

Olive Branch Community Church
Reverend Janice Preston, Associate Minister
Wednesday – Bible Study – September
Week 1– September 11, 2024

Overview

Although Jesus gave this revelation of himself to John nearly 2,000 years ago, it still stands as a comfort and challenge to God's people today. We can take heart as we understand John's vision of hope: Christ will return to rescue his people and settle accounts with all who defy him.

John begins this book by explaining how he received this revelation from God (1:1-20). He then records specific messages from Jesus to the seven churches in Asia (2:1-3:22). The scene shifts as a mosaic of dramatic and majestic images bursts into view before John's eyes. This series of visions portrays the future rise of evil, culminating in the Antichrist (4:1-18:24). Then follows John's recounting of the triumph of the King over all kings, the wedding of the Lamb, the final judgement, and the coming of the new Jerusalem (19:1-22:5). Revelation concludes with the promise of Christ's soon return (22:6-21), and John breathes a prayer that has been echoed by Christians through the centuries: "Amen: Come, Lord Jesus!" (22:20).

As we study the book of Revelation, be amazed with John at the unbelievable landscape of God's revealed plan. Listen as Christ warns the churches and root out any sin that blocks your relationship with him. Be full of hope, knowing that God is in control, Christ's victory is assured and all who trust him will be saved.

The vision John received opens with instructions for him to write to seven churches. He both commends them for their strengths and warns them about their flaws. Each letter was directed to a church then in existence but also speaks to conditions in the church throughout history. Both in the church and in our individual lives we must constantly fight against the temptation to become loveless, immoral, lenient, compromising, lifeless or casual about our faith. The letters make it clear how our Lord feels about these qualities.

The revelation is both a warning to Christians who have grown apathetic and an encouragement to those who are faithfully enduring the struggles in this world. It reassures us that good will triumph over evil, gives us hope as we face difficult times, and gives guidance when we are wavering in our faith. Christ's message to the church is a message of hope for all believers in every generation. (NLT Study Bible)

CHAPTER 1

1. John begins by describing the nature of the prophetic book that he has written. He states that the events he will describe will "shortly" take place, which in his day was simply a way of saying that they could happen at any time. How does John describe himself as the author? Who does he say will be blessed by his words (1-3)?

2. John writes that his words are intended for the members of seven churches located in the Roman province of Asia (modern-day Turkey). He greets these readers with the phrase “grace to you and peace,” which is typically of the greetings found in most of the New Testament epistles. Who does John say is the source of this grace and peace that they receive (4-5)?
3. Before John reveals the vision, he dedicates the book to his Savior. What acts of Christ does he single out in his dedication? What does he assure the believers will one day happen (5-7)?
4. John writes that Jesus identifies Himself as “the Alpha and the Omega,” which are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, to announce that He is the Beginning and End (vs 8). How does that description apply to His eternal nature and to His authority?
5. John reminds his readers that he is their “brother and companion” in the trials they are facing for Christ and that even in exile he is still serving his Lord. How does he describe the voice he heard in his vision? What instructions was he given (9-11)?
6. When John turns to look at the speaker, he sees a glorious figure wearing a long robe and girded with a golden band, both of which are symbolic of the garments worn by the priests in the Old Testament (see Daniel 10:5). What is the significance of this description? What else is unusual in John’s description of Jesus’ appearance (12-16)?
7. Jesus appears to John like “the sun shining in its strength” (16), which simply means He reveals Himself in all His divine glory. How does John react? What words of assurance does Jesus give to John to identify Himself as his Lord (17-18)?
8. Jesus continues by instructing John to write down everything he is about to witness and then reveals the “mystery” of the seven stars and lampstands in the vision. What do the stars represent? What do the lampstands represent (19-20)?
9. Why did God give this “revelation” or “vision” to John (1:1)?
10. What has God done for all who choose to follow Christ (5-6)?
11. How did Jesus announce Himself to John (10-11)?
12. Why do Jesus’ followers have no reason to fear His coming (17-18)?
13. How does John’s vision of Christ in all His glory affect your view of the Lord?
14. What comfort can you take from knowing that you will one day share in Christ’s glory?

