



REVELATION

FOLLOWING THE WAY OF THE LAMB

Session 09
*The Seven Seals (Really Six
and an Interlude)*
Revelation 6:1-8:1

Dwelling in the Word

1. Prayerfully read through Revelation 6:1-8:1 and reflect on the following questions: 1) What words, phrases, or images stood out to you? Why? 2) What does this passage communicate to you about God? 3) How would you like to respond to what God may be desiring to accomplish in you?

Digging Deeper


1. We are entering the section of Revelation where it gets more complex. The position presented in the sermon argues the best way to read the book is as a series of sections that run parallel to each other, with some progression, like a spiral. The parallels between the seven seals (6:1-8:1), the seven trumpets (8:2-11:19), and the seven bowls (15:1-16:21) are most pronounced. Take some time to read these sections in parallel with each other, noting your observations.
2. The sermon suggested that the seven seals do not reveal the content of the Scroll, but rather reveal what is already taking place in a fallen world marred by war and violence. Thinking particularly of the four horsemen (6:1-8), what do you think of the following quote shared in the sermon: “The first wave of violent imagery expresses the apocalyptic insight that the world’s suffering is *allowed* by God, but is more fundamentally a *result* of sin” (Howard-Brook, *Unveiling Empire*, 142).
3. The sixth seal (the great earthquake) is a collation of several Old Testament passages about the coming Day of the Lord—a day of final judgment and complete salvation. Look up the following references: Joel 2:28-32; Isaiah 24:21; 34:2-4; Hosea 10:1-8; Malachi 3:1-5. This rich symbolic language is intended to convey both the cosmic scope of God’s final judgment and the hope implicit in it. Write down some journal notes of your own reactions and prayers concerning this.
4. Chapter seven provides a description of the people of God from two perspectives. What do you think of the “hear” (7:1-8) then “see” (7:9-17) pattern found in the book? How does this picture of the redeemed people of God provide hope in the present? How does the picture of the great multitude of the followers of the Lamb “from every nation, tribe, people and language” impact the way you understand the church today?
5. The idea of the “sealing” of the people of God presented in the sermon saw the sealing as a marker of safety and belonging, and equated the sealing with the sealing of the Holy Spirit described in the letters of Paul (see Eph 1:13; 4:30; 2Cor 1:22). How does knowing that your salvation is secure in the Lord help you deal with present sufferings and trials?

For Groups

1. The seven seals, trumpets, and bowls can be seen as different perspectives on the same events. Is there a time in your life when you have had a shift in your perspective that changed the way you viewed something that happened? Share that with your group. How has that affected you as you’ve moved forward in life?
2. The four horsemen that are mentioned in the beginning of chapter six represent many of the difficult things that we find in our world. As a group, read through Psalm 10 and let it guide a time of prayer for some of the places you know of that are experiencing war, high poverty rates, etc. Be encouraged that God has the ultimate victory!
3. One of the messages of these chapters is that followers of the Lamb are “made secure, not safe”, meaning that God does not eliminate suffering and tribulation from our lives, but that he will be with us through it and keep us secure in the midst of it (Rom 8:25). What do you think of this interpretation? How does it help you understand your own suffering?


Living it Out

1. This section of Revelation challenges the view that current world order offers security. The death of the Lamb demonstrates the power of divine love and calls everyone to decision: where are you going to put your trust? Will it be in our crucified Lord (the Lamb that was slain) or in something else? What does it look like to live your life as a follower of the Lamb?
2. We live in a world where things can be difficult. Is there a simple act of kindness that you could do for someone this week as a way to bring light into the darkness?




THE SEVEN SEALS (REALLY SIX AND AN INTERLUDE)

Revelation 6:1-8:1
November 12, 2023 | Tyler Williams



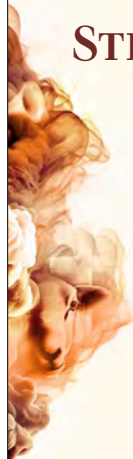
READING REVELATION RESPONSIBLY

- Take account of its genre, images and symbolism, and historical and cultural context.
- God’s word to first century Christ followers, and secondarily God’s word to twenty-first century Christ followers.
- Revelation is at its core a book about Jesus Christ, worship and discipleship, and final hope for the world.



