

Four Reasons Revelation is not Strictly Chronological

Chris Villi

BBC Berean Study

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Objectives of the Presentation

- Primary Objective:

- Provide clear and compelling evidence that Revelation is not meant to be taken in a strictly chronological fashion (i.e. four reasons)

- Secondary Objectives:

1. Propose a high-level, mid-level, and low-level chronology of Revelation
2. Disprove the assertion that the natural approach to any book is treating it as sequential
3. Disprove the assertion that any digressions and flash backs must be warranted and justified by the text

**#1. Not all Narratives are
Strictly Chronological**

Matthew is not Strictly Chronological

MacArthur's harmony of the gospels (MacArthur Study Bible)

There are no textual markers to inform the reader that a leap in chronology has occurred (e.g. see 9:18, 12:1)

| | | | |
|--|-------------------|---------|----------|
| THROUGHOUT GALILEE | | | |
| First call of the four | 4:18-22 | 1:16-20 | |
| Teaching in the synagogue of Capernaum authenticated by healing a demoniac | | 1:21-28 | 4:31b-37 |
| Peter's mother-in-law and others healed | 8:14-17 | 1:29-34 | 4:38-41 |
| Tour of Galilee with Simon and others | 4:23-24 | 1:35-39 | 4:42-44 |
| Second call of the four | | | 5:1-11 |
| Cleansing of a leper followed by much publicity | 8:2-4 | 1:40-45 | 5:12-16 |
| Forgiving and healing of a paralytic | 9:1-8 | 2:1-12 | 5:17-26 |
| Call of Matthew | 9:9 | 2:13-14 | 5:27-28 |
| Banquet at Matthew's house | 9:10-13 | 2:15-17 | 5:29-32 |
| Changed conditions with the Messiah present explained by three illustrations | 9:14-17 | 2:18-22 | 5:33-39 |
| SABBATH CONTROVERSIES AND WITHDRAWAL | | | |
| A lame man healed in Jerusalem on the Sabbath | | | 5:1-9 |
| Effort to kill Jesus for breaking the Sabbath and saying He was equal with God | | | 5:10-18 |
| Discourse demonstrating the Son's equality with the Father | | | 5:19-47 |
| Controversy over disciples' picking grain on the Sabbath | 12:1-8 | 2:23-28 | 6:1-5 |
| Healing of a man's withered hand on the Sabbath | 12:9-14 | 3:1-6 | 6:6-11 |
| Withdrawal to the Sea of Galilee with a great multitude from many places | 12:15-21; 4:25 | 3:7-12 | |
| APPOINTMENT OF THE TWELVE AND SERMON ON THE MOUNT | | | |
| Twelve apostles named | | 3:13-19 | 6:12-16 |
| Setting of the Sermon | 5:1-2 | | 6:17-19 |

Mark is not Strictly Chronological

MacArthur's
harmony of the
gospels (MacArthur
Study Bible)

There are no textual
markers to inform
the reader that a leap
in chronology has
occurred (e.g. see
14:10)

TRIUMPHAL ENTRY AND THE FIG TREE

| | | | | |
|--|----------------|---------------|----------|------------|
| Arrival at Bethany | | | | 11:55-12:1 |
| Mary's anointing of Jesus for burial | 26:6-13 | 14:3-9 | | 12:2-11 |
| Triumphal entry into Jerusalem | 21:1-11, 14-17 | 11:1-11 | 19:29-44 | 12:12-19 |
| Cursing of the fig tree having leaves but no figs | | | | |
| Second cleansing of the temple | 21:18-19a | 11:12-14 | | |
| Request of some Greeks and necessity of the Son of Man's being lifted up | 21:12-13 | 11:15-18 | 19:45-48 | |
| Departure from the unbelieving multitude and Jesus' response | | | | 12:20-36a |
| Withered fig tree and the lesson on faith | 21:19b-22 | 11:19-25,[26] | | 12:36b-50 |

OFFICIAL CHALLENGE OF CHRIST'S AUTHORITY

| | | | |
|---|-------------|----------|----------|
| A question by the chief priests, scribes, and elders | 21:23-27 | 11:27-33 | 20:1-8 |
| Faithful discharge of responsibility taught by 3 parables | 21:28-22:14 | 12:1-12 | 20:9-19 |
| A question by the Pharisees and Herodians | 22:15-22 | 12:13-17 | 20:20-26 |
| A question by the Sadducees | 22:23-33 | 12:18-27 | 20:27-40 |
| A question by a Pharisee scribe | 22:34-40 | 12:28-34 | |

