



The Last Word on Evil (Rev 6-7)

I sat on the beach during my holidays, watching the waves thunder toward the shore – while reading and meditating on the imagery of Revelation.

It is commonly known that waves travel towards the shore in cycles of seven, with the seventh being the greatest and most powerful wave of all.

It is truly remarkable how creation reverberates with its submission to God's cycle of sevens.

In today's passage we are confronted again with the symbolism of the number seven.

Remember, John saw a scroll, with writing on the inside and the outside, and it was sealed with seven seals (5:1).

But the contents of this sealed scroll were a mystery to all, especially the angels.

Point 1 | The scroll with the seven seals represents God's redemptive plan for humanity – previously hidden, but now revealed.

But, hang on, what is this scroll?

We get a clue from the Apostle Paul.

One of his big topics was how God's mysterious plan had been kept hidden, a secret, from the beginning. But now, finally, God's redemptive plan had been revealed (Ephesians 3:9, Colossians 1:25, 1 Peter 1:12).

The scroll represents God's redemptive plan or story told throughout Scripture – with all its twists, turns, triumphs and tragedies. It includes, not just the good news of Jesus, but coming justice and judgements for God's people.

For centuries, God's people had cried,

"Lord, how long until you release your justice and judgement on the earth?"

But, up to now, *"No one was worthy – no one can execute justice."* (5:3)

But as John watched the great scene in heaven, finally the One who is worthy is found: Jesus Christ, the lamb who had been slain, but now stands victorious, stepped forward to break open the seven seals.

Today, we'll look at the first six seals.

Point 2 | Evil is given permission to thunder upon the earth

As the seals are broken open, our ears get bombarded with wave upon wave of destruction falling upon the earth.

With that said, we must be careful not to interpret the seven seals as events which occur in a chronological order. Rather, the sevenfold unveiling is an overlapping of the types of calamities that have washed over *and* will wash over the earth.

We hear as the first seal is broken, a gallant white horse gallops towards the earth, winning battles and gaining victory.

The second horse, a fiery red, is given a mighty sword with which to take peace from the earth.

The third horse is black, and its rider holds scales.

The fourth is a pale green, its rider named Death and his companion, the Grave.

I've just introduced to you the infamous 'Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse'.

Who are they? What do they represent? And how can our good and holy God, allow such destruction to come upon the earth?

Now, in the process of preparing this message I read quite a few commentaries all providing guidance on the identity of these characters – and they didn't all agree [which I found most unhelpful!]

It was the identity of the rider of the first white horse, where their opinions differed.

Surely white represents purity, and a crown, God-given authority?

So, some suggest the rider is Jesus, the same who is called 'faithful and true' later in Chapter 19 (Rev 19:11). However, I find that suggestion problematic since Jesus is the Lamb who is breaking open the seals.

So, when I read Michael Wilcock's suggestion to coincide John's picture with Jesus' teaching in Matthew 24, I found their identity became less blurry.

Jesus foretold what would happen before His final return:

He told us, *"Don't let anyone mislead you, for many will come in my name claiming, 'I am the Messiah' They will deceive many."* (Matthew 24:5).

The first horseman bears a resemblance to an image of goodness. The horse is white, the colour of purity, and the rider is given a crown, the symbol of royalty.

So, I would suggest, this first horseman represents the power of the evil one, imitating Jesus, conquering hearts through deceit. Certainly, we see our world slipping further and further into moral decay as the white horseman continues to ride out deceiving even the church of God.

Next, Jesus says *"you will hear of wars and threats of wars"* (24:6). And, so the second horseman is war and conflict.

In opposing the Lamb, the evil one harnesses the selfish unforgiving pride of humanity that is opposed to the self-sacrificing humility of God's kingdom.

One leads to peace the other leads to conflict. It takes away peace and turns people against one another.

Next, Jesus tells us, *"there will be famines and earthquakes in many parts of the world."* (24:7)
So, the imagery of the third horseman appears to refer to markets and economics.

Extortionate prices for basics like wheat and barley, yet the luxuries of oil and wine remain unaffected. Greed drives what is called market forces and as a result the poor are further disadvantaged and denied justice.

The fourth horseman, a pale green, is the colour of death. So, he is easily recognised as the spectre of death resulting from violence, famine, disease and disaster. This is the natural outcome for a fallen humanity, humanity in opposition to God.

So, the breaking of the first four seals releases the infamous horsemen of the apocalypse.

Ever since Jesus entered his glory, after his resurrection, their mission has been to take Jesus and his people down; to oppose the cries of creation and the cries of God's people for the kingdom to come; opposing God's kingdom of truth, peace, justice and eternal life.

