

6 Now I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, "Come!"

² And I looked, and behold, a white horse! And its rider had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering, and to conquer.

³ When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" ⁴ And out came another horse, bright red. Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another, and he was given a great sword.

⁵ When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" And I looked, and behold, a black horse! And its rider had a pair of scales in his hand. ⁶ And I heard what seemed to be 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 wine!"

⁷ When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!" ⁸ And I looked, and behold, a pale horse! And its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth.

⁹ When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne.

¹⁰ They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" ¹¹ Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

¹² When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, ¹³ and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. ¹⁴ The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. ¹⁵ Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, ¹⁶ calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb,

¹⁷ for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

7 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree. ² Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, ³ saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." ⁴ And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:

⁵ 12,000 from the tribe of Judah were sealed,
12,000 from the tribe of Reuben,
12,000 from the tribe of Gad,

⁶ 12,000 from the tribe of Asher,
12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali,
12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh,

⁷ 12,000 from the tribe of Simeon,
12,000 from the tribe of Levi,
12,000 from the tribe of Issachar,

⁸ 12,000 from the tribe of Zebulun,
12,000 from the tribe of Joseph,
12,000 from the tribe of Benjamin were sealed.

⁹ After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from **every** nation, from **all** tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, **and** to the Lamb!" ¹¹ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying, "**Amen!** Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

¹³ Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" ¹⁴ I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

¹⁵ "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.

16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore;
the sun shall not strike them,
nor any scorching heat.

17 For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be
their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of living water,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

8 When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was
silence in heaven for about half an hour. ² Then I saw
the seven angels who stand before God, and seven
trumpets were given to them. ³ And another angel
came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and
he was given much incense to offer with the prayers
of all the saints on the golden altar before the
throne, ⁴ and the smoke of the incense, with the
prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand
of the angel. ⁵ Then the angel took the censer and
filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the
earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings,
flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

In the introduction I gave, as we began our series on the book of Revelation, we talked about some of the various ways that people interpret the book of Revelation. 2 of those ways, are the historicist view, and the futurist view. The historicist believes that the Book of Revelation charts history from Jesus'

first coming to His second coming. The Futurist believes it looks forwards to the end of time.

And some of you might have felt “a bit let down”, when I said “I actually believe there are elements of truth to all **four** of the main ways of interpreting the Revelation”. But I also said, that you’ll probably find that I lean more towards the futurist view...

So, are chapters 6 & 7 that we read today, describing to us, events that have already happened, and are already happening in the world, or are they describing future events that will unfold, in God’s final judgment, at the end of history????

And once again, I may probably disappoint you, by telling you that I believe it’s both. – Let me explain...

We are now getting into the sections of the Revelation, that many people don’t like to read. Some find it too gruesome – too horrific – too terrifying, to believe that this could possibly be God’s will, or His plan for History... And it doesn’t fit at all, with their view of Jesus, and His love...

And yet, in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, **and** Lukeⁱ, Jesus said pretty much exactly the same thing about the signs of the end of the age... And if we take a bit of a look at Matthew 24, it helps us to understand when these will occur.

In Matthew 24, Jesus talks about wars and rumours of wars. He talks about nations rising up against nations. He talks about famines and earthquakes... And He tells us, that these are signs of the end – that they are the beginnings of birth-

pains – but He also says, “But don’t be afraid, because they are **not** the end”... Alright, they are **like** the end, but they are **not** the end.

And I suspect that this is why we have trouble deciding, whether this is something happening in the present, or whether it’s something to happen in the future... Because these things **are** happening now. – it is **like** the end... But we are **yet** to see, a major, world-wide expression of these things, that will **herald** the end...

I’ll explain that a bit more, as we start ‘unpacking’ the 7 seals.

In chapter 5, we are in the throne room of Heaven, and there is a scroll, containing God’s plan for history. But this scroll, is sealed with 7 seals, and the only one who is worthy to break those seals, to both reveal God’s plan, and to set it all into motion, is The Lamb of God – The Lord Jesus Christ...

