

Seal the Deal

Introduction....the Seven Seals...

So let me remind you of where we are....**TIMELINE OF SEALS AND TRUMPETS**. The next event on our prophetic clock is the Rapture of the Church. Some time....likely shortly thereafter, brings the arrival of the Antichrist...and that starts the final seven years of Daniels prophecy start ticking. Each seal begins the tribulation. So we are 4 seals in and still in the first half of the 7 year tribulation.

We have been looking at the 7 seal judgments of Revelation. The first 4 brought the 4 Horses of the Apocalypse...we studied them last time. With the First Seal broken, the Tribulation began. The arrival and recognition of the AntiChrist starts the Last 7 years ticking.

The World has been hit with Famine, Disease and Death....and out of that the Antichrist will bring peace. But with the 5th seal....God announces His arrival.....Jesus is coming back and all of creation will be shaken. But before we get there,

We should note that the scroll's contents are not here being revealed. Only the seals are being broken in chapter six. As each seal is opened, John sees one of the four horsemen riding away, then the souls under the altar, then the heavenly signs. But all seven seals must be removed before the scroll can be opened and "read." The seventh seal is not opened until 8:1. We are probably to understand that the scroll itself is not opened until the sounding of the seven trumpets.

What do the seals represent? The first four seals can be seen as portraying problems such as war and famine that have always been with us. In a way, they show the self-defeating character of sin, which has characterized the world from its beginning. The seals, then, could represent a dramatic portrayal of the world's self-inflicted judgment upon itself. They represent the terrible effects of man's way, which works against the peace and abundance God has in mind for humanity.

The horsemen must be given permission by the Lamb and God's agents before they can accomplish the evil they intend to do. This implies that it is God who is Lord of history and man's activities.

Remember that in Rev 1-3 we see the church....what was and what is....7 letters to 7 very real churches. But between chapters 4-19 there is not a single mention of the church. So where is the church during end times events?

So...where is the church? Paul answered this for us in writing to the persecuted church at Thessalonica. That church was being slaughtered and persecuted. They wanted to know where those who had died had gone.

Paul said that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord...Most of the saints of the church over the last 2000 years have died...so where is the church? Their Spirit is with Jesus.

So they wondered...if Christ came back today..what happens to those who are already with Him and what happens to those of us who are alive at that time?

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 (ESV) — 13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. **14** For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. **15** For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. **16** For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. **17** Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. **18** Therefore encourage one another with these words.

This is the rapture of the church. **TIMELINE** I believe that it occurs before the 4th Chapter of Revelation....before the Antichrist brings about world peace...and for that reason there is no mention of the church playing any role or enduring the 7 years of tribulation on earth. We are conspicuously absent. If you remember an earlier part of this series about the rapture, I explained why I believe in a pre-tribulation rapture and this is one of many supporting key points. Jesus rescues His bride from the tribulation to come and not just the great tribulation- the last 3.5 years.

When the seal judgments are released...we will be at the Behma Seat of Judgement and preparing for the wedding.

I think that it is important to note that each seal...each trumpet...each bowl will get worse and worse. God is revealing His power and authority much like He did with each of the plagues in Egypt. Each one offering people a chance to surrender to His will and do what He has commanded. Many will....others incredibly will not.

4 Seals in and it seems bad already...but we haven't even really begun. Jesus said it will be worse than anything ever experienced....and John sees it and is trying to describe it to us.

When God reveals the end times to followers...they all shudder. When God reveals the end times to non believers...they scoff.

When the scroll was read by the prophet Daniel.....He paled and passed outHe was told to seal it until the time of the end....These seven seals are being opened one by one....we have seen incredible famine, disease, death and the arrival of the Antichrist

And yet the contents of the scroll have not yet been unleashed. The scroll must be opened before it can be "read" or revealed. That will come with the seven trumpets. We still have seals 5-7 to discuss today.

Revelation 6:9 (ESV) — 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.

