Richard Wagner, the theologian Strauss, Baron de Coubertin were originators of such anti-Christian works in philosophy, art, theology, and sport. In the late 19th century, they prepared the de-Christianisation without which the atrocities of the subsequent 20th century would have been inconceivable. These men mentioned - they are only a few examples; there were many more of their kind - were successful and famous; and the crown symbolises this. But the person on the white horse is also armed, with a bow. This is a deadly weapon that is effective from a distance and can be used to attack from a hiding place or ambush, for example. In contrast to a sword, which may only kill at close range and is therefore usually clearly visible before it is used, the bow is an attacking weapon that can be used to kill from concealment. This corresponds well to the advance of the anti-Christian spirit, for the work of such people as Marx and Nietzsche, for example, took place under the pretext of doing something good for humanity.

Karl Marx⁵, born in Trier in 1818, was the son of a lawyer of Jewish origin who - possibly for career reasons - had turned to the Protestant religion close to the state. His father's religious constitution is described as "rationalistic" and "enlightened". Marx was a man fond of writing and debating, and from his youth he moved in circles that practiced and invoked a corrosive rejection of all religion, especially Christian religion. They were not only concerned with criticising the religious practice of the churches or theological doctrine, but with a general slander of the Holy Scriptures. The philosopher Bruno Bauer was particularly influential on Marx. The German Wikipedia writes about Bauer: "(He) turned ... into a critic of the Gospels and held the view that no historical person of Jesus of Nazareth could be proven... In the early 1840s, Bruno Bauer became the leading head of left-wing Hegelianism alongside Ludwig Feuerbach. These two ex-theologians, who had been expelled from the university, competed to establish an atheistic philosophy in Germany for the first time."⁶

³ Mt. 24:4, 5; 1Jn. 2:18; 1Jn. 4:1; 2Thess. 2:1, 2 etc.

⁴ We also read something comparable in the 24th chapter of Matthew, as well as in the parallel passages of the evangelists Luke and Mark. The Lord Jesus also began that prophetic end-time discourse with an urgent warning against spiritual deception, which would be the prelude to the ensuing turmoil.

⁵ <https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/sfz58835.html> (retrieved 12.03.2023)

⁶ https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruno_Bauer (retrieved 12.03.2023)

Based on such - at the beginning still shamefully concealed - anti-Christian views, Marx developed a supposedly scientific theory that called for rebellion, subversion, murderous civil war, and every kind of godlessness. The final result of all these horrors was then to be a kind of "workers' paradise" on earth.⁷ Strangely, the further removed from human reality his apologists have become, the more prestigious Marx's heresies have become. In an academic study room, Marxism may have a certain charm, but in trying to apply it to real life challenges, it has always proved utterly absurd. The vernacular in socialist East Germany described the sum of Marxism with an ironic pun: "Marx is theory --- and bungle⁸ is what comes out of it in practice."

In reality, however, the harvest of the Marxist seed was much more terrible: Marx died in 1883, and his legacy spawned violence, terror and bloodshed around the world in the following hundred years. Life in Marxist countries was paradisiacal at best for the few leaders, and even these often enjoyed it only for a short time.

The criticism Nietzsche levelled at Christianity, he packaged as a call for betterment, and moreover it was published in the name of science. Nietzsche worked as a philosopher, and philosophy was considered a highly reputed scientific discipline at the time. In essence, however, Nietzsche's teachings are radically opposed to Christian doctrine, so that we are not dealing with -possibly justified - criticism, but with a complete denial of the truth, even if this is cleverly disguised.

To give another example: In the work of the composer Richard Wagner, the anti-Christian spirit is expressed by the fact that ancient Germanic gods are often glorified. The glorification of idols is undoubtedly opposed to the Christian faith and leads away from it; at the same time, it comes in the guise of great musical artistry. Wagner is still a celebrated and highly esteemed composer today; for example, the annual Wagner Festival in Bayreuth is a social event of the first order. One could say somewhat casually: the entire social elite of Germany (and beyond) pays homage to Wagner there; anyone who wants to count for something has to show up in Bayreuth. In such famous and celebrated persons as Nietzsche and Wagner, the anti-Christian spirit went out to triumph, and triumph it did; and its triumph continues to this day among such people as do not believe the truth.