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Wednesday – Bible Study
Week 3 – September 25, 2024

The second and third chapters of Revelation contain letters written to seven literal churches located in the Roman province of Asia Minor at the end of the first century AD. These churches were located in the cities of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. Although the entire book was to go to all seven churches (and to believers everywhere), these individual letters were addressed to these specific churches.

Jesus begins each letter with the phrase, “I know your works,” and He gives a promise to each person “who overcomes.” The letter also follows a consistent format:

1. An instruction is given to John to write down the words,
2. Jesus reveals His knowledge of the deeds, both the good and the bad, of the people in each church,
3. A verdict is rendered based on their acts, and
4. An exhortation is given to heed Jesus’ warnings and persevere.

Beyond those similarities, the message of each letter is tailored to the specific needs, issues and concerns in the church to which it is addressed. For this reason, we must read each in its own context. Even so, one of the remarkable things about these letters is that Jesus’ words to the seven churches can be applied to the churches of every era, including our churches today. These letters can be seen as a “test” for the modern church.

The risen Lord, with “His eyes like a flame of fire” (1:14), is searching the hearts of His people to determine their true character. The results of this probing and searching are as revealing and as convicting in our world today as they were some 2,000 years ago. In truth, many problems faced by our modern church could be solved by simply reading the recommendations of our Lord to these churches in Asia. (David Jeremiah)

Letters to Ephesus and Smyrna (2:1-11)

1. Ephesus was a self-governed city located on the western coast of Asia Minor. It sat at the crossroads of three major highways and was a center for trade. It was also the center for the worship of Artemis, the Greek goddess of fertility. Jesus praised this church for being dynamic, dedicated, determined, disciplined and discerning. But what was His main charge against them? In what areas did He see room for improvement (1-6)?
2. Smyrna was a wealthy port city located forty miles north of Ephesus. It was a center of learning in the sciences and medicine but also a center of emperor worship. By the reign of Domitian (ad 81-95), it had become mandatory for every resident to practice the religion on threat of death. The impoverished members of the church were thus suffering

because they refused to engage in emperor worship and they were also being persecuted by other groups. What counsel does Jesus offer in the midst of their suffering (9-10)?

Letters to Pergamos and Thyatira (Revelation 2:12-29)

3. Pergamos was located sixty-five miles north of Smyrna and was famous for its sculptures, temples, and library of 200,000 volumes. It was a center for worship of the emperor, Dionysus (god of the royal kings), and Asclepius (god of healing). Many in the church had stayed true to Christ in spite of this hostile environment, but others were following the false teachings of groups known as the “Balaamites” and “Nicolaitans.” What warning does Jesus give to these individuals? What does He command them to do (14-16)?
4. Thyatira was located forty-five miles east of Pergamos. Its residents conducted commerce in wool, linen, dyed goods, leatherwork, tanning, and bronze work. The city was home to several trade guilds each of which had a patron god and engaged in sexual parties as a part of their worship. Jesus praised the church for being service-oriented, loving, loyal, faithful, and patient, but He rebuked them for allowing these sexually immoral practices to take root in the church. What was Jesus’ message to them in this regard (20-24)?

Letters to Sardis and Philadelphia (Revelation 3:1-13)

5. Sardis was located thirty miles south of Thyatira. The city had once been great militarily and was home to a fortress that had witnessed few defeats in its past. But its residents were now clearly living off the glories of their past, and their “slumber” had caused them to fall into great moral decadence. Jesus called those in the church to “wake up” and engage in a faith that was active and growing. What other directions did He give to them? What did Jesus say would happen if they failed to “keep watch” over their lives (2-5)?
6. Philadelphia was located twenty-five miles southeast of Sardis. It was a strong fortress city, situated on a major highway, that served as a “gateway” to the Roman territories in the east. Jesus states that even though the church is small and has “little strength,” he has set before them “an open door” to proclaim the gospel to the far reaches of the world. What does Jesus say about those who seek to hamper their ministry efforts? What does He promise to those who continue to persevere in following after Him (9-12)?

Letter to Laodicea (3:14-22)

7. Laodicea was located forty-five miles southeast of Philadelphia and 100 miles east of Ephesus. The residents received their water from hot springs located six miles to the south that cooled to lukewarm as the water travelled along an aqueduct into the city. How does Jesus use this imagery to describe the nature of the church’s faith (15-17)?

