

Seals of the Book Revelation 6:9-17

So far in the book of Revelation, we started out in chapter 1 with a very cool description of Jesus, who then in chapters 2 and 3 instructs the then present day churches with the basic message to “repent and overcome,” which is obviously applicable for churches in today’s modern time. And then in chapter 4 there is a very other-worldly description of God’s throne room in heaven- jewels, rainbows, lightning, thunder, winged creatures; and in chapter 5 we learn of a scroll, or a book there in the throne room being held in the hand of God seated on the throne. And the Greek word there for scroll or book is “biblion,” it’s the very word we get the word “Bible” from. During the Old Testament time, *scrolls* were used to write and make copies of the Old Testament writings (**example**); but in the 1st century, during the New Testament times, the Romans introduced the “codex” which is a fancy word for a book- basically two small wooden sheets, that bind together pages of parchment paper (**example**). The Greeks had other words for scrolls, but about half of Bible translations translate this word “biblion” in Revelation chapters 5 and 6 as *scroll*, and half translate it as *book*. What’s interesting is that later on in chapter 20 the same exact Greek word “biblion” is mentioned again, and there in that instance *all* the translators translate it as *book*- referring to the books of judgement and the book of life being opened.

Now whether John is seeing a book or a scroll is *mostly* irrelevant, but as I’ve studied Revelation, personally I got a little curious as to what this “book” or “scroll” is, because after the seals are taken off (and those aren’t seals- arrr arrr arrr blubbery animals that you see on the beaches of California- rather this is *sea/s* as in referring to a stamped wax seal that during the time would be put on the envelope of a letter as an indicator to show the recipient *if* the letter (or the book in this case) had been opened and tampered with (**example**). Manufacturer packaging, or the little button of the cap of the grape jelly jar would be our modern day equivalent))- after the seals are taken off the book or scroll, we don’t have any immediate reference as to what words are contained inside it.

It’s kind of like the Bible is making a big deal out of unwrapping a Christmas present (**example**), and describing in detail the taking off of the bow, then the cutting of the ribbon, then the ripping of wrapping paper- only to then leave us hanging with not telling us what’s inside the box. I mean, what does the book say? Why is it important? It has a sealed, untampered-with, secret message

inside it, but all we're told is that the seals come off. Nothing is then opened- *until* we get to chapter 20, where books of Judgement are opened and the Book of Life is opened. And my thought is that maybe this *book* (biblion) of chapters 5 and 6 that can only be unsealed by Jesus, is perhaps the *Book* (biblion) of Life mentioned later in chapter 20 that contains the names of those who belong to Jesus- who will be rewarded and will escape eternal judgement. We don't know for sure, but that's my current hypothesis; and I wanted to point this out because you probably wouldn't notice this with many translations saying scroll here, but then book later, when in fact the same Greek word is used.

There is language in the Bible, of believers- followers of Jesus- being *sealed* by the Holy Spirit for eternal life, maybe it's fitting that their names are *sealed* up in the Book of Life that the Bible describes, and their names are there only because of the work of Jesus, and so only *He* is worthy to unseal the book, breaking open the wax stamps that give proof no one else has tampered with what is written inside- and those wax stamps, those seals, those pieces of clear plastic packing from the manufacturer, each represent events that need to happen on Earth before the goodness of what is written inside can be read and experienced.

I think this makes a lot of sense to view this description of seals in this manner- this book in chapters 5 and 6 is like a Christmas present being opened, and like a Christmas present, it has to be opened with acts of destruction in order to get to the really good thing that's beyond the destruction. The bow has to be *ripped* off, the string has to be *broken*, the tape has to be *cut*, the paper has to be *torn*- in order to get to the good thing that God has gifted us with. In order to get to the reading of the names that will experience everlasting joy in the amazing Kingdom of God, because of their surrender to King Jesus- in order to get *there*- the temporary constructs of this Earth must be broken. Before we get to experience all God has for us in the Kingdom of Heaven- as we read last week, there first has to be conquering on Earth, removal of peace, inflation, famine, plague... really difficult life trials- tribulation. In fact- the *Great* Tribulation must occur before we as God's people get to experience the full goodness of God's Kingdom. The "seals" that are keeping the book closed, must be broken before the book can be opened. Today we'll be looking at the 5th and 6th seal in Revelation 6:9-17. We'll begin first by looking at just the 5th seal, **verses 9-11**...

I'm not going to gloss over this, I admit this is a pretty heavy passage. We read last week that 4 horsemen will be released, who will bring conquering, killing, food scarcity, death. If you back up and look at **verse 8** again, you'll see it says 1/4 of the people on earth will die. In today's numbers, that would mean over 2 billion people losing their earthly lives. And my guess is that many of us, if we've ever thought about the 4 horsemen of the Apocalypse bringing this type of death to the world, we've probably (in light of our current American Christian culture) we've probably played this off as, well- at least I won't be here because I'll be raptured to Heaven before any of this happens. I'm sure there are many here today who have been taught this.