Who are these people? The church has already been raptured and reunited as the Bride for Christ....So these are believers who are slain for the word of God after the rapture. They became believers after the rapture and were killed for their new faith. These are tribulation saints the martyrs of the tribulation

The word “testimony” here comes from the Greek *martyria*. It means “witness.” Since Christians were often killed for being faithful witnesses of the testimony Christ had given them, they came to be called martyrs. The fifth seal, then, has a much more narrow focus and interest. It describes the witnessing community, willing even to die for the truth of Jesus Christ. Jesus had left no doubt that the church would be hated, persecuted, and that some of its members might be martyred. The synoptic Gospels carefully preserve Jesus’ warning about persecution

Matthew wrote: “You will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me” (24:9). John remembered Jesus’ words as well: “A time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God” (John 16:2).

In the Old Testament sacrifices, most of the blood was poured out at the bottom or base of the altar (Leviticus 4:7). The life or soul of the animals — and of humans — was said to be in the blood (Leviticus 17:11). Paul used the idea of an offering to describe the persecution he suffered and his imminent martyrdom. Both were, he said, “like a drink offering” (Philippians 2:17; 2 Timothy 4:6). In that sense, Revelation sees Christians who suffer persecution or martyrdom as sweet sacrifices offered to God.

Revelation is describing, in a graphic and meaningful way, that the new faithful have been killed for their convictions.

Revelation 6:9–11 (ESV) — 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.

There are a designated number of tribulation martyrs....People who came to Christ after the rapture and then were martyred for Him. God says...and we are not there yet...once everyone who must be martyred is killed....then I will avenge your blood.

Note how every moment....every thing...is under the direct hand of God. This is not the world spiraling out of control from one disaster to another....no it is the calculated, restrained, appropriate, perfect justice of God. God says....I have other martyrs on earth that remain there for my purposes.....they have not yet been beheaded yet...they are told by God to rest a little longer until the total number is complete.

I think we must pause here for a moment and soak in what is really happening. God will allow anything to happen on earth if it brings about the best eternal consequences. He doesn't say...there are people about to be martyred and I need to stop it....Likely these believers destined to martyrdom were crying out to God just as Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was likely flooded with people praying to be spared their beheading.

And if God was only focused on giving us a wrinkle free....risk free...worry free life on earth...He would save us from anything we don't like or want. But unlike most of us....God's perspective is first and foremost what happens to us eternally.

You see God realizes that the real show is not during our time on earth....This is just the waiting room for believers. Our destiny and our future is eternal....and God will allow anything to happen to any of His children during our fleeting time on earth...if it changes eternity for us or for anyone else.

God requires during these end times for a certain number of martyrs to be slain. Somehow their death by execution will bring others into the eternal kingdom. If a believer can be sacrificed on earth and by doing so someone else could be saved for all of eternity....In His economy that is a win for everyone.

So this seal judgment is kind of a weird one. Each judgment has been God pouring out His just wrath on those who have aligned themselves as His enemies. But this seal seems to impact believers. This seal is all about followers of Christ being executed and martyred. If the Divine Seal Judgments are on people who have rejected God...How does allowing more martyrs serve as a judgment against non believers? ...Great Question.

The death of God's people brings judgment in two ways. First, whether enemies of God want to recognize it or not....the presence of believers on earth actually protects them from the full throttle impact of Satan. The presence of the Holy Spirit on earth in believers restricts the power of Satan. They think that they want believers gone....but they really don't. The removal of God's people, the salt and light of the world, will allow darkness and corruption to overrun the earth unchecked. It will be a case of the blind leading the blind. In a world with a limited number of remaining believers...each of whom are being martyred....with each execution Satan gains a more secure foothold of evil on earth.

Second, God is still standing in judgment over non believers who reject Him. The total cost of their individual sins continues to mount. As the enemies of God murder His people, they are unknowingly heaping more judgment upon themselves. They have added to their list of sins the murder of God's people. And they will receive a greater measure of God's wrath for it. And Third, God doesn't tell them that judgement for what happened to them will not come...it will just be delayed a little longer. Then God will answer these martyrs' prayers for vindication when He pours out His wrath on His enemies.