CHRIST'S RESPONSE TO HIS ENEMIES' CHALLENGES

| | | | |
|--|----------|----------|----------|
| Christ's relationship to David as Son and Lord | 22:41-46 | 12:35-37 | 20:41-44 |
| Seven woes against the scribes and Pharisees | 23:1-36 | 12:38-40 | 20:45-47 |
| Lament over Jerusalem | 23:37-39 | | |
| A poor widow's gift of all she had | | 12:41-44 | 21:1-4 |

Genesis is not Strictly Chronological

- Genesis 1 presents a creation account and Genesis 2 backtracks to present the same account in more detail.
- Genesis 7:11ff is a re-statement of Noah, his family, and the animals entering the ark in 7:1-10.
- Genesis 11:1ff is a backtrack from 10:1ff, since 11:1 says that the whole world had one language whereas 10:5, 20, 30 say that there were many languages.
- Again, there are no clear textual markers.

Numbers is not Strictly Chronological

- *Then the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt (1:1)*
- *Now on the day that Moses had finished setting up the tabernacle, he anointed it and consecrated it with all its furnishings and the altar and all its utensils; he anointed them and consecrated them also. (7:1)*
- *Now in the first month of the second year, on the first day of the month, the tabernacle was erected. (Exodus 40:17)*
- No clear textual markers here.

The Chronicles are not Strictly Chronological

MacArthur's
harmony of Samuel,
Kings, and
Chronicles
(MacArthur
Study Bible)

No clear textual
markers

- e. David's numbering of the people (2 Sam. 24:1-24:25; 1 Chr. 21:1-50)
- D. David's Preparation and Organization for the Temple (1 Chr. 22:1-27:34)
- E. David's Last Days (1 Kin. 1:1-2:11; 1 Chr. 28:1-29:30)
 - 1. David's Failing Health: Abishag the Shunammite (1 Kin. 1:1-4)
 - 2. Adonijah's Attempt to Seize the Kingdom (1 Kin. 1:5-9)
 - 3. Solomon's Anointing as King (1 Kin. 1:10-40; 1 Chr. 29:20-25)
 - 4. Adonijah's Submission (1 Kin. 1:41-53)
 - 5. David's Last Words (1 Kin. 2:1-9; 1 Chr. 28:1-29:25)
 - a. David's words for Israel (1 Chr. 28:1-8)
 - b. David's words for Solomon (1 Kin. 2:1-9; 1 Chr. 28:9-29:19)
 - 6. David's Death (1 Kin. 2:10,11; 1 Chr. 29:26-30)

IV. THE KINGSHIP OF SOLOMON (1 Kin. 2:12-11:43; 1 Chr. 29:20-30; 2 Chr. 1:1-10)

- A. Solomon's Kingship Begins (1 Kin. 2:12-4:34; 1 Chr. 29:20-30; 2 Chr. 1:1-10)
 - 1. Solomon's Kingship Established (1 Kin. 2:12; 1 Chr. 29:20-2 Chr. 1:1)
 - 2. Solomon's Adversaries Removed (1 Kin. 2:13-46)
 - 3. Solomon's Wedding to Pharaoh's Daughter (1 Kin. 3:1)
 - 4. Solomon's Spiritual Condition (1 Kin. 3:2,3)
 - 5. Solomon's Sacrifice at Gibeon (1 Kin. 3:4; 2 Chr. 1:2-6)
 - 6. Solomon's Dream and Prayer for Wisdom (1 Kin. 3:5-15; 2 Chr. 1:7-12)
 - 7. Solomon's Judging of the Harlots with God's Wisdom (1 Kin. 3:16-28)
 - 8. Solomon's Officers, His Power, Wealth, and Wisdom (1 Kin. 4:1-34; 2 Chr. 1:10)

**#2. Prophetic Writings
are Often Topical, not
Chronological**

Isaiah is not Strictly Chronological

- *Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel. (7:14)*
- *...And the government will rest on His shoulders...There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness... (9:6-7)*
- *But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. (53:5)*
- No clear textual markers to denote shift in chronology.