The breaking of the seals, allow the scroll to be opened, to reveal the whole of God’s plan. And it almost seems to me, that this section of the Revelation – as Jesus breaks the seals, we are given something like a ‘Table of contents’ of what will be contained within the Scroll... Because, when the 7th seal is broken, there are then 7 trumpets, which describe (in more detail), the wrath of God, that He pours out on the evil...

And then after the 7th trumpet, there will be 7 bowls, which describe (in even greater detail) the horrors that come upon those who reject God, and persecute His people still...

And so, these 7 seals, are bit like a table of contents, telling us of what to expect, as we read further into the Revelation....

Jesus breaks 4 of the seals (one by one), and what's known as "The 4 horsemen of the Apocalypse" are released.

First, a white horse, and its rider had a bow and a crown,,, representing a ruler, bent on conquest. And I find it interesting – some of the commentaries I read on this, identified these 4 horsemen, as demonic powers, but the Bible doesn't actually say that... In fact, it is God who at least **allows**, them to do what they do – no matter how terrible it seems...

But all the way through history, ruler after ruler, has arisen, bent on conquest – wanting to rule the world... Hitler; Napoleon; Alexander; Hannibal; Various Roman emperors... Nations have risen: Egypt; Assyria; Babylon; The Roman empire; The British Empire; France; Spain.... We could even look to the rise of ideologies, where some would want to see the world conquered over to their particular political system: Fascism; Nazism; Communism; Republicanism; Even democracy... Throughout history, these ideals have been forced upon cultures, to be conquered over from some other political system.... And much blood has been shed because of it...

The second horse, was bright red. And its rider, was permitted to take peace from the Earth... To me, this seems like something other than merely war – it's describing anarchy – where people slay one another – where they do whatever they

like... It seems like it's describing a situation where justice has gone out the window... How awful...

And often, anarchy follows conquest:

We've seen this type of thing happen in recent history. *When Saddam Hussein was beaten in Iraq, his once iron-fist control, was released, and the country descended into anarchyⁱⁱ... Whole people-groups were annihilated. Christians especially were targeted and killed, by anyone who wanted to give-it-a-go... And there was no one to intervene...*

With civil uprisings happening in other middle-eastern countries (right now), ISIS has come in on the back of these, and they perpetrate all sorts of evil... They do what they like – they kill who they like, and there's no one to dish out justice...

The third horse, was a black horse, and its rider had a set of scales in his hand. This image represents famine. A quart of wheat (that's close enough to a litre of wheat), for a day's wages... That, is a maintenance ration. It's describing a famine, where the price of basic food stuffs, is so high, that a person would have to work a whole day, just to earn enough to feed themselves for that day. And there's nothing left for clothing or shelter. If they want to feed their family, they'd have to eat the less palatable grain (Barley)... And they've still got nothing left for clothing; or shelter; or medicine...

And yet the luxuries are unaffected – wine and oil are still available...

And don't we see this following the anarchy that follows war??? Most of the population can barely get enough to eat, but the rich and powerful, can continue to obtain their luxuries.

And the fourth horse, was a pale horse, ... Death.

Famine; Disease; Wild beasts...

So often, in war-torn countries, the biggest death toll, for a people weakened by starvation, and a disruption of civil services, comes from cholera; dysentery; diarrhoea...

The flu pandemic following WWI killed more people than WWI did (by about 4 times).

And we've seen this unfold through history:

- A ruler bent on conquest makes war, and conquers
- Anarchy follows, and mass murders
- Followed by famine
- Followed by death

This is happening in the world today... and as Jesus said, "It's **like** the end, but it's **not** the end."

But I believe this is also telling us, how the end **will** begin:

There will arise, a world leader, bent on conquest... And he (or maybe she) will make war (on a world scale)... We've never seen a world war. WWI and WWII – we call them

world wars, but much of the world was never involved in them...

- And this ruler will conquer, on a **world** scale.
- There will be anarchy, where people slaughter one another, on a **world** scale.
- There will be **famine**, on a world scale.
- And there will be disease and death, on a world scale...

And 25% of the world's population will die... That's how we know, that this is a future event, because this has never happened... No conflict in history, and no pestilence in history, has ever led to a 25% death toll across the world... This is yet to come. This, will be the beginning of the end.