The following verses 3 and 4 of Revelation 6 describe how a red horse is sent out with the opening of the second seal. From the text of the verses it is relatively easy to see that the rider on this horse is symbolic of wars and war-like conflicts.

The meaning of verses 5 and 6 is also not too difficult to figure out: The rider on the black horse means dearth, inflation and consequent famines that will kill many.

Let us now look at the next two verses 7 and 8. At first sight these seem like a repetition of the previous verses to sum up: "And when he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come"; and I looked, and behold a pale horse, and he that sat on him, whose name (is) "Death";

⁷ Compare Jesus' word according to Lk. 16:16b: "The good news of the kingdom of God is proclaimed, and everyone enters *by force*."

⁸ In German language, the word for bungle – Murks – makes a rhyme to Marx.

and Hades followed him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with the sword, and with hunger, and with death⁹ and by the wild beasts¹⁰ of the earth."

If one reads the sequence of verses 1 to 8 and considers the history of mankind - a history in which spiritual seductions, terrible slaughters, deadly famines, and natural disasters occurred again and again - then one might at first assume a kind of ongoing divine judgement. And this idea is certainly not entirely wrong. Nevertheless, we should note that verse 8 describes an intensification that goes beyond the statements of verses 1 to 6; an intensification that is so striking that it cannot be hidden.

When the fourth seal is opened, the deadly horrors take on a dimension that obviously is beyond the events of the first three seal openings. For here it is now said that *a quarter of* all people on the whole earth will perish through the previously mentioned punishments such as war, civil war, hate crimes, famine, and epidemics. A quarter of humanity - let's imagine that! I myself lived for many years in Berlin; a city that today probably has almost four million inhabitants. There, almost one million people would die as a result of the aforementioned catastrophes - in addition to those who leave this world due to old age (and statistically predictable). That is a very large number! And the same thing is happening worldwide... In the eighth verse of the sixth chapter, a global event with extremely far-reaching consequences is announced.

Whenever I read these verses in Revelation, I couldn't help but think of the two World Wars of the 20th century. These were - as their names suggest - worldwide events that also led to millions and millions of deaths. But a first rough calculation of mine had shown that despite the enormous human losses, the numbers of which were roughly known to me from my history lessons, their total number did not reach by far a quarter of the world's population.

Nevertheless, I took this as a starting point for further research, especially since other causes of death are also mentioned in the deliberate verse 8, such as epidemics, famines, and hate crimes. The further question, however, was which period of time I should consider and to which number of the earth's population I should refer the figures of those killed, if any, added up.

First, I considered whether this quarter of humanity would perish within a very short period of time - say: within a week or a month. This would undoubtedly be very dramatic and completely unmissable.¹¹ However, such a rapid mass death would have extreme consequences for the survivors. The orderly disposal of so many corpses would hardly be feasible and the abrupt disappearance of such a high proportion of productive people would lead to such a profound global financial and economic crisis that the survival of humanity as a whole would appear questionable.¹² However, this was not the content of that announcement to the prophet John, and therefore I assume that these striking events

⁹ The Elberfelder Bible translation explains that this probably refers to diseases or epidemics.

¹⁰ According to David Stern's commentary on the Jewish New Testament, the wild animals represent hatred or hate crimes. I interpret this to mean, for example, the Nazi mass murder of the Jews (Holocaust) and the "purges" and other atrocities committed by the Soviet communists against their own people.

¹¹ And even if this idea seems rather unlikely - with God it would not be impossible.

¹² Let us keep in mind that the last severe financial crisis in 2008 was triggered by the fact that locally - namely in the USA - a number of unclearly collateralised loans became conspicuous. Nevertheless, this brought the world financial system to the brink of a "meltdown". If we now imagine that from one day to the next about a quarter of all loans would no longer be serviced, then it seems inconceivable that the financial system would survive such. The consequence would undoubtedly be global anarchy of the highest order.

would probably rather be spread over a longer period of time. After some thought and prayer, I came to the conclusion that I should look at the approximate life span of a human being - say 80 years.

This led me to the following hypothesis: In the period between 1880 and 1960, during the approximate duration of a human life, so many people died through war, civil war, hate crimes, epidemics, and famines that in total it amounted to about a quarter of the world's average population at that time.