Prophetic Books in General are not Strictly Chronological

- The small horn (Antiochus Epiphanes) described in Daniel chapter 8 is also described in chapter 11, and Daniel 8:3-26 and 11:2-45 both sweep from Israel to the tribulation and the antichrist.
- Other prophetic books are also written topically
 - Jeremiah made nine proclamations of judgment on nine different nations in 46-51.
 - Jeremiah and Ezekiel both oscillate between near and far prophecies.
 - Joel describes the cosmic signs that signal the coming of the Day of the Lord in 2:10, 2:31 and 3:15.
- No clear textual markers in these texts.

Revelation is a Prophetic Book

- *Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near. (1:3)*
- *And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book. (22:7)*
- *And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near... (22:10; cf. vv.18-19)*

**#3. The Bible Itself is not
Meant to be Strictly
Chronological**

A Note about Epistles

- It is important to note that Epistles are not meant to be narratives.
- They are didactic in nature, and therefore logical and topical.
- In general, it doesn't make sense to even think of Epistles in terms of chronology.
- Given this, the majority of the New Testament is not meant to be chronological.

Strict Chronology in the Bible

- So far, we have seen that a small minority of books in the Bible present strict chronology.
- Prophetic books and epistles are mainly topical.
- Poetry and wisdom are not meant to present chronology.
- Even many narratives are not strictly chronological.
- Therefore, the natural approach to most books in the Bible, including Revelation, is to assume general chronology, not strict chronology.

Books of the Bible that are not Strictly Chronological

- Pentateuch – At least three of five (Gen./Lev./Num.)
- OT History – At least six of twelve (Sam./Kings/Ezra/Neh.)
- OT Poetry – All five books
- Major Prophets – All five books
- Minor Prophets – All twelve books
- NT History – At least two of five (Matthew/Mark)
- NT Epistles – All 21 books
- NT Prophecy – Revelation
- Overall, a minimum of 55 of the 66 books are not strictly chronological!

**#4. Specific Reasons in
Revelation to Reject Strict
Chronology**

Textual Markers in Revelation

- Most scholars agree that Revelation is not fully chronological and, most often, there are no textual markers for changes in chronology.
- For example, John is told to “prophecy again” in 10:11, but we are not told where the new prophecy ends.
- The phrase *kai eidon* (“and I saw”) occurs 32 times in Revelation, and is used multiple times in the same vision.

Textual Markers in Revelation

“After these things I looked = introduces a new unit in John’s vision sequence. After these things is clearly a textual marker. However, care should be exercised when stating what is actually indicated by this marker. The exact same phrase is used in Revelation 7:9; 15:5 and 18:1. Whatever else the marker indicates, it does not indicate a temporal shift. This does not mean that a significant amount of time has transpired between the units of material. Rather, the marker indicates that John received the vision in units of material. Revelation 1:1-3:22 is the first unit. Revelation 4:1-7:8 is the second unit. Revelation 7:9-15:4 is the third unit. Revelation 15:5-17:18 is the fourth unit. The last unit of material John saw is contained in Revelation 18:1-22.”

Van Kampen et. al, Revelation Commentary, note on 4:1

Textual Markers in Revelation

- The “chronological markers” (i.e. “after these things”) are related to the order in which John saw the visions, not necessarily the sequence in which they will transpire.
- Some claim that the phrase meta tauta (“after these things”) introduces a new vision sequence. However, this phrase is found in between the sixth and seventh seal and between the introduction of the bowls and the bowls themselves, so it does not always introduce a new vision sequence.

Revelation as Topical, not Sequential

- Revelation 1:19 does not claim to be an outline of the book, but a list of the content of the book.
- Revelation 7:1ff is a backtrack of 6:12-17.
- In 12:1-4, the woman (Israel) is introduced before the dragon sweeps a third of the stars to the earth.
- Topical language with backtrack in 15:1, 6-7. The angels in 15:1, 6 are seen as having the bowls, but the four living creatures give them the bowls in v.7.
- Even the classical dispensationalist allows for some mingling of past and future, disjunctive intercalations.

Revelation as Topical, not Sequential

- The theme of the book is the coming of Christ (1:4, 1:7, 1:8, 4:8, 16:15, 22:7, 22:12, 22:20).
- Revelation is essentially made up of a series of visions (1:2, 11, 19).
- The progression moves forward, then backs up to recast the prophecy in different terms, then moves forward again (Song of Solomon does this also).
- Revelation contains multiple accounts/visions of the same events from different angles with different details (much like the four gospels).
- Context and the analogy of Scripture are the best way to determine authorial style and intention and thus chronology.

