

# Revelation: The Seals

Lesson 17

# The Lamb Opens The Seals

- Read [Revelation 5:1-13](#)
- The Lamb was given the scroll sealed with the seven seals. The Lamb was the only one worthy to open the seals.
- In general, the seals, trumpets and bowls of divine wrath signal the terrible judgments of God on the world at the end of the Age, climaxing in the second coming of Christ.
- Each opened seal casts a tribulation judgment upon the inhabitants of earth.
- Five questions must be answered before these events of Divine Wrath can be understood.
  - Are the events which begin with the breaking of the first seal past or future?
  - What is the relationship of the seals to the Rapture of the church?
  - What is the relationship of the seals to [Daniel 9:27](#)?
  - Does Revelation deal with the entire seven years anticipated in [Daniel 9:27](#) or only with the last three and one half years?
  - What is the relationship of the events of Revelation to Christ's sermon on the end times?

# Foreword

- At some time in every commentary on the Book of Revelation, it is necessary to go back and make sure we have the proper framework to understand these prophecies. There are two primary sources ...
  - The book of Daniel
  - Jesus' Olivet Discourse
- The first clarification is the use of 'weeks' in understanding Daniel's 70 weeks.
  - We are so used to the decimal system we rarely give thought to other numbering systems.
  - A decade of years to us is ten years. Everyone has complete understanding using 'decade'
  - The Hebrew have a word, "heptad" which is a grouping of '7 years'. Daniel was given a prophecy concerning 70 heptads. And that is 70 grouping of 7 years. English translations rendered heptad as "weeks" rather than a grouping of 7 years.

# Seal #1: Conquest

- Rev 6:1-2
  - The first rider is on a white horse and rode out to conqueror
  - Held a bow (to make war)
  - No arrows seem to indicate diplomatic means in conquering nations
  - Was given a crown
- The first seal is generally agreed to represent a worldwide peace movement by man. It may be associated with the Israel peace covenant made by the Beast.
- The first rider is the Antichrist who has not yet been revealed. See the next page
- Some scholars associate the first rider to Christ because in His second coming ([Rev 19:11](#)) Jesus is pictured riding on a white horse (a symbol of victory).
  - Roman generals after a victory in battle would ride a white horse in triumph with their captives following
  - Christ returns to the earth as a conqueror at the end of the tribulation and not at the beginning.
  - Riders on the other horses obviously relate to destruction and judgment which precede the second coming of Christ
  - The rider cannot be Christ for He is the one opening the seals. He will not be the contents of them and open also, for the little book of Rev. 5 contains “things” never before revealed and which no man but Christ is able to open and reveal.

# Seal #1: Conquest (2)

- The conqueror shown here is the future world ruler, sometimes referred to as Antichrist. He is most likely the same ruler of the people mentioned in [Daniel 9:26](#)
  - This ruler has a bow without an arrow, indicating that the world government which he establishes is accomplished without warfare.
  - But do note (and this very important) ... In ancient times a bow was kept in case of leather or cloth. If the bow was exposed, it signified a preparation for war. The rider has a bow, signifying complete preparation for war and absolute willingness to battle and conquering through conflict. No arrows indicate great statesmanship in conquering as opposed to outright battle.
  - The future world government begins with a time of peace but is soon followed by destructions as evidenced by the following three horsemen.

# The White Horse Rider Represents Antichrist

- It is clear that the rider of the white horse is a symbol of an individual, for he has a bow and is given a crown and he goes forth “conquering and to conquer” ([Daniel 7:8, 24-26](#); [8:8-10, 20-25](#); [11:35-45](#))
- Through conquests the antichrist will become supreme over the ten kings of Revised Rome by the middle of the Week.
- The giver of the crown is not mentioned here, but it merely symbolizes the rise of the Antichrist to power as king among the ten kings through the operation of satanic powers. ([2 Thessalonians 2:8-12](#); [Rev 13:1-4](#); [Daniel 8:25](#); [11:36-39](#))
- It seems clear that this rider will cause the wars, famines, pestilences, death and hell of the following three seals. These blights always follow an ambitious conqueror. Antichrist is pictured as such in Daniel 7, 8, 11.
- Antichrist is the only one prophesied to go forth “conquering and to conquer” at the beginning of the week.
  - The Antichrist is not to come necessarily on a white horse, but he is to come as the false Messiah of Israel. ([Matthew 24:4-5](#), [John 5:43](#); [Daniel 9:27](#))
  - If this rider is not Antichrist, then we do not find him mentioned in Revelation before the middle of the Week. Were that the case we would have two individuals going forth “conquering and to conquer” at the beginning of the week – one clearly pictured in Daniel and one here.
  - The sphere of conquest of the one in Daniel is defined, the other is not. One can be identified, the other cannot.
  - Both are successful in conquest, and prominent enough to receive mention by God, but only the one is explained in detail as to his rise, power, length of reign and etc. When considering this rider as the Antichrist, these discrepancies vanish.

# Seal #2: Bloodshed

- Read [Revelation 6:3-4](#)
  - Second rider is on a red horse
  - Given a sword to make men kill each other
- The second seal represents the removal of peace from the earth and the wars that engulf the earth.
- Man's efforts in Seal #1 fail as God's wrath is poured out.
- In contrast with the first rider who has a bow without an arrow, this second rider carried a large sword. This again, was a picture of political power with the rider as world ruler.
  - War will be the natural result of the Antichrist's going forth "conquering and to conquer" ([Daniel 7:24](#); [11:40-45](#); [Matthew 24:6-7](#))
  - The "sword" is a general symbol of war, bloodshed, and national/civil/class conflicts of all kind. This picture depicts anarchy, a people turn against one another with a sword. The OT word for sword is used 393 times; and usually alludes to a war, a conflict or judgment.
  - [Rev 6:4](#) speaks of a great sword. The Greek word great is megas and refers to the largest sword used in the Roman period. The Greek word used for "kill" in this verse is sphazo is found only in this one verse in the entire NT. It means "to butcher and to slaughter like an animal for sacrifice. This is not killing through a conventional form of war, but an outright violent slaughter of other people. It appears that when peace is dislodged, a period of complete global anarchy will prevail.
  - The inhabitants of earth at this time cannot expect peace until the "Prince of Peace" comes to reign over the world ([Isaiah 2:2-4](#); [9:6-7](#))
    - Antichrist's nature
    - God's wrath poured out on men given a final chance to turn to God.

# Seal #3: Famine

- Read [Revelation 6:5-6](#)
  - The rider is on a horse
  - Carries a scale that signifies a great scarcity of food
- This seal represents famine that results from the desolation of war.
- A day's wages refers to a silver coin, the Roman denarius, worth about 15 cents, which was the normal wage for a worker for an entire day. ([Matthew 20:1-16](#))
- Bread by measure and weight signifies scarcity of food ([Ezekiel 4:10-17](#))
  - A quart of wheat was enough for one good meal
  - Three quarts of barley was enough for three good meals.
  - A measure, early a quart of corn was a slave's daily ration, an amount usually purchasable for 1/8 of a day's wage. This means food will be eight times higher than usual.
  - In either case, there would be nothing left for buying oil or wine.
  - Food rationing may occur not because no food is being grown, but because the human slaughter and multiple military conflicts create a disastrous humanitarian crisis.

# Seal #3: Famine (2)

- Famine is the inevitable aftermath of war.
  - Let an ambitious conqueror rise and peace is taken from the earth.
  - Then famine is the natural result, because of the lack of men to till the soil and harvest the crops
  - The olive and grape need no cultivation; hence their ruthless destruction by the invaders is forbidden in the statement “hurt not the oil or the wine” ([Matthew 24:6-7](#))
  - We learn in [Revelation 11:6](#) that it will not rain for 42 months. This ecologic disruption would create the conditions for a food shortage and famine.
- This will be a major cause of death in the Great Tribulation.
- The black color of the horse speaks of famine and death.

# Seal #4: Death And Hades

- [Revelation 6:7-8](#)
  - The fourth rider is named Death riding on a pale, green horse
  - Another rider is riding close behind Death is named Hades (generally believed to be the holding place of departed souls)
  - Given power to slay ¼ of mankind by the sword, famine, plague and wild beasts.
- This seal prefigures the death that follows in the wake of the failure of men to establish peace. These two riders are named because they are not recognizable by man, as are the first three.
  - The rampage of Death and Hell over the fourth part of the earth (ground) will be the natural result of the riders of the first three seals.
  - The fourth seal initiates a combination of sword (war), hunger (famine) and death.
  - The tribulation will be a period of violent military clashes, war, and civil conflict as the nations on earth are thrust into sudden chaos and confusion.
- “Death” has reference to a great pestilence that shall be sent on earth after the rise of the Antichrist, and after wars and famines have taken their toll of human life. ([Matthew 24:6-7](#))
  - Here is the aftermath of war, famine and death.
  - With war and famine, people fall prey to a plague and the wild beasts of the earth.
  - The sword and hunger refer to the second and third seals which are followed by Death and Hell
  - Bodies of men killed by the riders of these first four seals will be eaten by the beasts of the earth (Cf. [Ezekiel 14:21](#))

## Seal #4: Death And Hades (2)

- “Pale” is literally a pale green.
- The startling fact is revealed that a fourth of mankind will be killed by these means. That’s essentially one billion people or more.
- It should be obvious that this is not a trivial judgment but a major factor in the Great Tribulation, thus supporting the conclusion that by the fourth seal the Great Tribulation has begun.
- The first four seals may be considered as a unit and a general description of the Great Tribulation as an unprecedented time of trouble (cf [Jer 30:7](#), [Dan 12:1](#), [Matt 24:21-22](#))

# Seal #5: Slain Souls Under The Altar

- Read [Revelation 6:9-11](#)
- This seal reveals the fact that the saints of God will be killed because of their faith and their impassioned plea for vengeance.
- Who Are These Martyrs?
  - They are future saints not in the church age.
  - Since the martyrs ask for judgment on their oppressors on the earth, their murderers are obviously still living. This strongly suggests that these martyrs are faithful saints who are killed during the Tribulation period.
  - The martyrs cry is for vengeance (justice). This further evidence that they are not church age sufferers. The cry of the church age martyr is the cry of Stephen, the first martyr of the church: “Lord do not charge them with this sin, for they know not what they do.” ([Acts 7:60](#))
- Why were they martyred?
  - After the church is taken away, God will turn His attention to Israel once more.
  - During the seven-year period Tribulation period, many Jews will return to God. ([Romans 11:25-26](#))
  - They had been killed because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained ([Revelation 1:9](#))

# Seal #5: Slain Souls Under The Altar (2)

- If not one believer will be left on the earth at the beginning of the Tribulation, how then will people be saved?
  - God will send for His 'Two Witnesses' into the world to prophesy and perform miracles
  - God will also send 144,000 Israelites who are 'sealed' for God's service during this period (Revelation 7:4)
  - There will be millions of Bibles, tracts, and Christian literature 'left behind.'
- They were under the altar (where the blood of the sacrifice where in OT was spilled) ([Exodus 29:13](#))
  - Conveys their redemption and protection
  - To be 'under the altar' is to be covered in the sight of God by the merit which Jesus Christ provided in dying on the cross.
  - It is a figure that speaks of justification
  - These martyred witnesses are covered by the work of the Lord Jesus Christ

# The Martyrs Will Be Rewarded ....

- They were given white robes, likely symbolizing purity
  - They have not been raised from the dead.
  - They do not have resurrected bodies at this point in time.
  - These martyred saints will be honored in heaven forever, but even before that they will be honored on earth during the Millennium.
  - ([Revelation 20:4](#)) During the Millennium, these saints will experience the justice and peace that eluded them during their lifetimes. Having experience resurrection on the other side of their martyrdom, they will be invited to rule alongside Christ in His righteous, holy, and joyful Kingdom.
- Told to wait a little longer until the full number of their fellow believers had been killed. More martyrs coming
  - From the same altar in heaven where the martyrs cry out will come an angel with a sharp sickle ([Revelation 14:18-19](#)). This is the angel of judgment sent to avenge them.
  - This angel will reap the wicked and throw the clusters of grapes into the great winepress of the wrath of God. This is the most graphic description of God's judgment on man's sins.
  - Zechariah the prophet spoke of the future day of tribulation as a time when two-thirds of the entire Jewish population would be killed. ([Zechariah 13: 8-9](#))
  - Biblical scholar, Richard Bauckham summarizes martyrdom during the Tribulation period with these words, "Revelation portrays the future as though all faithful Christians will be martyred ... It is not a literal prediction that every faithful Christian will in fact be put to death. But it does require that every faithful Christian must be prepared to die."
- This passage shows that the time period is the Great Tribulation, but not its end.

# Redemption Has Been Written In Blood.

- Early in the OT, The Egyptian Pharaoh schemed to kill all male children born to Hebrew women.
- Satan inspired Haman, the wicked favorite of Persian King Ahasuerus, to devise a scheme to kill every Jew in the country.
- Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century BC, became one of Israel's most unrelenting enemies, attacking Jerusalem and executing Jews who refused to bow to Zeus.
- Herod tried to destroy Jesus by slaughtering all the infant boys in Bethlehem.
- Stephen was stoned to death for insisting that the Jewish religious leaders had murdered Jesus ([Acts 7](#))
- Herod had the apostle James executed ([12:1-2](#)).
- Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna was burned at the stake for his refusal to worship Caesar.
- [Revelation 2:13](#) mentions Antipas, a member of the church at Pergamos was executed for his faith.

# Redemption Has Been Written In Blood (2)

- Many Christians died under the cruel reign of Emperor Domitian because of their Christian testimony.
- Many Roman Christians were martyred in the arenas
- Medieval believers had to endure the Inquisition
- The Huguenots and other Protestants were massacred or exiled during the reformation
- Hundreds of Chinese believers lost their lives during the Boxer rebellion
- Russian Christians were sent to slave labor camps or to Siberia under the country's communist rule
- So intense was Hitler's persecution of the Jews in Europe that some believe the Jewish population in Europe was reduced to less than the numbers of Jews who left Egypt under Moses.

# The Courage Of Martyrdom Continues ...

- Studies from several organizations show that a Christian is martyred every 4-5 minutes today. More Christians have been martyred this past century, than all previous centuries combined.
- It is illegal to be a Christian in North Korea and some 50,000 have been sent to labor camps there
- Christians are persecuted in more than 65 of the world's 193 countries
- In Nigeria, nearly 300 churches were destroyed, and 612 Christians were killed in 2013.
- Since 2010, the treatment of Christians has rapidly worsened in Iran. The regime monitors church services, bans Farsi-language services and arrests converts.
- In India, anti-conversion laws have been adopted in five states, and these laws are frequently used as a pretext to disrupt church services and harass Christians. Pastors are frequently beaten or killed, church buildings are destroyed, and converts are forced to flee their homes.

# The Courage Of Martyrdom Continues (2)

- More than one million of the 1.5 million Christians in Iraq have fled the country since the fall of Saddam Hussein, due to increasing persecution.
- In August 2013, 38 churches were burned, and 23 others were damaged in an upsurge in violence against Coptic Christians in Egypt.
- History and current events clearly show that the persecution and martyrdom are the norm for Christians.
- In Revelation 6 we see it will be increasingly norm in the future, worldwide. The dark lord of this fallen world cannot tolerate opposition to his program to annihilate everything godly and good.
- These martyrs, past, present, & future, provide examples of courage that should inspire us to a deeper commitment to Christ and a determination to stand strong for Jesus, no matter the cost.
- At some point in the future, the process of becoming a Christian, means an almost certain death as a martyr worldwide.

# Seal #6 Interrupted: Disruptions In Heaven And On Earth

- [Revelation 6:12-17](#)
  - Earth shaken by a great earthquake
  - The sun turned black
  - The stars in the sky fell to the earth
  - The sky rolled up like a scroll
  - Every mountain and island was removed from its place
  - In the gospels, these cataclysmic events occur just prior to Christ's return. (Also see [Joel 2:30-31](#))
- This seal speaks of the great convulsions that will shake the whole earth.
  - At the same time, due to the earthquake, all the mountains and islands were moved from their places
  - This may signify the condition in which every authority and power loses its control over men and anarchy reigns.
- Here again in the sequence of events, the end had not been reached as there was still another seal. But this is the most dramatic judgment thus far in this time of great distress before the Second Coming

# Seal #6b: Terror of God's Wrath

- Events
- All earth's inhabitants who had ignored or defied God
  - Hid in the caves among the rocks
  - Cried out for the mountains to fall on them and hide them from the face of God and the wrath of the Lamb
  - Apparently, all hiding people had witnessed Christ's arrival on the clouds and were terrified by the judgment and wrath they knew was coming
  - [Isaiah 2:19](#), [2 Thessalonians 2:8](#)
- The practical effect of the judgment was fear in unbelievers from all walks of life.
  - Their fear was so great they would rather be killed by a falling mountain than to face the wrath of the Lamb and Their wrath (referring to the anger of the triune God).
- This is not a picture of ordinary trouble but the period of greatest distress in world history.
- Taken as a whole, Chapter 6 is one of the most important and pivotal chapters in Revelation.
  - It describes the first six seals
  - Introduces the seventh seal which consists of and introduces the seven trumpets and the seven bowls of the wrath of God.
  - It should put to rest the false teachings that God, being a God of love, could not judge a wicked world.
  - It also raises the important question contained in the closing words of verse 17: Who can stand?
  - Only those who have availed themselves of the grace of God before the time of judgment will be able to stand when God deals with the earth in this final period of great distress.

# Seal #7

- [Rev 8:1-5](#)
- When the Lamb opens the 7<sup>th</sup> seal there was silence in heaven for ½ hour. This gives credence to the fact that is a most important event.
  - The contents of the seven trumpets are quite different from the seven seals. The trumpets lie under the sixth seal and proceed from it.
  - The seven trumpets are included under the seventh seal and the seven bowls are included under the seventh trumpet. So that we have in fact a single series in three movements.
  - The seventh seal accordingly is important because it actually includes all the events from [Rev 8:1](#) through [Rev 19:10](#)
- Seven angels are given seven trumpets
- Another angel was given incense to offer up with the prayers of the saints on the golden altar before God's throne
- The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand. This appears to precipitate the judgments that follow.
- Fire from the altar was hurled on the earth producing peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake
- Note that similar disturbances also occur at the end of the trumpets ([Rev 11:19b](#)), and at the end of the bowls ([Rev 16:18-21](#)), but with increasing levels of intensity.

# Seals Wrap-Up

- These seals are the beginning of God's judgments upon the earth.
- The seals are the successive unfolding of the judgment program, although they may continue throughout the period when once unfolded.
- They are mainly judgments through human agencies
- They fall upon the earth in the first portion of the tribulation, and they will continue on through the full seven years