Something else of interest here as well. These souls have been martyred....their souls are with God at the throne of God..their blood and life have been poured out as drink offerings. Yet they still care

about getting justice for what happened to them. They aren't joyful and bliss...they are crying out to God how long do we have to wait for justice?

Some disagree, but I believe that this shows us that heavenly souls are not oblivious to what happens on earth. Even in heaven, things will not settle until God has brought justice to all of His creation. The actions of God during end times brings about His order...His will....His justice...and His sovereignty throughout all of His creation for all of eternity.

The fifth seal tells the church this persecution and martyrdom is not random or meaningless. It is a sweet sacrifice to God, who knows precisely what the church is suffering and enduring.

In other words, God is answering the prayer that has been prayed by every believer since the day Jesus taught us to pray...

Matthew 6:10 (ESV) 10 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Revelation is what happens when God's Kingdom comes and finally His will is done.....on earth....as it has always been done in heaven. How long? Rest a bit longer....more of your brothers and sisters must die first. And it is time for the Sixth Seal.

Servants of God down through the ages have asked the same question (Isaiah 6:11; Jeremiah 47:6; Zechariah 1:12; Luke 18:1-8). David had asked precisely this question on a number of occasions (Psalm 13:1; 35:17; 74:9; 79:5; 80:4; 89:46). "My soul is in anguish," he cried out, "How long, O Lord, how long?" (Psalm 6:3). Habakkuk asked: "How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen?" (1:2).

We could readily imagine how the church of John's day would have related to this question of "How long?" Jerusalem had fallen a generation earlier. (This assumes a date for the writing of Revelation as being around A.D. 96.) The early expectancy of Christ's return had not materialized. The church was suffering at least sporadic persecution from Jews and Roman authorities. Some Christians had been martyred, banished or had their property confiscated.

Revelation 6:12–14 (ESV) — 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.

With the 6th seal, we have a catastrophic event on earth. The first five seals were about God bringing his judgment and wrath upon man...His enemies and to do so requires the sacrifice of believers....But this seal brings change to the natural order of things. He rearranges the earth and the heavens.

With the opening of the 6th seal we see the following signs and wonders; A great earthquake Sun becoming black as a sackcloth of hair Moon becoming as blood Stars of heaven falling on earth Heaven departing as a scroll when rolled together Every mountain and island moving out of their place

When the sixth seal was opened, John saw awesome cosmic disturbances. The cosmic catastrophes described by the sixth seal were also mentioned by Jesus in this same discourse. "Immediately after the distress of those days the sun will be darkened," said Jesus, "and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken" (Matthew 24:29).

Throughout the Scriptures....earthquakes were also regular features of divine visitation. When God stepped into earth, the earth usually shook.....When God descended on Mount Sinai, "the whole mountain trembled violently" (Exodus 19:18). Isaiah prophesied of a time when the Lord would "shake the earth" (Isaiah 2:19). In Haggai, the Lord says: "In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land" (2:6). When Jesus was crucified a great earthquake rearranged the temple and the curtain...Earthquakes often meant...God has Arrived...and that is what this cataclysmic earthquake reveals....Those were 4 horses....but now God is dealing directly.

Also throughout Scripture, celestial disturbances are often connected with the coming of the Messiah. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel, Zephaniah and Jesus Himself all described such things

This is a fulfillment of Joel's Prophecy.... Joel 2:30-31: And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come.

Now some today say that we are already in the Tribulation....The the great and terrible day of the Lord is now....let me just dump water on that flame before it catches.