Major Visions of Revelation

1. Seven seals (6:1-17, 8:1)
2. Sealing of 144K and raptured saints (7:1-17)
3. Seven trumpets (8:2-9:21, 11:15-19)
4. Two witnesses (10:1-11:14)
5. Satan, tribulation, 666, 144K, three angels, rapture, Day of the Lord (12-14)
6. Seven bowls (15:1-16:21)
7. Punishment of Babylon (17-18)
8. Marriage supper of the Lamb (19:1-10)
9. Armageddon (19:11-21)
10. Millennium (20:1-6)
11. Final judgment (20:7-15)
12. New heavens and new earth (21-22)

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Often understood to be interludes by those who believe the seals, trumpets, and bowls are sequential

Should we assume that the other (white) sections are chronological with respect to each other?

Events of the Sixth Seal

- The sixth seal depicts the coming of the Day of the Lord (6:17 – “the great day of their wrath has come”)
 - In conjunction with His *parousia* (Matthew 24:29-30)
- It is the fulfillment of Ezekiel 38:18-23
 - Great earthquake (Revelation 6:12; Ezekiel 38:19)
 - Mountains thrown down (Revelation 6:14; Ezekiel 38:20)
- History, as we know it, cannot continue after the cosmic signs.
 - These cosmic signs happen in conjunction with the treading of the winepress on the Day of the Lord per Joel 3:13-15 (cf. Revelation 14:17-20, 19:15)

Events of the Seventh Trumpet

- The mystery of God is finished in the seventh trumpet (10:7).
- Resurrection of two witnesses (11:11-12) and their ascension in a cloud in conjunction with the sounding of a trumpet (11:15; 1 Cor. 15:52)
- Great earthquake, lightning, thunder, and hailstorm (11:13, 19; cf. Ezekiel 38:19-22)
- The announcement of the Day of the Lord - final battle, judgment/rewards, and establishment of the kingdom and reign of Christ (vv.15, 17, 18)

Events of the Seventh Bowl

- It is the fulfillment of Ezekiel 38:18-23
 - Great earthquake (Revelation 16:18; Ezekiel 38:19)
 - Mountains thrown down (Revelation 16:20; Ezekiel 38:20)
 - Lightning, thunder, and hailstorm (16:18, 21; cf. Ezekiel 38:19-22)
- The sixth bowl occurs before the Day of the Lord
 - Men are gathered together at Armageddon (16:16) in preparation for the coming “great day of God” (16:14)
 - Christ “coming like a thief” (16:15; cf. 2 Peter 3:10, 1 Thessalonians 5:2)
 - The announcement of the Day and earthquake (vv.17-21)

Seal, Trumpets, and Bowls

- The scroll itself represents the kingdom (5:5, 9, 10, 12, 13), so the seals represent what must happen before the kingdom begins.
- The trumpets represent the events that announce the kingdom.
- The bowls represent the judgments that will be dealt out immediately prior to the coming of the kingdom.

Two Final Reasons

- Other Old Testament eschatological prophecies clearly link together the sixth seal, seventh trumpet, and seventh bowl (Joel 3:1-16; Isaiah 63:2-6; Revelation 14:14-20) with the second coming of Christ (Revelation 19:11-21).
- The apostle John's use of "wrath"
 - See presentation called "Preserved through the Bowls, Rescued from the Wrath"

Conclusion

- The overall outline of Revelation is generally chronological with the coming of Christ (*parousia*) as the focal point
 - Events leading up to the *parousia* (i.e. seals, trumpets, and bowls)
 - The *parousia* of Christ / Day of the Lord (19:11ff)
 - Events flowing out of the *parousia* (i.e. the millennial kingdom, final judgment, and eternal state)