8. Laodicea was an important center for trade, and its wealthy citizens prided themselves on being self-sufficient. Evidently, this same attitude had infiltrated the church, and the believers had grown ignorant of their dependence on Christ. What does Jesus say to help them recognize their true condition? What is His invitation to them (17-20)

Reviewing the Story

9. What promise is given to those in Ephesus and Smyrna who overcome (2:7, 11)?
10. What promise is given to those in Pergamos and Thyatira who overcome (2:17, 26-27)?
11. What promise is given to those in Sardis and Philadelphia who overcome (3:5, 12)?
12. What promise is given to those in Laodicea who overcome (3:21)?

Applying the Message

13. Which words of praise from Jesus to the seven churches could apply to your church?

Which words of warning or instruction from Jesus could apply to your church?

Olive Branch Community Church
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Wednesday – Bible Study
November 13, 2024
CHAPTER 4

Book Summary:

The word "revelation" means "an unveiling or disclosure." This writing unveils future events such as the rapture, three series of judgments that will fall on the earth during the tribulation, the emergence of the Antichrist, the persecution of Israel and her amazing revival, as well as Jesus' second coming with His saints to the earth, the judgment of Satan and his followers, and finally, the eternal state.

The purpose of the book of Revelation was for John to record three things:

1. The things he had seen, (which represent the vision of the glorified Christ chapter 1:1-18).
2. The things that are, which relate to the 7 churches, in chapters 2-3.
3. The things that are to take place, chapters 4-22.

Thus, chapters four and five are a transition between the age of the church as shown in the seven letters to the churches and the seven-year tribulation, which would culminate in Jesus' return.

It is important to note that up to this point, the Holy Spirit has been present in the churches on earth and among God's people. But as we come to this section in Revelation, we find the Holy Spirit is now up in heaven before the throne of God. As John writes, "Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God (4:5). This is significant, because in 2 Thessalonians 2:6-8, the apostle Paul writes there is currently a force present on earth who is restraining "the lawless one" from doing his work. This "lawless one" or "man of sin" is the Antichrist, and the Restrainer is none other than the Holy Spirit.

So when the Holy Spirit and thus the church in which He dwells, is taken up into heaven, the restraining force will be removed. The Antichrist will be free to do as he pleases, and this will result in a time of tribulation the world has never before witnessed. Truly, as we will begin to see in this lesson, all hell is literally about to break loose on the earth.

Chapter Context:

Chapter 3 concluded the description of "the things that are" (Revelation 1:19). Chapter 4 begins the final section of Revelation, regarding "the things that are to take place after this" (Revelation 1:19). Chapter 1 describes the appearance of Jesus to John on the island of Patmos, at which time He commanded John to write to seven churches in Asia Minor. Chapters 2 and 3 provide us with the contents of Jesus' letters. Whereas chapters 1–3 relate events on earth, chapters 4 and 5 describe what John saw in heaven. Because the

word "church" does not appear in this "after this" section of Revelation, we may assume the church does not experience the judgments described in chapters 6 and beyond.

Chapter Summary:

John reports in the opening verse of Revelation 4 that he saw a door open in heaven and heard a voice beckoning him to come up to heaven. From heaven's vantage point John would witness future events. Upon his arrival in heaven, John saw God. He was sitting on a throne surrounded by twenty-four other thrones. A sea of glass lay in front of God's throne, and four living creatures were beside the throne. When the living creatures ascribed honor and praise to God, the elders who occupied the twenty-four thrones fell down and worshiped God. They cast their crowns before Him and praised Him.

The Throne Room of Heaven (Revelation 4:1-5)

1. The Bible reveals that no one can look on God's face and live (Exodus 33:20). So when John looks into heaven, what he sees is only the appearance of God, and he tries his best to describe what he is seeing. What imagery does he use to describe the glory of that place? What impact does the presence of God have on John (verses 1-3).

Verse Commentary:

John explains the vision he saw when transported, to heaven through the Spirit of God. This verse tells us God appeared with the likeness of precious jewels. Each carries a certain symbolism that we are meant to understand.

The **jasper stone** John saw refers to a clear jewel, perhaps resembling a diamond. It portrays God's absolute purity and perfection.