Let's move on.

As Jesus breaks the 5th seal, our eyes turn from Earth to what is happening in heaven...

And John sees the souls of those who have been killed for being faithful to Jesus... They **had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne.**

These are the disciples of Jesus (Christians), who have been so very faithful, throughout history, and faithful as the world enters its final stages – They are so faithful, that they would even die, before they ceased to be witnesses for Jesus. And the faithful who had been slain, cry out to God, “How long?” “How long is this going to go on?” “How long until You judge and avenge our blood?”

And they were given a white robe, which symbolises holiness (and their faithfulness), and they are told to rest. Rest, because there are more who are yet to die for being faithful.

Our Lord knows how many of His children have been executed for their faith. Even today, all over the world, Christians are being starved; imprisoned; beaten; enslaved; and executed...

And here's the thing, every Christian who's martyred, goes straight to glory. The Lord knows how many have died. He knows how many more will **yet** die, as they stand faithful, as witnesses for Him.

And so we come to the **6th seal**:

Jesus has told us that earthquakes and what-not would happen, and they're **like** the end, but they're **not** the end... But now, as this 6th seal gets broken, we catch a glimpse of the cataclysmic global and cosmic upheaval, that is in store for the heavens and the Earth, when the end **does** come.

- There is a great earthquake
- All of a sudden, our atlases – even Google Earth is out of date
- Islands and mountains disappear
- The sun turns pitch black
- The full moon looks like blood
- The stars fall from the sky
- And in fact, the sky disappears

And all the kings of earth; the high ranking military; the rich and powerful – everyone – slave and free, are so scared, they'd rather be buried alive, than to face the judgment of God, and they say, "hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, ¹⁷ for the great day of their wrath has come, and who **can** stand?"

When the terrible day of judgment comes, "Who can stand?" We've only had like a table of contents so far, and we're already asking the question, "When the day of wrath comes, who **will** be able to stand?"

And that's why I didn't want to take chapter 6 on its own today, because chapter 7 tells us who **can** stand on the Day of The Lord's Wrath...

John has an image of four angels standing at the four corners of the earth and they're ready to bring on the destruction. But another angel gives them a message – "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads."

And 144 000 are sealed.

Now, there's been a lot of debate, and a lot of ink has been spilled over the 144 000. Who are they???

Well, very clearly, it's talking about God's chosen people, Israel – 12 000 from each of the 12 tribes... But the tribe of Dan is missing, And the tribe of Manasseh (Manasseh was one of Joseph's sons), is listed as a separate tribe, so the line of Joseph is getting 2 bites of the cherry... Why is the tribe of Dan excluded?

Well, we're not told. But we do know that the tribe of Dan, were the first tribe of Israel, to fall (wholesale) into the sin of idolatryⁱⁱⁱ – they were the first to abandon God for idols...

So, who are these 144 000? The Jehovah Witnesses used to say, If you're a Jehovah Witness, you're one of the 144 000... But they seemed to stop saying that when their numbers grew to more than 144 000...

The number 144 000, along with most numbers in revelation, is most probably symbolic.

Many bible scholars believe it is symbolic of the whole people of God. The number 1000 means "a lot". There's 12 tribes; 12 apostles. $12 * 12 = 144$, meaning all the people of God, and lots of them – 144 000... That's what some believe.

But the fact that it is separated out, and 12 tribes of Israel are all individually listed, –surely it must be telling us, that even in the whole people of God, there is a very special place, for the people of Israel (God's chosen people), who are faithful to Jesus Christ.

We don't know, who these 144 000 are, but whether they represent a certain segment of Israel, or whether they represent the whole people of God, what does it mean for them to be "sealed"? They are getting God's seal before the destruction of creation... What does that mean? – There's lots of options, but I think the best explanation is this:

In Ephesians 1, Paul talks about how Christians are sealed by the Holy Spirit ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. ^{iv}

In Ephesians 4, he talks about how we should be living faithfully, and not to **grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom** we were sealed.