High-Level Chronology



Seals 1-5



Trumpets 1-6



Bowls 1-6



Armageddon



Millennial Kingdom
Lake of Fire
New Heavens/Earth

Rapture

Events leading
up to *parousia*

Parousia

Events flowing
out of *parousia*



6th seal



7th trumpet

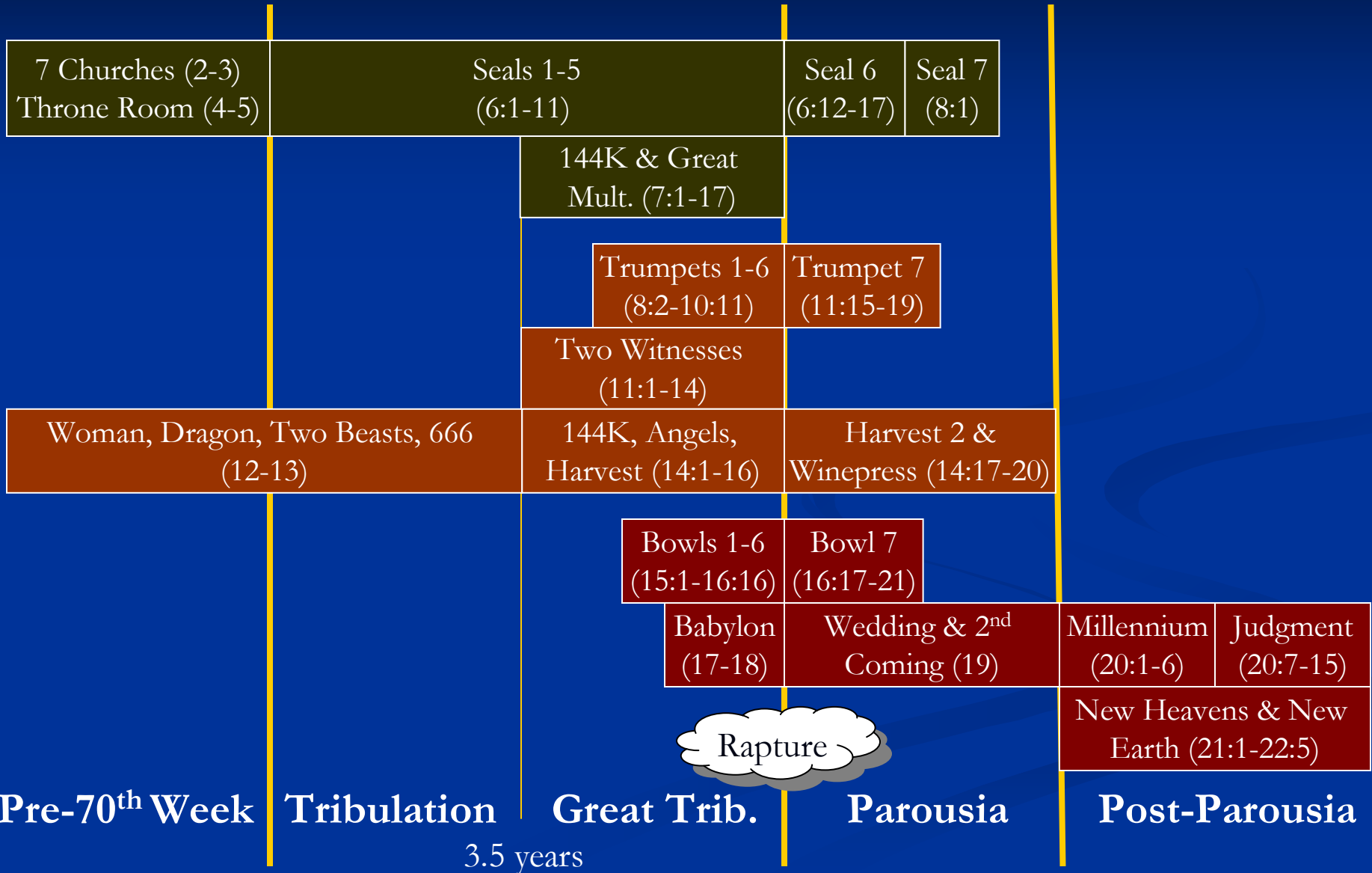


7th bowl

One More Point to Ponder

- Could it be that the Day of the Lord will be a literal 24-hour day per Zechariah 14:6-7? If so, the post-trib position is the only plausible pre-millennial position.
- In that day there will be no light; the luminaries will dwindle. For it will be a unique day which is known to the LORD, neither day nor night, but it will come about that at evening time there will be light (NAU).
- On that day there will be no light; the sunlight and moonlight will diminish. It will be a day known only to Yahweh, without day or night, but there will be light at evening (CSB).
- And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark: But it shall be one day which shall be known to the LORD, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light (KJV).