The **carnelian** was ruby red. It portrays God as our Redeemer.

Israel's high priest wore the jasper and carnelian and ten other gemstones on his chest (Exodus 28:17–21). Each of the twelve stones represented a tribe of Israel. Just as the high priest wore the tribes of Israel symbolically on his chest, so Jesus, our High Priest carries us Christians on His heart.

Jasper and carnelian are also the first and last gems, respectively, on the high priest's garments. This description not only reinforces that God is the "first and the last" (Revelation 1:8; 22:13)", it also identifies Jesus as God, as both perfection and our redeemer.

John also indicates that an **emerald rainbow** circled God's throne. An emerald is green symbolizes life.

The rainbow first appeared to Noah and his sons after the Flood as a token of God's promise to refrain from sending another flood to destroy the world (Genesis 9:8–17). The

emerald rainbow around God's throne likely indicates that His promise of eternal life is guaranteed.

Verse Context:

Revelation 4:1–6 describes the apostle John's experience of being in the Spirit and being transported to heaven. There, he sees the radiance of God described as precious jewels. Further, he sees twenty-four other thrones, occupied by twenty-four elders. He also witnesses seven burning torches and a sea of glass in front of God's throne. Near the throne are four creatures that ascribe threefold holiness to God.

2. The presence of the twenty-four elders, who represent the church, indicates that God's people will be with Him in heaven by this point and will not endure the coming Tribulation. God's throne is depicted in the Bible as one of grace for His people (Hebrews 4:16). But how is it depicted in this passage 4:4-5)?

The identities of these twenty-four elders are unknown; some speculate they may be the twelve patriarchs of Israel and the twelve apostles.

Based on this context, the twenty-four elders in heaven may be a select group of believers. Or they may represent all the redeemed of all ages. The apostle John reports that he saw the twenty-four elders in heaven with white garments, representing holiness, and with crowns, depicting victory and approval from Jesus at His judgment seat ([1 Corinthians 9:24–27](#); [2 Timothy 4:8](#); [James 1:12](#).)

There is another possible idea or symbolism tied to the 24 elders. Some scholars would say the 24 elders represent the 12 tribes of Israel combined with the 12 apostles, representing how God has bridged the gap between the Old Covenant and the New. Again, since the Bible is not clear who the 24 elders are in Revelation, these are just ideas that can help you possibly understand who they might be or represent.

Dressed in white - The 24 elders were all dressed in white and wore crowns on their heads. To be dressed in white, especially a white robe, is symbolic of being clothed in the righteousness of Christ. The only ones who will ever be clothed in his righteousness are those who have been redeemed. You see this mentioned in other parts of Revelation.

The Living Creatures (Revelation 4:6-11)

3. The “four living creatures” that John sees in his vision resemble the beings that Isaiah and Ezekiel observed in their visions (Isaiah 6:1-3; Ezekiel 1:5-10; 10:9-14). They are “full of eyes” and have knowledge of God and His purposes. Each of their faces (lion, calf, man, eagle) suggest qualities that belong to God (supremacy, power, humility, swiftness of action). These beings lead in delivering God's judgement to earth. But what else are they leading here? What are these angelic beings doing in heaven (4:6-8)

Scripture References

Psalm 103:19 – The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.

Isaiah 6:1 – In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³ And they were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

Ezekiel 1:5-10 - and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was human, ⁶ but each of them had four faces and four wings. ⁷ Their legs were straight; their feet were like those of a calf and gleamed like burnished bronze. ⁸ Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands. All four of them had faces and wings, ⁹ and the wings of one touched the wings of another. Each one went straight ahead; they did not turn as they moved. ¹⁰ Their faces looked like this: Each of the four had the face of a human being, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left the face of an ox; each also had the face of an eagle.

4. The twenty-four elders (who represent the church) offer their worship to God in response to the glory and honor the four living creatures bestow on God. What is the significance of them casting their crowns before God? For what do they praise Him (verses 9-11)?

The four living creatures are found in [Revelation 4:6–9](#); [5:6–14](#); [6:1–8](#); [14:3](#); [15:7](#); and [19:4](#). The texts that describe these creatures do not indicate that they are figurative—they are real, actual beings. The four living creatures (literally “beings”) are a special, exalted order of angelic being or cherubim. This is clear by their close proximity to the throne of God. [Ezekiel 1:12–20](#) suggests that they are in constant motion around the throne.