These are people who do not know what is in the great tribulation. Example, in the great tribulation period; The antichrist will be revealed – we are yet to see him Famine will hit entire earth not a part of the earth (black horse) War will come upon entire earth not part of the earth (Red horse) Entire animal kingdom will rise against humanity ¼ of the earth will be killed. If it's today 2015 = 1.85 billion people, if its 2030 = 2.13 billion people Sun will turn black meaning entire earth will go dark not just some parts Stars will fall from the heaven to earth We are yet to see all these things We are not in the great tribulation period It's GRACE time...God is still giving people the chance to turn back to Him today.

Revelation 6:15–17 (ESV) — 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?"

Isn't this amazing? They reject the Rock of Ages and pray to the rocks. You would think they would be praying to God. But instead they are praying to the forces of nature.

During the Sixth Seal, people in their darkest moments are calling out to creation to save them. A creation that is literally crumbling under the power of its Creator

Tammy and I have been watching a show called Alone. They drop people off around bears and see if they can survive in the wilderness on their own. It is stunning to watch almost every one of them pray to the trees, the universe, mother nature or the creation. Paul told the Romans that this would become rampant, that people would worship the creation and not the creator. It is just hard to watch and wonder how God must feel.

Jesus is entering His creation and the whole of His creation is impacted by it. People falsely convince themselves that when God comes back they can make deals with Him or tell Him what to do....

No...Revelation 6 shows us what happens when God arrives to Judge. You see what sinners dread the most is not death.....it is the revealed presence of God...His eyes and wrath focused on them.

The wrath of God isn't spiteful hate or personal vindictiveness. It is God's holy response to unrepented sin that is the cause of the misery and suffering humans bring upon themselves. But just because it is not spiteful doesn't mean it is some how bearable. In fact, they make a statement and a very interesting and penetrating question in response.

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,

Notice this wrath is coming from two places...From Him who is seated on the Throne (The Father) and from the wrath of the Lamb (Jesus- the Son- the Second Person of the Trinity. Notice it is the great day of THEIR wrath that has come.

The Wrath of the Lamb sounds like an oxymoron....We usually associate lambs with meekness and humility. They are tender and mild little creatures. Other animals are associated with wrath and considered ferocious. We would think the Lion from the tribe of Judah would be a more fitting image to depict the Christ at this point. Lions are fierce. No one would care to meet a lion unless he was armed with a weapon. One would not, however, take a weapon to protect himself against a lamb. While we may tend to downplay the wrath of the Lamb of God, the Bible does not let us forget it. Revelation makes clear that, although Christ defers punishment, there comes a time when His patience is exhausted. He waits long — but at last His righteous anger is aroused, and He breaks forth in all the fury of His wrath. The Bible is clear that when the measure of man's iniquity is full, we shall be ripe for judgment. Sin will have run its course.

The enemies of God have attempted their worst. They have united their forces against Him and against His people. Suddenly, like a thief in the night, His anger will break forth like lightning. His indignation will burn like fire. The great day of His vengeance will come. The day of judgment will be upon all those who have stubbornly refused to bow their knees before Christ or confess His lordship over their lives.

This is the only time that I could find where the term Wrath of the Lamb is used in Scripture...Wrath of God often...Wrath of Lamb only here.

I think we must not miss the contrast here of Christ.

What a switch! Contrast the wrath of the Lamb in that day of judgment over against the meekness of the Lamb upon the cross. At Calvary, Jesus Christ the Lamb offered no resistance. He was abused but made no complaint. He bore it all in patience and majestic silence. Jesus, the sacrificial Lamb, could have stepped down from the cross at any time. He could have consumed His enemies with a single word. The same angels who sing praise to Him who is worthy in Revelation 5 were at His beck and call ready to come to His aid should He have desired them to do so. In spite of all the torment and anguish, Jesus stayed on the cross and died.

The enemy certainly seemed triumphant then! It was his hour — the hour of darkness. Satan was holding high carnival as the Son of God died upon the cross. It was the day of his power. He seemed to be in control. Oh, how he must have laughed with hellish glee when the Lord of life breathed His last and succumbed to the power of death.