1880 to 1960: A quarter of humanity worldwide was wiped out

Before I present my further arguments, I would like to briefly explore the following question: Was the epoch of the two World Wars, objectively speaking, really so special, so extraordinary, that it might at least hypothetically be regarded as the fulfilment of the prophetic words from Rev. 6,8? Purely subjectively, in my personal perception, this is how it appeared; but that be does not say anything about whether it is really so. Against the historical uniqueness of the world war era, one could argue that there had already been previous historical phases in which very many people died within a relatively short time span. I would like to mention only two well-known examples here. During the plague epidemic - also called the Black Death - between 1346 and 1353, about 25 million people are said to have died in Europe; this would correspond to about one third of the European population at that time. Another example is the so-called Thirty Year War from 1618 to 1648, which also led to the death of about one third of all people in the area of today's Germany.

However, these two events do not correspond to the complex picture of Rev 6,8 for various reasons. The plague epidemic in the 14th century was indeed an international event, which claimed a considerable number of victims on several continents, but it was "only" a disease event and did not take place globally. The war events of 1618 to 1648, on the other hand, were accompanied by famine and epidemics, but they were clearly regionally limited; the focus of their impact was on the German-speaking areas of Central Europe. Events such as these two catastrophes - and unfortunately there were many more of them - could therefore be seen as a fulfilment of verses 3 to 6, but not of verses 7 or 8.

The period from 1880 onwards, on the other hand, was special for various reasons. Inventions such as the steam engine, the internal combustion engine, electricity, and telecommunications greatly advanced globalisation. Technical advances and industrialisation led to the great powers not only fighting each other on their actual traditional territories, but also entering into global competition. The consequence of this was the two wars from 1914 to 1918 and from 1939 to 1945, both of which were extremely rich in casualties. Because a great many peoples and states around the world were actually involved, historians refer to them as World Wars; in fact, the first two of their kind. In these two terrible events, a new quality of the well-known phenomenon of "war" became objectively apparent. The epidemic called "Spanish flu" in the years 1918 to 1920 also led to numerous deaths on all inhabited continents, totalling several million; some estimates put the total at around 100 million. In the epoch I have just outlined, we do indeed find the mark of various global catastrophes with an extremely large number of deaths.

Moreover, the period between 1880 and 1960 also saw extraordinary hate crimes on a very large scale. Many people really acted like "wild animals" against one another: they erupted into senseless, gratuitous, and mass murder out of the very lowest instincts. On the one hand, the mass murder of the Jews initiated by the Nazis should be mentioned here; on the other hand, however, the genocide-

like crimes committed by communist rulers such as Stalin or Mao against their own population. It is a fact that European historiography has paid relatively little attention to the hate crimes committed by communist dictators, at least in terms of the number of people killed. On the one hand, this has objective reasons, because the mega-killers in the East naturally did everything to cover up their own crimes. Moreover, Stalin, for example, was even an ally of the West for several years, namely in the fight against Hitler, and therefore for many years it was not necessarily opportune, even in the West, to look too closely at Stalinist crimes. For this reason, research has been directed towards estimates. However, such investigations quickly lead to death figures that are shockingly high. In some cases, mass murder was also mixed with other catastrophes; for example, in Maoist China, where the misguided policy of the "Great Leap" in the 1950s led to a severe famine with millions of deaths.

I think that my brief description above makes one thing clear: the era around the two world wars, together with a certain period before and after, was unique in world history, and it would be difficult to find a comparable era. Even the collapse of the Roman Empire, although of course also of great consequence, was a rather regional event.

In the following table I have compiled the number of people killed as a result of significant historical events from the period 1880 to 1960.¹³

Event	Number of people killed
Colonial war in the Belgian Congo ("Congo atrocities", 1888 - 1908)	at least 10 million
World War I (1914 - 1918)	17 million (military and civilian victims)
World War II (1939 - 1945)	70 million (military and civilian victims and murdered Jews)
Korean War (1950 - 1953)	4.5 million (military and civilian victims)
Chinese Communism under Mao	70 million (including famine, excluding war deaths)
Soviet Russian Communism under Lenin and Stalin (1917 - 1953)	62 million (without war dead)
Spanish flu (1918-1920)	approx. 50 million (some estimates go up to 100 million)
Various famines worldwide (1880 to 1960)	At least 47 million (not counting the starvation deaths in China under Mao)
5th and 6th cholera epidemics (1881 - 1896 and 1899 - 1923) and remaining years	more than 15 million
Tuberculosis (1880 to 1960)	approx. 26 million in Northern and Western Europe alone
Other epidemics and pandemics (1880 to 1960)	at least 20 million (without tuberculosis, without Spanish flu)

¹³ For reasons of clarity, I list the sources separately at the end of this paper.