[Revelation 5:6–14](#) describes the duties or purposes of the four living creatures. They fall down and worship the Lamb, Jesus Christ, offering the same reverence to Him that they did to the Father ([Revelation 4:6–9](#)), proof positive of the deity of Jesus Christ. Along with the twenty-four elders, they have “harps and golden vials full of incense, which are the [prayers of the saints](#)” ([Revelation 5:8](#)). Harps are frequently associated with worship in the Old Testament, as well as with prophecy ([2 Kings 3:15](#); [1 Chronicles 25:1](#)). Incense represents the prayers of the saints. Therefore, taken together, the four living creatures and twenty-four elders hold in their hands all that prophets ever prophesied and believers ever prayed for—all about to come to pass.

The purpose of the four living creatures also has to do with declaring the holiness of God and leading in worship and adoration of God, and they are involved in some way with God’s justice, for when He opens the first four seals and sends out the four horsemen to destroy, their powerful voices, like thunder, command “come” ([Revelation 6:1–8](#)). The horsemen respond to the summons of the four powerful creatures, indicating the power

the creatures possess. That power is seen again in [Revelation 15:7](#) when one of the four unleashes the last seven plagues of God's wrath on mankind.

The four living creatures are very similar, if not the same, beings as those in Ezekiel chapters 1 and 10 and [Isaiah 6:1–3](#). They are four in number, full of eyes, have faces like the beings in [Ezekiel 1:10](#), have six wings ([Isaiah 6:2](#)), and offer worship as the beings in [Isaiah 6:3](#), saying, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord.” They may not be the exact same beings, but they definitely are comparable and probably of the same order.

In summary, these beings are an exalted order of angels whose purpose is primarily that of worship ([Revelation 19:4](#)). They are very similar to the beings in [Ezekiel 1](#) and [10](#) and [Isaiah 6:1–3](#), and they are in some ways involved in God's divine justice.

Olive Branch Community Church
Reverend Janice Preston, Associate Minister
Wednesday – Bible Study
November 20, 2024
CHAPTER 5

The Lion, the Lamb, and the Scroll

Chapter 5 Summary

The scene of John's vision shifts from earth to heaven, where he is given a glimpse of God's throne room. The Lord's throne is surrounded by twenty-four other thrones, each occupied by elders wearing white robes and golden crowns. Lightning and thundering come from the throne, and seven lamps of fire burn in front of it. Four creatures with the appearance of a lion, a calf, a man and an eagle, offer nonstop praise to God, while the elders fall down to worship Him. John then sees that the One on the throne has a scroll with seven seals, and it is determined that only Jesus, the Lion of Judah and the Lamb of God is worthy to open it. When Christ takes the scroll, first the living creatures and elder, then the angelic host and then all of creation worship Him and proclaim Him worthy.

This scroll seems to symbolize the judgment of God on sin and wickedness (Revelation 5:1-2).

- The scroll in the right hand of God the Father is a title deed to this earth.
- It is sealed with the perfect number of seven seals which once broken, will reveal the conditions for the rightful owner to take possession of this planet.
- But the question before us is "who is worthy" to take and open this scroll? Is there someone that can take possession of, and rule, this earth?

Nobody in heaven or on earth has both the moral authority and the legal right to take up the judgment of God. In response to what seems a hopeless situation, John begins to weep (Revelation 5:2-4).

Now scripture tells us that there was no one that could be found who could open the scroll. There was no one worthy. Let's imagine the angst amongst those watching this scene.

- 'Michael, mighty archangel, what about you? Will you step forward?' 'I cannot. This earth was given to man, lost by man and man must redeem it'.
- 'Adam, Son of God, what about you? Will you open the scroll?' 'I'm sorry, I failed. I followed the lie and started this whole mess. I lost my rights.
- 'Abraham, father of Israel, will you redeem this land?' 'I can't... I couldn't even wait for God to bring about His promise and produced an Ishmael causing centuries of conflict... I'm sorry.