STRUCTURE

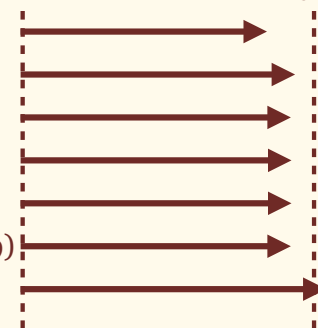
- Recapitulation (“progressive parallelism”), not linear chronology.
- The seven sections run parallel to each other, with some progression, like a spiral.



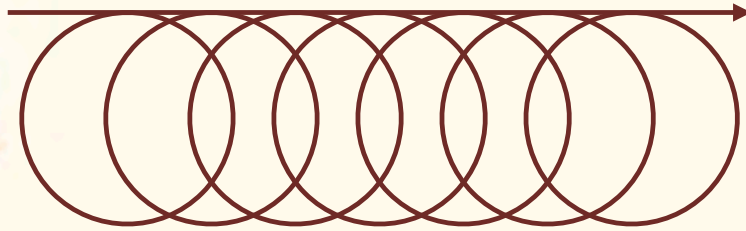
STRUCTURE

1. Seven Churches (1-3)
2. Seven Seals (4-7)
3. Seven Trumpets (8-11)
4. Dragon & the Beasts (12-14)
5. Seven Bowls (15-16)
6. Fall of Babylon & Beasts (17-19)
7. New Heaven & Earth (20-22)

The Christ Event The End of the Age



STRUCTURE



STRUCTURE

- Three cycles of seven disasters that increase in intensity.
- Come in a 4 + 3 pattern, with interludes between the sixth and seventh.
- Each show the same thing, the degenerating course of history, from different points of view.

7 Seals (6:1-8:1)	7 Trumpets (8:2-11:19)	The Dragon & the Beasts (12:1-14:20)	7 Bowls (15:1-16:21)
1: Conquest 2: Violence 3: Economic Hardship 4: Death	1: Earth 1/3 scorched 2: Sea 1/3 to blood 3: Water 1/3 bitter 4: Sun 1/3 darkened		1: Sores 2: Sea to blood 3: Rivers to blood 4: Scorching sun
5: Martyrs 6: Cataclysm	5: Locusts (1 Woe) 6: Calvary (2 Woe)		5: Darkness 6: Demonic Frogs
Interlude (7:1-17)	Interlude (10:1-11:14)		Interlude (16:15-16)
7: Silence (7 Trumpets)	7: Consummation		7: Earthquake

Intensification →

APPROACHING THE SEALS

The Seals *do not* reveal the content of the Scroll, but rather reveal *what is already taking place* in a fallen world marred by war and violence.

- No one is able to look into the scroll until all the seals are broken (the contents of the scroll is given to John to eat in chap. 10).

SEALS 1-4

“The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse” (6:1-8).

- Background for much of the imagery is found in Zechariah 1:8-15; 6:1-8.



SEALS 1-4: THE FOUR HORSEMEN

- Seal 1: Conquest – “A conqueror bent on conquest” (6:2).
- Seal 2: Violence – “Power to take peace” (6:4).
- Seal 3: Economic hardship & famine (6:5-6).
- Seal 4: Death – “given power over a fourth of the earth” (6:8).

SEALS 1-4: THE FOUR HORSEMEN

- Each of the riders are ultimately under God’s sovereignty and limits (1/4).
- Represent the all too common threats of human wars, famines, plagues, and other consequences of human fallenness (Jer 14:12; 21:7; Ezek 5:17; 6:11; cf. Matt 24:5-8; Romans 1:18-32).

SEALS 1-4: THE FOUR HORSEMEN

They demonstrate the divine restraint of evil:

“The first wave of violent imagery expresses the apocalyptic insight that the world’s suffering is *allowed* by God, but is more fundamentally a result of *sin*” (Howard-Brook, *Unveiling Empire*, 142).