These above-mentioned events alone, with their relatively well-documented numbers of deceased, led to at least 391.5 million deaths in the period of about 80 years, i.e. during one human age. It should be borne in mind that the total number of people who died in this way is likely to be considerably higher, for the following reasons.

- (1) The statistics for certain countries and regions of the world are very likely to be incomplete, especially with regard to Africa, China, India and other Asian regions. As an example, let us mention the cholera epidemics: A relevant publication of the World Health Organisation (WHO) mentions exact figures for the deaths from cholera in India only for the years 1900 to 1954; this adds up to more than 14.3 million deaths - without taking into account the years 1880-1899 and 1955 to 1960, and without the rest of the world. The figure of 15 million deaths given above is therefore very much to be back held; in fact, it may have been considerably more.
- (2) In the above table, the number of people killed as a result of colonialism is only given for the case of the well-documented crimes in the Belgian Congo, namely 10 million. Another source, which, however, offers very extensive material that I was not able to evaluate within the framework of this paper, gives a summary figure of 50 million dead as a result of world-wide colonialism. I assume that the colonial endeavours in the period under consideration here very probably resulted in significantly more victims than those included in the above table.
- (3) The tuberculosis deaths in the above table are based only on the population of the countries in Northern and Western Europe, because only for these countries are reliable sources available; however, we know that this disease also occurs in other countries.¹⁴ For this reason, the total number of people who died of tuberculosis worldwide was almost certainly considerably higher; in my opinion, it could well have been twice to three times the figure given above.
- (4) Malaria deaths and deaths due to tropical infectious diseases, such as dengue fever, yellow fever, sleeping sickness, etc., are not included because no reliable statistics are available for them.
- (5) Furthermore, in addition to the devastating world wars, dozens of local wars took place in the era under consideration, the total death toll of which is estimated to be another millions.
- (6) I have also not taken into account natural disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions and floods. These events are not explicitly mentioned in Rev. 6,1-8, but in Jesus' end-time discourse according to Matthew, chapter 24, they are mentioned as typical omens of the coming end-time. The number of victims of such events worldwide in the eighty-year period under consideration can easily add up to several million.

Now the above data on deaths must be put in relation to the population of the earth at that time. In 1880, the world population was approx. 1,400 million; in 1955, approx. 2,600 million.¹⁵ The mean value calculated from these two key data is 2,000 million. For my hypothesis mentioned above, this would

¹⁴ Today, tuberculosis is practically only rampant outside the developed world. There, it still causes more than 1 million deaths a year, although knowledge about its prevention and treatment has progressed considerably.

¹⁵ <https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/izpb/55882/entwicklung-der-weltbevoelkerung/> (retrieved 03.05.2022)

mean that in the intervening period, a quarter of them, i.e. about 500 million people, lost their lives as a result of wars, civil wars, hate crimes, hunger, and epidemics.

Taking into account the above figures on deaths from significant historical events - at least 391 million - and considering the reasons given why the actual number of deaths was considerably higher, the following conclusion can be drawn.

It seems plausible to me that in the period between 1880 and 1960, about a quarter of the world's population at that time actually died as a result of a historically unique sequence of wars and civil wars, hate crimes such as genocides and the Holocaust, famine, epidemics and natural disasters.

Now we could consider this circumstance closed with an appropriately honourable commemoration of the many dead and sit back and relax. However, after a further look at the Revelation, we should be rather worried. For if it is indeed the case that the events described in Revelation 6, verses 7 and 8, have already been concluded for some time, then **it follows with compelling logic: the further end-time events are much closer before us than many people realise!**

Therefore, in the following I would like to go into more detail about the coming events of the end times.

The First End Times: The Fall of Jerusalem in the Year 70

Jesus himself spoke to his disciples about the end times. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke contain corresponding records. These accounts are similar to each other, but also have a few differences. I find Luke's account the most trustworthy because, according to his own words, Luke thoroughly researched for the writing of his account. Therefore, in the following I refer mainly to the text that we find in the 21st chapter of Luke's Gospel; and I use the Elberfelder Bible, which is widely recognised for its faithful translation.