- 'Moses, Oh, great deliverer, can you deliver here?' 'I wish... But I was angry, disobeyed God in my anger and struck the rock. I wasn't even allowed into the Promised Land. I cannot redeem. I needed redemption myself.
- 'David, Oh great and mighty king, what about you?' 'Um, one word - Bathsheba. It is true what I wrote 'Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me. I cannot.
- 'Paul, great Apostle and leader of the church, can you lead us out of this situation?' 'No. I spent the early part of my life persecuting and putting God's people to death. It is true what I wrote that I am the greatest of sinners.

Then one of the twenty-four elders reassures John that there is One who can take this scroll: Jesus. Here, He is described as "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" and the "Root of David." John then describes Jesus symbolically, as a Lamb that has been slaughtered, who takes the scroll from the hand of God. In response to this, the beings described in chapter 4 begin to sing a new song to God (Revelation 5:5-10).

This passage ends with a series of praises and responses. The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures sing a song praising Jesus for His worthiness to enact God's judgment. In response, a number of angels respond by praising Jesus. This praise is then echoed by every creature in creation: "in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them" (Revelation 5:9-14).

What do the living creatures and elders proclaim about the Lamb in their song? What do they say that He alone has done? (8-10)

After seeing Jesus take the scroll, John will begin to describe the judgments which follow. These "seal judgments" will be described specifically in Revelation chapters 6 through 8. The seventh seal includes the judgments contained in the seven "trumpet judgments," which begin in chapter 8.

Source: Revelation: The Ultimate Hope In Christ, Dr. David Jeremiah
Bible Study Series: Revealing Jesus in Revelation, I. Gordan

Olive Branch Community Church
Reverend Janice Preston, Associate Minister
Wednesday – Bible Study
January 15, 2025
CHAPTERS 6 - 7
Life, Hope & Truth

Setting the Stage

Please read:

Job 39:19-25 – Details the strength of a horse

Matthew Chapter 24 – Jesus tells about the Future on the Mount of Olives

Zechariah 6:1-8: The Four Chariots and the Four Horsemen – doing God’s work

A quick look at our world today reveals some terrifying realities – wars, starvation, disease, dictators, biological terrorism, wildfires, and snow storms. Some might think the cataclysmic events that the Bible calls the Tribulation have already begun. But in reality, these are just birth pangs of something far worse to come, and those events begin in this next section of Revelation.

Previously, we saw that John followed Jesus’ instructions to write down the things he saw (Revelation 1), the things which are (see Revelation 2-3), and the things to come, beginning with the scene around God’s throne in heaven (Revelation 4-5). It was there that John witnessed Jesus, the Lion of Judah and the Lamb of God, taking the scroll from the One on the throne. John also saw seven seals on the scroll, each representing a coming judgment.

The breaking of the first four seals releases four horsemen who bring war, famine, and death. In our day, the idea of a horse being an instrument of judgment seems unusual. But the horse would have been readily understood as such a metaphor in the biblical world. In battle, the strength and fearlessness of the horse were respected (see, for example, Job 39:19-25). The horse was thought more of as a weapon of war than it was as an agricultural asset or mode of transportation.

Four times in this section of Revelation, we read one of the four living creatures saying “Come and see” (6:1-7). In most translations of the Bible, the command is directed to John. However, he is already there, so it might be better to read the word using its alternate meaning: go or proceed. The command to “come and see” thus issues the command for each of the four horsemen to “go out” and “proceed forth” in fulfilling their mission of executing judgment against the earth.

1. The rider of the white horse carries a bow with no arrows and wears a crown that “was given to him. While some scholars believe this rider is Christ, however, more believe that he represents the Antichrist, who has his power given to him and carries no arrows because he conquers in the name of false peace. The rider of the red horse personifies

war, the red color speaking to the shedding of blood. What is each rider's purpose (verses 1-4)