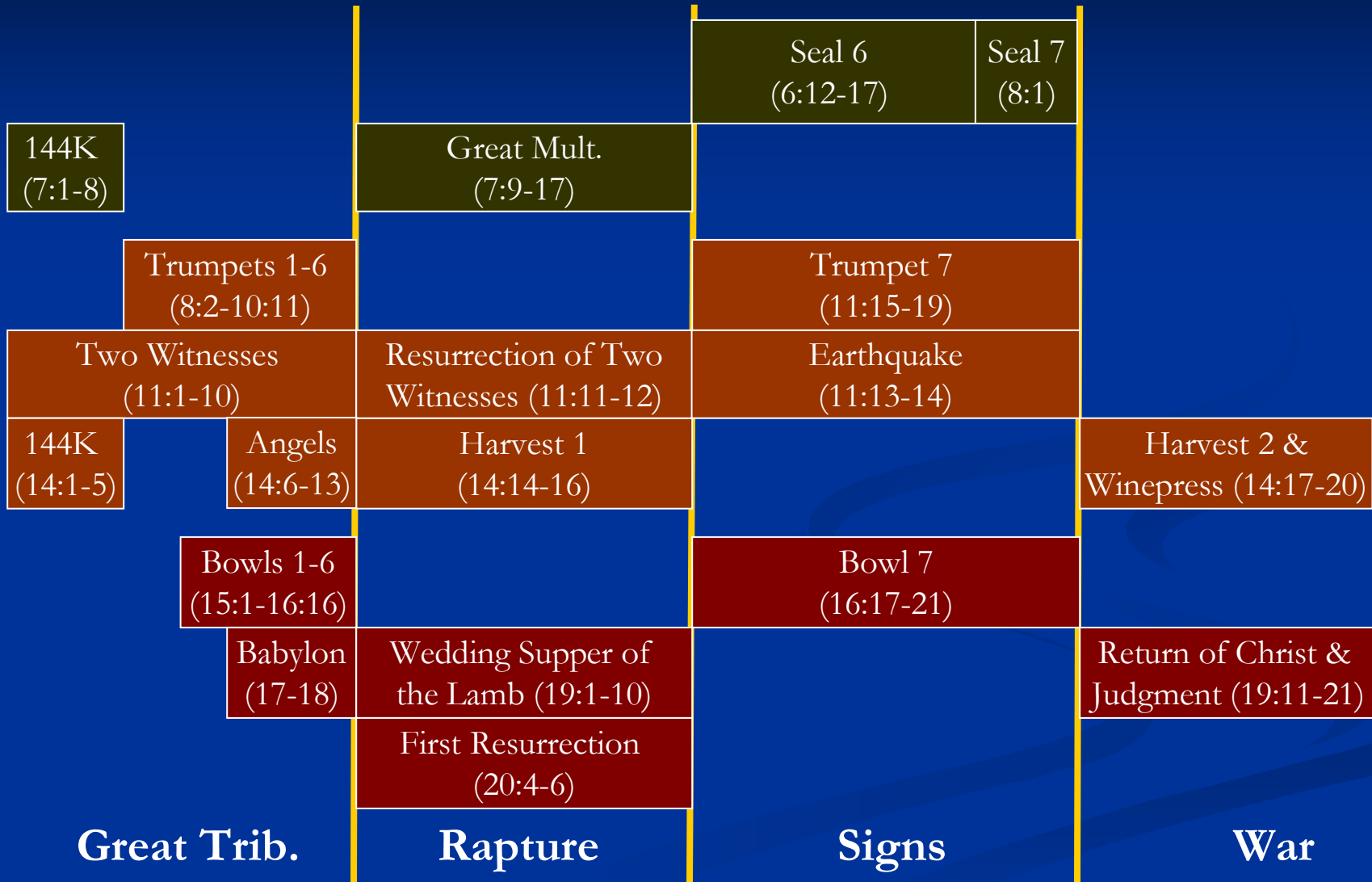
Mid-Level Chronology



Explicit References to the Rapture

1. The great multitude (7:9-17)
2. The two witnesses (11:11-13)
3. Immediately prior to Christ's return (14:14-16)
 - Note the reaping of the unbelievers on the Day of the Lord that immediately follows (14:17-20; cf. 19:15)
4. The wedding supper of the Lamb (19:1-10)
5. Shortly before the establishment of the millennial kingdom (20:4)

Low-Level Chronology



----- Day of the Lord -----

Questions?