The seal is the Holy Spirit – God gives His Holy Spirit, to His children, to help us to stand strong, and remain faithful, through all of the persecutions, and all of the terrible times of the end. We know that the Holy Spirit is the comforter. And so the Holy Spirit gives us power and strength, comfort and peace, through all of the terrible tribulation. And we'll see that in V9, which we come to now:

John then looks, and he sees **a great multitude** a group of people who couldn't be numbered – a people of every nation; of every tribe; of every language. And these are **standing before the throne and before the Lamb** .

Chapter 6 ended with the question “Who can stand before God on the day of His wrath?” I’ll tell you who can stand – the faithful, from every nation...

They’re not cowering before God – they’re full of praise...

You know, some people read the book of Revelation, and they’re terrified about what’s going to come... Some people just want to block up their ears “No, I don’t want to hear this”... (they might even stop coming to church while we’re in this series)...

And let me tell you, “If what we’ve been reading today scares you, maybe that’s an indicator that your heart isn’t right with God.”... Because these faithful, dressed in white robes, are worshipping God. They’re standing before Him and praising the Father and the Son, for the salvation that He’s bringing. Revelation shouldn’t scare the Christian... It’s a blessing... Every time we pray, “Your Kingdom come”, we’re praying, “Lord, bring it on.”...

Who are this multitude dressed in white robes? – One of the elders asked John that very question, and he said “I don’t know, you’d better tell me.”

“These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

There's only one way to stand before God on the day of His wrath – And that is to have our sins washed away by the blood of the lamb... All of the great and mighty and powerful, will cower, but those who are His faithful – those who are sealed by the Holy Spirit, and endure to the end – these are the ones who will stand.

And I want you to note here also, that this is in the present tense. The Greek literally says: “**These are the ones who are coming out of the great tribulation**”.

There is a relatively new teaching, which has only been around a couple of hundred years, called the “pre-tribulation rapture”. It is a belief that is gaining popularity (mainly from churches in the united states, and it's a belief that has been made popular by the “Left Behind” series, but I don't believe it is biblical).

The pre-tribulation rapture view, believes that Christians are going to be snatched out of the world **before** the great tribulation occurs. And that may be ‘wishful thinking’, but that doesn't make it true... And right here, in the Revelation, we have the great tribulation, and the faithful are coming out of it – it is a present reality. They didn't come out before it began.

How are they coming out? And the language used, seems to indicate that they are martyrs. How are they coming out of the great tribulation? They are faithful witnesses to Jesus, and they are being killed because of it....

In the great tribulation, they've undergone terrible suffering, but:

They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

¹⁵ "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.

¹⁶ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.

¹⁷ For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

You can see (can't you), that these who have suffered terribly, through the great tribulation – these who have been sealed by the Holy Spirit, and remained faithful – what a wonderful reprieve – what a wonderful rescue – what a wonderful salvation... - to be sheltered by God in His presence.

I think we might leave it there for today. I did want to explain the breaking of the 7th seal, and how this leads to the 7 trumpets, as the wrath of God is explained more fully...

But that can all wait until next week.

Let's pray,

Lord Jesus Christ,

We confess to you, that we are fearful for you to break the seals on the scroll...

And yet Lord, we pray, "Even so, come Lord Jesus".

Lord, we thank You, that You have told us, that those who read this Revelation, will be blessed.

And Lord, as we study it, we're beginning to understand the blessing.

Heavenly Father, when the big trouble begins,

And even through the little glimpses

of the big trouble that we get even now,

Please help us to always remain faithful to you.

Lord, we praise you for the gift of Your Holy Spirit, who seals us, And keeps us strong and faithful.

Lord, we thank you for the blood of Jesus,

That washes us, and makes us white as snow,

That on the day of Your Wrath, we can stand,

with confidence before Your throne.

Come Lord Jesus.

Come with Your justice, and Your righteous wrath.

Rescue Your faithful, and set things right,

We pray.

Lord, we also pray for Christians today, who are being persecuted.

Help them to be the very best witnesses for you,

And receive them into Your glory,

And shelter our Brothers and Sisters with Your presence,
under the Altar

We pray these things in Jesus' name,
Amen.

ⁱ Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21

ⁱⁱ <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,442987,00.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ Judges 18

^{iv} Ephesians 1:14