2. The rider of the black horse represents famine, which often occurs as a result of war. While the rich will not suffer as much, their "oil and wine" will not be harmed, and the average person will border on starvation. What power will God give to these riders (see verses 5-8)?
3. When the fifth seal is opened, John sees the "souls of those who had been slain for the word of God" under the altar and hears their cries for justice. Believers in Christ are raptured at the beginning of the Tribulation; these souls represent those who come to faith during the Tribulation. Although the passage doesn't describe the events of the fifth seal, what clue does it offer? What is given to these individuals (see verses 9-11)?
4. The breaking of the sixth seal ushers in a series of catastrophic events. Although the natural phenomena that are described, an earthquake, a blockage of sunlight, or a meteor show, are not as unusual as individual events, the severity of these collective events will be unprecedented on Earth. How will the people respond to this crisis (see verses 12-17)?
5. After the breaking of the sixth seal, God demonstrates His control over the events taking place by sending His angels to temporarily hold back further judgments. This "phase" in the action reveals there will be periods of God's grace during the Tribulation. What does He allow to happen at this time during the lull between judgments (see verses 7:1-3)?
6. In the Old Testament, we read of God "sealing" or protecting His people from impending judgment. He protected Noah and his family from the Flood, Rahab, and her family from the destruction of Jericho, and 7,000 prophets in Elijah's day from kneeling before Baal. What can we learn about the identity of the 144,000 whom He seals here (verses 7:3-8)?
7. John now sees a multitude of people, comprised of all races and nationalities, standing before the throne of God. They are clothed in white robes (symbolizing salvation and righteousness) and carry palm branches (symbolizing deliverance and celebration). This group likely represents those who are saved during the Tribulation, as a result of the ministry of the 144,000 witnesses just mentioned. What do these individuals declare before the throne? What is the reaction in heaven to their salvation (verses 7:9-14)?
8. One of the elders explains to John that the multitude represents those who have "come out of the great tribulation." Rather than being taken out of these afflictions, God planned to deliver them through their trials, which indicates the gospel will continue to be preached after the church is raptured. What relief will these saints find in heaven (see verses 7:15-17)?

Reviewing the Story

After taking the scroll from the One on the throne, the Lamb begins to open its seals. As each seal is opened, it triggers a new judgment of God on earth. The first four seals unleash four horsemen who bring false peace, warfare, famine, and death. The opening of the fifth seal is met by the cries of martyrs for their deaths to be avenged. The sixth seal triggers a series of unprecedented natural disasters, a great earthquake, a darkened sun and moon, falling stars, and general terror on Earth. Yet the gospel persists, leading to the “sealing” of 144,000 witnesses for Christ who, in turn, reach a countless multitude of people with the gospel.

9. What power is given to Death and Hades during the Tribulation (Revelation 6:8)?
10. What is the cry of the people on earth when the sixth seal is broken (6:16)?
11. What happens in heaven before the seventh seal is broken (7:2-3)
12. What did the elder reveal to John about the identity of the multitude (7:14)?
13. What is your reaction when you read about these judgments that will fall on the earth?
14. What are some ways that God has used you to witness to others about Christ?

Three Takeaways

In this section of Revelation, the apostle John describes nothing less than hell on earth. As each seal is broken in succession, it unleashes a devastating consequence against the people of this world. By the time the sixth seal is broken, it is as if the judgments from God are shaking the very foundations of the earth, “every mountain and island was moved out of its place” (6:14). When we look at these “sixth seal” judgments, we come up with three inescapable truths.

- First sin brings about horrible consequences. All of human society will be impacted by the breaking of the seals, and no one will be exempt from God’s judgment. Even those who profess to not know God will understand that what is happening is coming from the hand of the Almighty Himself (6:17). The events of the sixth seal are God’s response to the horror of sin. No human being can argue with the Lord when they see His divine displeasure at work.
- Second, sin brings about an impulse to hide. Our human instinct is to hide when we are confronted with sin. Adam and Eve were the first to hide from God when they sinned, and we have been doing the same ever since. During the Tribulation, people will hide themselves any way they can, seemingly to protect themselves from physical harm, but in

reality, to protect themselves from the all-seeing eye of God. Thankfully, through Jesus Christ, we no longer have to hide from God because the guilt and shame of our sins have been removed.

- Third, sin brings about a hardness of heart. Sin can so harden the human heart that people would rather face the terrible consequences of their mistakes than admit their guilt and be forgiven. In his vision, John sees people crying out, praying, in a sense for mountains to fall on them and shield them from God's presence. You would think these people would feel compelled at this point to fall on their faces and repent. But instead, we find they would rather die. This is the sad result of sin's hardening effect on the heart.

The takeaway for us is not to take lightly God's attitude toward our sins. Even for believers, sin is still sin. Seeing God's response to the sin of the world during the sixth seal judgment should motivate us to confess our sins before God. When we do, "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Source: Dr. David Jeremiah

Olive Branch Community Church
Reverend Janice Preston, Associate Minister
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CHAPTER 7

The opening of the first six seals sets before us scenes that would shake our souls.

- The first seal is opened and goes forth conquering and to conquer; it goes forth and it kills.
- The second seal is opened and much blood is shed upon the earth.
- The third seal is opened and the earth is ravaged with famine.
- The fourth seal is opened and death visits the earth, with Hades in its wake.
- The fifth seal is opened and we learn the lot of the church as we hear the cry of the martyrs, “How long, O Lord, holy and true until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”

While the sixth seal is opened at the end of Chapter 6, it ushers in a series of catastrophic events. Although the natural phenomena that are described are not unusual as individual events, the severity of these collective events will be unprecedented on earth. Chapter 6 closes with the sixth seal and the seventh is not opened until chapter 8. Chapter 7 then, is a parenthesis, but it answers some very important questions. From the very nature of the judgments of the preceding section it would appear no one could possibly be delivered physically, much less saved spiritually. In fact, these judgments give rise to the desperate question at the end of chapter 6, “for the great day of their wrath has come, who is able to stand?” Chapter 7 answers this question and demonstrates that even in this awesome display of God’s wrath, the mercy of God is still present and seeking to bring men to Himself. Even in this wrath, God is providing an opportunity for men to be saved (Matthew 24:14). (Keathly)

The Number Four - corresponds to the four corners of the earth, the four winds of the earth. In other words, these things are universal and affect the entire earth. The four winds which they hold in their hands have in view judgment, which is confirmed from verses 2 and 3. In verse 2 we are told that the four angels have been granted the power to harm the earth and the sea. In verse 3 they are expressly told not to harm the earth, the sea, or the trees.

1. Who are these four angels?
2. What is their significance?
3. What are we to make of them?
4. Who are the 144,000?
5. Is there a difference in the 12 Tribes in Revelation versus the 12 Tribes of Israel?
6. Describe the “great multitude” (i.e, their nationalities, their position, their spiritual condition)?
7. Discuss the significance of the White Robes and Palm branches.

8. The Elders (see 4:4) – explain
9. The Four living beings (see 4:6) – explain
10. Explain the great tribulation – (7:14)

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Chapter 8

Let's review what has happened up until now. The Church of Jesus Christ has been raptured or taken up into heaven before the beginning of the Tribulation on earth. Most of the Jews and Gentiles who have come to faith in Christ during this time have been martyred. On earth, the seal judgments are taking their toll. Plagues, wars, scarcity of food, natural disasters, and persecution have left the world a desolate place.

Yet the end is still not in sight. More judgments are to come when the seventh seal is broken. When it is opened, seven trumpet judgments will be unleashed. When we reach the seventh trumpet judgment, it will sound forth seven bowls of judgment that will be poured out. In other words, the seventh seal contains within it the rest of the book of Revelation and the plan of God for planet earth. Furthermore, as we get into the seven trumpet judgments, we find Satan's presence in the man of sin, the Antichrist, becoming increasingly more manifest.

However, before any of that happens, there is a pause. What is about to be unveiled is so serious that it is preceded by a period of silence in heaven. Up to this point, there has been an intensity of worship taking place, angels, elders, saints, and living creatures all singing and shouting praise to God. But all this suddenly ceases, and there is absolute quiet in the heavenly realm. It is a foreshadowing of the solemn revelation that is about to be made.

1. When the seventh seal is broken, what does John hear? (See Revelation 8:1) What do you think is the significance of this?
2. Describe the scene John relates to us in verse 3. What do you think these things represent?
3. What does John see happening in verse 4?
4. In verse 3 John saw the angel fill his censer with incense (representing the prayers of the saints). In verse 4 the smoke of the incense (i.e., the prayers of the church) ascends into the presence of God. Now what happens in verse 5? What is the significance of this?
5. What is the first thing John saw in this present vision? What does John report that he saw in verse 6? What is significant about the event John saw in verses 3-5 (the scene depicting the prayers of God's people?)