But Christ did not stay in the tomb. Death could not hold Him. He is risen and now sits upon the throne in heaven. That is news the devil does not want anyone to know. All through history he has been trying to convince the world that he was the victor instead of Christ. So convincing has been his argument that the followers of the Lamb have been persecuted and terrorized throughout history. How often the streams of the martyrs' blood have been made to flow. It is no wonder that they cry out as they do in verse 10,

How often the Master has replied, "Wait." Rest for a while longer until the number is complete. Wait until your fellow servants follow you into martyrdom. The good news of the gospel is going to be proclaimed to all the nations (Matthew 24:14). It will be proclaimed by a generation willing to die for the sake of reaching the unreached. Today we see inroads being made in what were once Hindu and Islamic strongholds. Where the gospel was once forbidden, it is now being proclaimed. Those strongholds are being pried open by the blood of martyrs — ordinary people who are willing to die for their profession of Christ as Lord. In nations like Sudan, Iran, Iraq, and Pakistan the ground has already been receiving the blood of martyrs — our brothers and sisters in Christ.

At the cross....Jesus was the Sacrificial Lamb....Now He is being revealed as the Lamb who was Slain...The Lamb who could open the seals...the Lamb who had received from the Father all authority in heaven and earth...The lamb who knew the price for our salvation and paid it...The lamb who comes for those who believed and those who did not. So the people during this seal ask a very penetrating question.....

Notice that instead of fleeing to the God of mercy for refuge and humbly bowing down before Him in worship, they conceal themselves in caves consumed with frenzied fear. And they cry out the obvious....

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

This question is actually a quote from Malachi.

Malachi 3:2 (ESV) 2 But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap.

So they ask a very insightful...revealing and penetrating question...Who can stand the wrath of God?

Well Jesus can and Did.....He took the full wrath of God for the sins of the world....He stood in our place...He paid the full price and felt the full weight of the wrath of God. Jesus bore the wrath that every man deserved. Jesus is God and God Himself can stand the wrath. In fact, Jesus even talked about this...

Matthew 24:15–22 (ESV) — 21 For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. **22** And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

Jesus said that no human being could be saved unless the days were cut short.....So obviously there are two more groups to consider.

First, those who believe in Jesus...the elect...can stand because Jesus stood their faith in Jesus as their Savior and Substitute protects them from God's Wrath. In fact, I believe that they are saved by the rapture. Christ removes His bride before the Tribulation.

So who are these elect that survive because the day is cut short? They are the believers that come to know Christ during the tribulation. Those not yet martyred.

So the answer to their question is simple. Who can stand? Christ Alone.

Only Christ can take the full force of the righteous and just wrath of God for the sins of the World. No human can do it. No believer can do it. No one can do it. That is why He and He alone is the Savior of the World.

As believers in Christ....we don't stand a chance against the wrath of God for our sins....But we do stand under Christ and His Righteousness and under the protective hand of God. Again, nothing that we did....only what God did for us.

In light of all the devastation let loose in the seal judgments, one might reasonably conclude that no one could possibly stand. Revelation 7, however, reveals that two distinct groups of the redeemed will stand strong during the Tribulation. One group will stand strong on earth under the hand of God's protection, while the other group, after suffering martyrdom for their faith, will stand before God's throne in heaven. We'll meet these two groups in the next chapter.

The believer can stand in the face of this great wrath of God because Jesus already bore the wrath the believer deserved.

Revelation 7:1 (ESV) — 1 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.

After this enormous earthquake....a dead calm....not even a breath of air....nothing moving....an eerie time on earth....

Next week we will learn what happens when the 7 seal is opened.....and the dead calm on earth.....occurs in Heaven. You see the seventh seal is the last seal. The Scroll that the Prophet Daniel read.....the scroll that made Him pale and pass out....the scroll where Daniel was told to seal until the end....the end has come. It is about to be revealed...And heaven and earth stand in awe.....literally dead silence....because of what is about to be unleashed. Let's Pray.