“The Lamb does not bring war and violence into existence by opening the seals but shows they are subordinate to the purposes of God” (Caird, *Revelation*).



SEAL 5: MARTYRDOM

- The souls of those “under the altar” depicts their deaths as meaningful sacrifices (Lev 4:7); they were “slain” (*sphazo* σφάζω) just like the Lamb (6:9-11).
- Their question: “How long... until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” is uttered by victims of injustice (Cf. Zech 1:12; Ps 6:3; 13:1; 35:17; 74:10; 79:5-10).
- “How long?” is a call for justice that recognizes that justice is under God’s purview (Romans 12:19-20).



SEAL 5: MARTYRDOM

- The martyrs are given white robes of honour and told to rest for a short time...
- “Until the full [number] of” martyrs is complete (but “number” is not found in the Greek).
- “Until their fellow servants... were finished [i.e., their witness].”
- Speaks of God’s readiness to delay justice until the witnessing of the faithful is finished (10:6-7; 11:7; cf. Rom 11:25; Matt 24:14).



SEAL 6: CATAclysm

- The sixth seal introduces cataclysmic imagery of the great “day of the Lord” (6:12-17).
- Earthquakes; disturbance of the sun, moon, and stars; mountains being shaken — all are signs of the end (also in 11:19; 16:18; cf. Isaiah 24:19; Jer 51:29; Joel 2:10; Matt 24:29).
- This vision of the end is parallel to the visions of the collapse of the cosmos at the end of the other series (16:17-21; 20:11).



SEAL 6: CATAclysm

- Ends with seven(!) groups of people hiding from the Lord and crying out,
- “For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?” (6:17).



INTERLUDE/PREVIEW

- Answer: The faithful followers of the Lamb will withstand it (7:1-17).
- **Heard:** the 144,000 (7:1-8), but then
- **Saw** the great multitude (7:9-17).



INTERLUDE/PREVIEW

- The 144,000 of the Lamb's Army (cf. Num 1).
- Symbolic of the completeness of the people of God (12 tribes x 12 apostles x 1000; cf. 21:16).
- The 144,000 are made up of Jews and Gentiles, both heirs to the promises of God.



INTERLUDE/PREVIEW

Saw: A Great Multitude (7:9-17).

- Points to the fulfillment of the promise of Abraham (Gen 15:5; 17:4-5; 22:17; cf. Gal 3:23-29).
- Portrayed as dressed in white with palm branches and cleansed by the blood (= death) of the Lamb.
- Came out of the great tribulation/affliction, which encompasses the entire time between Christ's first and second comings (7:14; cf. 1:9; 2:9-10).



INTERLUDE/PREVIEW

What is the meaning of the Seal?

- Protection: See Ezek 9:4; Exod 12.
- Belonging: Sealed with "His name and his Father's name" (14:1); was put on all of "the servants of our God" (7:3; cf. 1:1; 2:20; 10:7; 11:18; 15:3; 19:2, 5; 22:3, 6).



INTERLUDE/PREVIEW

- Sealing refers to the work of the Holy Spirit when we believe (Eph 1:13; 4:30; 2Cor 1:22).
- An image of God's promise of salvation; those who belong to God and the Lamb; those who conquered by the faithfulness of their witness.
- We are made *secure*, not *safe* (Rom 8:25).



INTERLUDE/PREVIEW

- The scene ends with the great multitude crying out, "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb" (7:10).
- Then the angels, the elders, and the four living creatures offer their own sevenfold praise (7:12).
- And concludes with the elder's description of the future of the redeemed (7:15-17).



SEAL 7: SILENCE

- The Seventh Seal brings silence (8:1).
- And introduces the Seven Angels and the Seven Trumpets (8:2-11:19).



RESPONSE

- Challenges the view that current world order offers security.
- The death of the Lamb demonstrates the power of divine love and calls everyone to decision.
- And for those who follow the Lamb and are sealed with God's Holy Spirit, we know that no matter what tribulation or suffering we face, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus!