

Session 6 The Seals of Judgment and God's Protection (Rev 6 -7)

For answers to fill-in-the-blanks spaces and for *additional study material pertaining to this session, see mikebickle.org

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE SEVEN SEALS (REV. 5)

- A. Jesus took the scroll sealed with seven seals from the hand of the Father (5:7). It represents the *title deed* of the earth and the *action plan* required to cleanse the earth. One by one, Jesus will open each seal to release a terrifying judgment against the wicked.
- ⁷*He [Jesus] came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him [Father]...⁹ and they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals..." (Rev. 5:7-9)*
- B. The seven seals are *literal* (not symbolic), *future* (their fulfillment is still in the future), *progressive* (increasing in intensity), and *numbered* (released in a sequential order).
- C. One's view of the timing in which Jesus will open the seals is one interpretive key to Revelation. I believe Jesus has not yet opened the first seal—the bowls of prayer must be full.
- ⁸*When He [Jesus] had taken the scroll...the twenty-four elders fell down...each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. (Rev. 5:8)*
- D. In the generation in which the Lord returns, God will shake all nations to judge the kingdom of darkness, purify the Church, and bring in the great harvest including the salvation of Israel. This process will be seen in the beginning of birth pangs and in the release of the seals, trumpets, and bowls judgments, culminating in the kings dying at Armageddon (Rev. 19:19).
- ⁶*"...I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; ⁷and I will shake all nations, and they [unbelievers] shall come to the Desire of All Nations [Jesus]..." says the LORD. (Hag 2:6-7)*
- E. The seven seals will escalate the process of the Lord shaking all the nations by bringing judgment to the kingdom of darkness (the harlot Babylon Rev. 17) and purifying the Church, while creating the optimum context for many to be saved (the end-time harvest).
- F. The seven seals are released by Jesus, the Lamb of God (5:5; 6:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12; 8:1).
- ¹*I saw when the Lamb [Jesus] opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, "Come and see." (Rev. 6:1)*
- G. ***Come and see:*** Four times John was exhorted to "come and see" (6:1, 3, 5, 7). He was to *come*, or draw closer to God, to position his heart to understand and then to *see* or to pay attention. We must also "come and see" so that we have understanding to agree with Him in that day.
- ¹⁷*Your eyes will see the King in His beauty...¹⁸Your heart will meditate on terror: "Where is the scribe? Where is he who weighs? Where is he who counts the towers?" (Isa. 33:17-18)*
- H. ***Principle of judgment:*** God's end-time judgments will remove all that hinders love. He will use the least severe means to reach the greatest number at the deepest level of love without violating anyone's free will.

- I. God's judgments against the wicked in the first four seals result from God taking His *restraining hand off* evil men, allowing them to sin in an unrestrained way against one another. The Antichrist will act violently against the nations including the harlot Babylon (Rev. 17:16).
 - 1. The first four seals are brought about by the actions of sinful men.
 - 2. The fifth, sixth and seventh seals involve supernatural actions from heaven.
- J. Each seal naturally leads to the unfolding of the next seal. For example, the release of the Antichrist in the first seal (Rev. 6:2) leads to a World War in the second seal, which in turn causes famine and economic crisis in the third seal, followed by death and disease, etc.

II. FIRST SEAL: ANTICHRIST'S POLITICAL AGGRESSION (6:1-2)

- A. The opening of the first seal speaks of the Antichrist's political aggression (6:1-2).

¹I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying..., "Come and see." ²I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer. (Rev. 6:1-2)
- B. **White:** The color white symbolizes righteousness because the Antichrist's reign will initially appear righteous. He will be the counterfeit to Jesus who rides a white horse with truth (19:11).
- C. **Bow:** The Antichrist's rule will initially be gained by an "arrowless bow." This speaks of his bloodless victories or peaceful conquest using deceptive diplomacy. The rider is pictured as ready to go to war on a horse with a bow in hand. A bow speaks of *striking at a distance*. Since there are no arrows, it is commonly understood as a *threat of war*, without war breaking out yet.
- D. **Crown:** the Antichrist wears a crown as a symbol of his political authority (13:1-2, 7).
 - 1. The Antichrist will receive authority, or permission, to act from God. Jesus possesses all authority (Mt. 28:18). He will give the Antichrist a limited sphere to act for 3½ years.

⁷And authority was given him [Antichrist] over every...nation. (Rev. 13:7)

¹⁸All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. (Mt. 28:18)

¹There is no authority except from God...the authorities that exist are appointed by God...⁴He is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. (Rom. 13:1, 4)
 - 2. Satan and sinful leaders will also give their authority to the Antichrist (13:2).

²...The dragon [Satan] gave him his power, his throne, and great authority. (Rev 13:2)
- E. Through the Antichrist, God will judge the harlot Babylon for murdering the saints (17:6, 16).

III. SECOND SEAL: WORLD WAR (6:3-4)

- A. The opening of the second seal speaks of the release of the final world war (6:3-4).

³*When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, “Come and see.”*⁴*Another horse, fiery red, went out. It was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword. (Rev. 6:3–4)*

B. **Great sword:** This sword speaks of extreme forms of bloodshed coming from war and violence. The Antichrist will start by using an “arrowless bow” (6:2), and then he will use a “great sword.”

C. **Take peace from the earth:** The context for the breaking of the seals is counterfeit world peace (1 Thes. 5:3), which will end with the opening of the second seal and the abomination of desolation. God will take peace from the nations made drunk by the great Harlot (17:6, 16).

³*For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. (1 Thes. 5:3)*

D. The Antichrist will make a peace treaty with many nations for seven years and then break it.

²⁷*He [Antichrist] shall confirm a covenant [peace treaty] with many for one week [seven years]; But in the middle of the week [seven years] He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate...* (Dan, 9:27)

IV. THIRD SEAL: FAMINE AND ECONOMIC CRISIS (6:5-6)

A. The opening of the third seal speaks of releasing famine and economic crisis (6:5-6). This famine and economic collapse will follow the world war seen in the second seal (6:4).

⁵*When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, “Come and see.” So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand.*⁶*And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine.” (Rev. 6:5-6)*

B. **Pair of scales:** This speaks of an economic crisis. The greatest economic pressures and the most severe famine in history are yet to come against the nations who embrace the ways of the Harlot.

C. **Denarius:** A denarius was equivalent to wages for one day's work.

1. A quart of wheat is the amount that one man would eat for one day on a minimal diet.

2. The economic crisis will cause one's earning power to be reduced to working all day to afford food for one person for one day. This represents about 10 times less buying power than in the world today.

D. **Wheat and barley:** Wheat is superior in taste and nutrition to barley. Barley, an inferior grain, will be three times cheaper than the price of wheat.

V. FOURTH SEAL: DEATH TO ONE-FOURTH OF THE EARTH'S PEOPLE (6:7-8)

A. The opening of the fourth seal speaks of the death of one-fourth of the earth's population (6:7-8).

⁷*When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come and see."* ⁸*So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth. (Rev. 6:7-8)*

- B. **Pale horse:** This is literally pale green or ashen. It is the color of death or the decay of a corpse.
- C. **Death and Hades:** Death is what happens to the physical body, which goes to the grave. Hades is the prison where the departed spirit of an unbeliever goes before going to the lake of fire after the Millennium.
- D. **A fourth:** John saw one-fourth of the world's population being killed by the sword, hunger, death (pestilence), and wild beasts. These are similar to the four judgments that Ezekiel referred to as "God's four severe judgments" (Ezek. 5:17; 14:21).

²¹*"How much more it shall be when I send My four severe judgments on Jerusalem—the sword and famine and wild beasts and pestilence—to cut off man and beast from it? (Ezek. 14:21)*

- E. **Hunger:** the starvation seen in the third seal will continue to escalate in the fourth seal.
- F. **Death:** The second use of "death" in verse 8 is probably related to martyrdom, pestilence, or disease. Fatal diseases will increase greatly.
- G. **Wild beasts:** Hungry beasts will come out of the wild to the city looking for food. They will probably be seen roaming in the open seeking to devour people because of great hunger.
- H. **One-fourth:** Some estimate that the population of the earth in 2050 will be 10 billion people. One-fourth of this 10 billion is about 2.5 billion. Thus it is possible that the number of deaths will exceed 2 billion people, which is 50 times greater than the death total seen in World War II.

VI. FIFTH SEAL: PRAYER RELEASING JUDGMENT (6:9-11)

- A. The opening of the fifth seal is related to the power of the prayer movement that will release great judgment on Antichrist's empire as seen in the trumpet judgments (Rev. 8-9).

⁹*When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar [altar of incense in heaven] the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God...* ¹⁰*And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"* ¹¹*Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed [martyred] as they were, was completed. (Rev. 6:9-11)*

- B. The fifth, sixth, and seventh seals involve heavenly activity. The judgment of each seal increases in intensity. The fifth seal is more severe than the four that precede it. The shedding of the blood of the saints stirs up God's vengeance (Rev. 19:2) and fuels the prayer movement. This is one of the main turning points in the story line seen in the book of Revelation.

²*Righteous are His judgments...He avenged on her the blood of His servants... (Rev. 19:2)*

- C. **They cried:** The intensity of the prayer ministry in heaven at this time gives us insight into the intensity of the prayer ministry on earth. The Spirit who inspires intercession in heaven will inspire the same on earth with profound unity.
- D. **How long:** The prayer, “How long...” is the most recorded prayer in Scripture (Zech. 1:12; Ps. 6:3; 13:2; 74:10; 79:5; 80:4; 89:46; 90:13; 94:3; Dan. 8:13; 12:6-13). Here is prayer for justice on the Antichrist's cruelty, vindication of God's reputation, and deliverance of His people.
⁷“...will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night...⁸He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” (Lk. 18:7-8; NAS)
- E. **Vengeance:** This is not a cry for personal revenge, but that God would remove reprobates who oppress His people and hate His kingdom. They will long to see the Antichrist's cruelty stop.
- F. **O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood....:** Holy and true are two aspects emphasized (3:7) in context to God's judgments. As the saints lean into God's sovereignty with confidence in Jesus' goodness, they see that His judgments are *holy* for they do not violate love and they are *true* in judging the guilty with accurate information. God's judgments are neither too severe, nor too lenient, neither too early, nor too late, but are filled with holiness and truth.
- G. **Dwell on earth:** The saints will ask God to avenge their blood on those who *dwell on the earth*.

VII. THE SIXTH SEAL: COSMIC DISTURBANCES (6:12-17)

- A. The opening of the sixth seal will release a great earthquake with signs in the heavens (6:12-17). This seal begins God's specific answer to this prayer of the martyrs in heaven. It is followed by the release of the trumpet and bowl judgments on the Antichrist's empire (Rev. 8-9; 16).
¹²He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood.¹³And the stars of heaven fell to the earth...¹⁴Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place.¹⁵And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains,¹⁶and said to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!¹⁷For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?” (Rev. 6:12–17)
- B. **Great earthquake:** There will be a great earthquake or a worldwide geophysical upheaval (Hag. 2:6; Heb. 12:26-28). Every mountain will be moved, rather than destroyed. No one could hide in a mountain if they were all destroyed. Mountains continue to exist in the seventh bowl (16:20).
- C. **Sun:** What causes the sun to become darkened? This will be a supernatural sign sent by God as well as possibly including the natural effects of ash and debris from volcanic eruptions or smoke.

- D. **Stars:** The stars can speak of asteroids and meteor showers hitting the earth. The Greek word for stars used here is “*aster*” from which we get the word *asteroid*. An *aster* refers to any shining mass in the sky, including stars, meteors, asteroids, any flaming debris, etc.

VIII. FIRST ANGELIC EXPLANATION: WHO CAN STAND? (7:1-17)

- A. The angelic explanations are like parenthetical sections that follow the chronological sections. They answer the tough questions such as *Why are God's judgments so severe?* and *What will happen to the saints?* They describe how God helps the saints and the Antichrist attacks them.
- B. Angelic explanation #1: God's people sealed for protection—physical and spiritual (7:1-17). This angelic explanation answers the question, “Who can stand?” affirming the security of God's people. God answered this cry by revealing that 144,000 Jewish believers will stand in victory (7:1-8) and Gentile martyrs (7:9-17) shall stand strong without wavering in persecution.
- C. John sees a divine sealing on His people that gives them physical and spiritual protection.
¹I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth...²I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels...³saying, “Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.”⁴And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed... (Rev. 7:1-4)
- D. The 144,000 servants of God give us a picture of victory. They receive a protective seal before God strikes the earth, sea, and trees (7:3). Israel received a protective mark on their doors that saved their firstborn. Others will be sealed for protection (9:4). The *Goshen principle* speaks of God protecting His people from judgment (Ex. 8:22-23; 9:4-6, 26 (Ps. 91; Ezek. 9:6; Zeph. 2:3).
⁴They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. (Rev 9:4)
- E. Gentile believers (7:9-17) will also stand strong spiritually without wavering in persecution. The weakest saints can be spiritually protected if they ask the Lord for help.
⁹Behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne...¹⁰saying, “Salvation belongs to our God...”¹³Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, “Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?”¹⁴...he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes...in the blood of the Lamb.” (Rev. 7:9-14)

IX. QUESTIONS FOR SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION (E.G., FCF FRIENDSHIP GROUPS)

1. Identify one point that inspired or challenged you. Why? What will you do differently to apply it?
2. Identify one point that you want to impart to a younger believer. Why? How will you approach this?
3. Identify one point that you would like to gain more understanding of. How will you seek to gain it?