In those descriptions of the end times, it should first be noted that Jesus was speaking to Jewish contemporaries, and that the impressive splendour and greatness of the Jerusalem Temple gave rise to this. The words of the Lord Jesus therefore ostensibly referred to the future of the temple and the city of Jerusalem: Jesus announced the downfall of both, but He did not stop there. For in that occasion, the Lord referred to *two different* end times by teaching: First, the Jewish people will be judged, with Jerusalem and its temple destroyed. This was the obvious message to his Jewish followers, and it described the end times for Jerusalem. For afterwards, Jesus announced a phase that belongs to the rest of the nations - by this is meant the present time, in which the Jews are still scattered in many ways and the Gospel is accepted mainly by the non-Jews - and only at the end of this present era comes the end of the world.¹⁶

Jesus' urgent admonitions to be vigilant against the signs of the times certainly apply to both events! The accuracy of the Lord's predictions concerning the destruction of Jerusalem is shown by historical testimonies.

¹⁶ Luk. 21:23b.24: "For great distress shall be upon the land, and wrath against this people. And they (i.e., the Jews) shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive among all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the nations, until the times of the nations be fulfilled. "Only then does Jesus describe His return and the coming end of the world from verse 25 onwards.

Jesus had urged people to stay away from Jerusalem in that time of distress or to flee from it at all costs. How advisable this was, becomes clear from the descriptions of a contemporary historian. The writer Flavius Josephus, who was of Jewish origin, experienced the so-called Jewish War of the years 66 to 70 C.E. himself and wrote a book about it.¹⁷ He reports that so many Jewish people died in the war against the Romans primarily because they had done the exact opposite - they had streamed into the city from outside, although the warlike events had long been in progress and the Roman troops were already close to Jerusalem.¹⁸

And unfortunately, many followed the advice of false prophets who preached and taught contrary to Jesus. Flavius Josephus writes about this: "In general, there were many such prophets at that time, who were instigated by the tyrants and sent among the people in order to encourage them to steadfastly trust in God's help, and in this way to ensure that the people did not defect too much, and that those who were already beyond all fear and apprehension would at least be kept back in the city by hope. (JK: VI,286)

These false prophets preached the exact opposite of what Jesus had recommended for salvation: Jesus had strongly advised to flee, but the false counsellors called on the people to stay. In retrospect, it becomes clear that Jesus was right. For even at the time when the Romans had already committed the "abomination of desolation" by carrying their idols into the fallen Jewish sanctuary and offering sacrifices to them,¹⁹ it was possible to flee Jerusalem and thereby remain alive. This is evident from the records of the historian. Josephus writes that even after the conquest of the Temple, a "flood of people" defected from the enclosed Jerusalem and were let free by the Roman troops; at least as far as they were citizens of Jerusalem. According to Flavius Josephus, about 40,000 people saved themselves in this way - and to a certain extent at the last minute. Of those who remained in the enclosed city, however, hardly any survived the horrific slaughter that followed its storming. Josephus describes how the Roman soldiers were obsessed with cutting down the survivors and even dug up the earth to find those hiding in the catacombs below Jerusalem.

The terrible horror of Jerusalem's "last days" is summed up in the one sentence of the contemporary chronicler and eyewitness: The city of Jerusalem had "during the duration of its siege (...) endured so many sufferings (...) that the same measure of happiness, distributed over the whole time of its existence, would certainly (...) have made it enviable in the eyes of men." (JK: VI,408) Now if the end of Jerusalem was already so miserable, who can think that the end of the whole world would be less terrible?

The contemplation of the end of Jerusalem in the year 70 should urgently sensitise us to listen carefully to the words and instructions of Jesus. For just as He showed a way of salvation in the judgment of the Jewish people, He also wants to show a way of salvation from the horrors of the final end times for the whole world.

¹⁷ Flavius Josephus: Jewish War (JK). The German translation is available as a free resource here on the internet: https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Juedischer_Krieg

¹⁸ Cf. Flavius Josephus: Jewish War. VI,420.421

¹⁹ Cf. Flavius Josephus: Jewish War. VI,316. This abomination was foretold in various places in the OT and NT; especially Mt.24:15 as well as Dan.9:27 and 11:31.