We are all vividly aware there is indeed a battle going on. As long as the Lamb is on the throne, there will be fierce resistance that should never be underestimated.

We, the followers of the Lamb, God's servants, the Church, seek to go the way of the Lamb. So resistance increases. And the Church, because we are still in the world, gets caught up in the battle.

Is this not what Ezekiel saw? He spoke of 'four sore acts of judgement' (14:21), yet he also promised that the faithful would be delivered (14:22).

But, when we see the fifth seal broken, we wonder how the righteous are delivered?

Point 3 | The fifth seal: God's people are promised deliverance, but it is an eternal deliverance.

John saw *"under the altar the souls of all who had been martyred for the word of God and for being faithful to their testimony."* (6:9)

Indeed, Jesus foresaw in Matthew 24:9, *"you will be arrested, persecuted, and killed. You will be hated all over the world because you are my followers."*

No! The church is not exempt from the forces of evil that thunder throughout the earth.

But, right in the middle of the plundering of persecution brought by the fifth seal, the sixth seal is opened.

And finally, in the opening of the sixth seal, we see the picture of the great Day of the Lord - when it will end.

What do we learn from this onslaught of evil?

At the beginning and upon the release of every wave, God always holds ultimate power. Like when we studied the book of Job, Satan is given permission to harm God's servant, so here too the reign of evil is ultimately under God's control.

That is why the martyr's cry, "How long before you bring your judgement?" receives the answer, "it is but for a time". There is a limit that God has set in place.

As we move to Chapter 7, we get the answer to 'what will become of God's people? How are they to be preserved?'

Point 4 | The seal of God is marked on the foreheads of the servants of God

Now, when we step into the picture story of chapter 7, we kind of go back in time – we see what took place BEFORE the destructive events we just read were permitted to be released.

An angel shouted,

"Wait! Don't harm the land or the sea or the trees until we have placed the seal of God on the foreheads of his servants."(7:3)

Let's explore this 'seal' – because even in our world today, the notion of being 'marked' with a seal or a sign is still very much being referred to – especially on Facebook! Indeed, in a few minutes, we will use the same language of being marked and sealed.

The symbolism of being 'sealed' relates to ownership.

In one of Ezekiel's visions, the Lord tells him that six executioners were coming to punish the city. But 'a man clothed in linen' was told to 'put a mark upon the foreheads' of God's faithful people, BEFORE the six 'executioners' were permitted to harm the city for its sins (verses 1–6).

When we turn to the New Testament, Paul tells us that we have been sealed with the promised Holy Spirit when we first put our faith in Christ (Ephesians 1:13).

Today, we will ask for God's 'seal' to be placed on little Caleb, symbolizing God's 'ownership' of him. We mark him, with the waters of baptism, as 'God's own child.'

As Caleb is too young to declare Christ has his personal Saviour, his already 'sealed parent and Godparents, make the declaration and promise on his behalf. Later, he will make his own faith commitment, bearing the mark of Christ as he grows into adulthood.

So, if we could see what was occurring in the Spirit realm, when the sign of the cross is placed on Caleb's forehead, we would see that he is 'marked' with God's name – and every angel here with us would be rejoicing at the sight, and every demon who happened to creep in, would surely shudder!

From the moment the mark is placed upon us, our eternal safety was guaranteed.

So, when the searing winds of danger blow, the servant of God is found to have been sealed already against their power. The horsemen ride out on their career of destruction; but the church has been made indestructible.

So, by way of a contemporary application of this passage: while we are on the subject of 'seals', the vaccine is NOT the mark of the beast (13:16) – for already those in Christ have been sealed with God's own Spirit.

Application | What is our take home message?

There are two important truths we learn from today's picture stories:

Firstly, we are reassured that no matter how much evil rages around the world, God has firmly put limits on the destruction that erupts.

Secondly, we do not walk in this dangerous world unprotected. Rather, we wear the seal of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

When the angels of God look at us, they see the seal of God on our foreheads. They know that we are the ones who have been bought with the precious blood of Christ and are now His precious possession.

So, wear your seal with confidence! And let God's seal shine brightly throughout this dangerous, uncertain world.



Revelation Devotional - Week 4

This week we delve into chapters 6 and 7 of the book of Revelation when the opening of the seven seals on the scroll is described. This week we look at the first six seals.

As we live and move in this dangerous and uncertain world, may we be reassured our faithful God has placed limits on what evil may permeate our globe. May God bless you and comfort you through this devotional.