The end times will be terrible - but salvation is possible

As already mentioned above, the New Testament contains, in addition to the end-time discourse of the Lord Jesus, another prophetic preview which is much more detailed and extensive, namely the Revelation of John. After I have shown by means of a historical analysis that some essential events of that prediction have already come to pass and have been fulfilled - namely this concerns the first four opened seals according to the 6th chapter of the Revelation - I would like to strongly advise you to deal with the following events.

Revelation 6:9-11 describes a dialogue that we people on earth probably cannot perceive at all. When the fifth seal is opened, the souls of those previously killed for the sake of Jesus ask when the final judgement will finally come. They are told that there will be another phase of hatred and murder of Christians, but they are also told that it will only be a short time until the final judgement. This further phase of hatred and murder is a reference to the coming time of great tribulation; it is only hinted at in this passage; it is described in more detail in the seventh chapter in verses 9 to 14.

In the text of the sixth chapter, events are described that immediately precede the return of the Lord Jesus: A great earthquake is announced; the sun will become black and the moon red like blood; the stars will fall to the earth and the sky dwindles (Rev. 6:12-14). Thus, there will be very striking changes in the heavenly bodies.

And a little later (Rev. 6:15-17) all people - great and powerful as well as citizens and slaves - get into great fear and wish to hide under mountains and rocks. For suddenly they realise that the day has come when Jesus' divine final judgement begins.

Revelation 7:1-8 then describes an event which is the key to salvation from the turmoil of the end times. Therefore, I would like to repeat: From these verses onwards the final judgement of God is spoken of, and the authority for this has been given to Jesus, the crucified and resurrected Son of God! Now it is important to understand that in the first verses of chapter 7 a separation of people is described; and indeed a separation for their salvation. For it says: "*Before* any harm is done to the earth, nor to the sea, nor to the trees", these counted-out people are to be sealed; and this in the sense that these specially marked men are taken out of the judgment action *before* it begins. It is worth noting that in the verses 1 to 8 people from the twelve tribes of Israel are explicitly mentioned, and we must ask ourselves whether this is to be interpreted literally or figuratively.

Let us note two things. First, the apostle Paul tirelessly taught that there is *no* longer a difference between Jews and Gentiles in the church of Jesus. One could almost say that this was one of his core themes; he unfolds it in Romans 3:22-24 and 10:12, 13; Ephesians 2:11-18; Galatians 2:11-16 etc. In the eleventh chapter of Romans, Paul explains that Christ-believers from the other nations have been grafted into the noble olive tree of the divine Israel. In other words, through their trust in the Lord Jesus, they now organically belong to the Israel of God.

I would like to add to this a statement by Paul, which is not lacking in clarity, and which literally reads: "For not he is a Jew who is outwardly so, nor is the outward (circumcision) in the flesh circumcision; but he is a Jew who is inwardly so, and circumcision (is of) the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter. Its praise comes not from men but from God." (Rom. 2:28.29) Accordingly, being Jewish in the divine sense is not based on being a bodily descendant of Jacob or being ritually circumcised. Rather, it

depends on the inner condition of a person; on his or her willingness to trustfully submit to the Lord Jesus and to seek and do His will.

Now the verses Revelation 7:1-8 are precisely about a divine action: God sends his angels to spare people from his judgments. Who will be spared? Surely the ones whom God praises because he has acted in a pleasing way. Therefore, I would like to state with certainty that the mention of those saved from the twelve tribes of Israel is to be understood in a *spiritual* sense. This means that this manageable number of 144,000 people will include people who come from any peoples and nations in the world on the basis of their bodily origins. These will be persons who were so closely connected to Jesus in their earthly lives that they are truly recognised as His own, as the Israel of God. As a reward for their efforts and for their trust, they will enjoy the privilege of escaping all the terrible horrors that will be poured out on the earth and its inhabitants.

That this is the case is also confirmed by the 14th chapter of Revelation. According to the verses 1 to 5 there, John saw these 144,000 chosen ones again, this time singing before the throne of God. Only to them is it given to perform a very special song of praise, for they are described as blameless and undefiled; and they follow Jesus, the Lamb, wherever it goes. We should note that John receives this vision just before an angel proclaims to all the rest of the people on earth, "Fear God and give glory to him, for the hour of his judgement has come!" But the 144,000 are taken out of judgement, for they have apparently already been caught up to heaven.²⁰

We should note that the number of sealed and saved people is given very precisely. This is especially noteworthy in comparison with the following verses 9 to 17 of chapter 7, where we also read of people standing before the throne of the Lamb, i.e. before the throne of the Lord Jesus, and praising and worshipping Him there. This certainly means that they are also saved. It is said about them that they are such a great multitude that no one can count them. Now this is a striking contrast: first a precisely determined number, and then a huge, uncountable multitude. The statement can only be that in the first salvation, which takes place before the final judgement, a relatively small, manageable number of people will be set apart. The many times larger number will only be saved later - after the terrible judgement on earth has already begun. The choice of words in Revelation makes it unmistakably clear that this second great multitude will find their way to the Lord Jesus out of the Great Tribulation (Rev. 7:14).

On the one hand, it is comforting that even out of that phase of great horrors, many will still find faith and liberating confession. But on the other hand, we should realise that this will be a salvation from great, indeed from inconceivably hard tribulation! The people who belong to the second group will encounter many sufferings such as hunger, thirst, and scorching heat (climate change!), and the tears caused by these will only be wiped away in heaven. Please see also footnote 2 on page 2!

On the other hand, the people who are recognised by Jesus as His own, set apart and saved before the beginning of this terrible time are much better off; they are spared having to suffer through that terrible time on earth. What the apostle Paul wrote in his first letter to the Christians in Thessalonica

²⁰ Rev. 9,4 mentions sealed ones who are on earth *during the* divine judgement. We are not told why they are there. It is conceivable that they have returned for evangelism - after all, the name of the Lord Jesus obviously still has to be proclaimed on earth during the tribulation period. At the same time Rev. 9,4 makes it quite clear that these sealed ones will also be preserved from divine wrath punishments on earth! Their status as beloved of God protects and saves them; no matter where they are.

applies to them: "We, the living who are left, will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord". (1Thess. 4:17)

In Jesus' end-time discourse according to the Gospel of Luke, the reader is explicitly advised: "**Watch therefore and pray at all times that you may be able to escape from all this that is about to happen and stand before the Son of Man!**" (Luk. 21:36) Actually, this advice should not be necessary. For if we really hear the seriousness with which Jesus warned his listeners of these end-time horrors, then we could actually come up with the idea ourselves to ask God again in time to spare us from this ultimate catastrophe. In my opinion, we need constant prayer to the Lord Jesus above all in order to recognise better and better what God's will is for our lives and so that we do not let ourselves be discouraged from doing this will. For even if our spirit is willing - in our natural nature we remain weak and lack firmness. No man will be saved by his own will or strength; only God alone is able to do this, and this by grace. (Luk. 18:25.26)

The fact that salvation is possible is also confirmed in various other passages in the Bible. In his first letter to the Thessalonians, the apostle Paul states: "Jesus saves us from the wrath that is to come." (1Thess. 1:10) We also read something comparable in the prophet Joel in the Old Testament. In direct connection with the divine final judgement ("before the day of the Lord comes, the great and terrible", so at the end of Joel 3:4) it says there: "And it shall come to pass: Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (Joel 3:5a)

Summary

There are strong signs and evidence that the eschatological events have already progressed significantly. In particular, the first four seals according to chapter 6 of Revelation have already been opened. The associated events wiped out the lives of a quarter of the average world population at that time between 1880 and 1960. The Second Coming of the Lord Jesus has therefore undoubtedly come very close - even if the exact day and hour are not known to anyone.

With the visible return of the Lord Jesus, which will take place in great power and unmistakably, His final judgement on all people who then live on earth will begin. A time will then begin which is called the time of the great tribulation.

The NT clearly states that a person living at that time does not necessarily have to live through or suffer the worst phase of earthly horrors. **This is avoidable!** Jesus will save those who have faithfully and sincerely adhered to Him before the beginning of this horrible time of horror from this act of punishment, trial, and judgement. The key to this salvation is prayer!

Furthermore, the visible return of the Lord Jesus does not mean the final end of the world. Rather, it is the prelude to the actual final judgement, of which the Great Tribulation Period is a part. Even during that period, salvation to eternal life will still be possible if a person acknowledges Jesus as Lord and Son of God - but only at the price of terrible suffering.

(Matthias Czerny, March 2023)

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