In contrast, I've been very clear many times that that line of reasoning is not very strongly presented in the Bible, so I won't list out all the scriptural cases I've presented in the past, but here again we see that Christians are indeed present during the Tribulation- followers of Jesus are present in the world when things start turning bad, and they are even killed as a result of the Tribulation and bad things happening on Earth. We simply can't get around this fact. And the Bible is showing us very clearly that idea very much does *not* seem fair- the Christians who will be killed as a result of the 4 Apocalyptic horsemen, will, as **verse 10** basically says, they will cry out saying "How much longer God are you going to put up with the bad people of this world that are killing followers of Jesus?" "It's not fair." "God, You are going to bring salvation, protection, blessing, but You are not doing that now, when are You going to do it, God?" "Why are You not coming to the rescue?" That's what's going on here.

And I'm not sure we like the answer that is given- these followers of Jesus who will be killed during the Tribulation- **verse 11** says they will be given a white robe, and will be told to rest, until even *more* followers of Jesus are killed. Death will be the final boss for many of us, before we get to reap the full reward of our life walking with Jesus. This has been the foundational teaching of Christianity since day 1. Jesus is very clear about this in the gospel books, as He says: "*If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me.*" (**Matt. 16:24**) From the gospel books at the beginning of the New Testament, all the way through to Revelation at the end of the New Testament, this is the way of Christianity. **Revelation 12:11**, speaking of those who get to receive the Kingdom of God, who are able to defeat Satan- it says "*And they overcame him (Satan) because of the blood of the Lamb (Jesus) and because of*

the word of their testimony, and (here's what I want you to notice) they did not love their life even when faced with death." Will it be said, of you and I, that we did not love our life even when faced with death? Or, will it be said of us that we loved our life here on earth so much that we were willing to do or say anything in order to avoid discomfort and death? That's heavy, right? Do we enjoy this life on Earth so much that, when what is described comes, we'll be willing to compromise our faith, disregard what the Bible says, go along with the crowd- in order to spare our life and continue living comfortably? Now's the time to decide what you will do, go ahead and decide it now, that's why we have all these warnings, so that we can be prepared and not be caught off guard. Ok, while we're all trying to recover from that truth bomb, let's rip off another bandaid, seal number 6, verse 12... **(v 12-17)**

All Revelation studies I have ever seen, for some reason, gloss over this passage and treat it as: "this is only the beginning, more bad things are coming, there's still the trumpets and the bowls before the end..." If you're not familiar with the book of Revelation, let me tell you- there are 3 series described, that each contain 7 catastrophic events- first is described 7 *seals*, and later on there are 7 *trumpets* that sound and usher in difficult events, and then after that is described 7 *bowls* that unleash even *more* difficult events. Now, in knowing that, let me be very clear that what is being said right now in even just the 6th seal is Biblical language descriptive of the very end. Life on earth is no longer possible if the sun turns black, the stars of the sky fall to earth, the sky is split apart and rolled up like a scroll, and every mountain and island is removed from it's place. That's descriptive of the end of time as we know it, there's no more, after events of that level. To me it does not make much sense to view these 7 seals as happening, and then afterwards the 7 trumpets happen where the 3rd trumpet says the stars fall, and the 4th trumpet says the the sun is darkened 1/3 of the time- no those things have already happened with the 6th seal if we are attempting to view these events chronologically.

There's another inconsistency if we're looking to view these 3 series of 7 as being in a sequential order. Before the 3rd series- the bowls of wrath- before these bowls start in chapter 16, in chapter 14 we have the description of Jesus harvesting *all* the earth- believers and unbelievers. If we attempt to view these series, or this book of Revelation, in sequential chronological order, then it doesn't make sense for all the earth to be harvested and *then* the bowls of wrath

happen. What would be the point, who would the bowls of wrath affect- on an empty Earth, void of any people? No, we're told that's not the case, we are told there are people on the Earth during the Bowls of Wrath. Hang on to this dilemma for now, and I'll come back to this and suggest what makes a little more sense in how to view the events described- how to view the 7 seals, 7 trumpets, 7 bowls. But before I do that, let me continue in emphasizing the finality of what is being described here.

In addition to the descriptions of earthly constructs shutting down and being re-organized, you have language conveying terror of those on earth, whether poor or rich, weak or strong, slave or free- realizing they are seen by the Jesus God. And how would they realize they are seen by Jesus, by God? Well, the passage says the sky splits open, and I'd assume people then in that moment will be able to see into heaven- it seems to me this is describing what happens right before what is described in Revelation 19, when the heavens open and Jesus returns to rescue His followers and bring judgement against His enemies.

Concerning the end of all things, even before the book of Revelation was written, the early church and even the followers of God before Jesus was born, they all looked to the book of Joel in the Old Testament that describes the end of time. That end times event was and still is, referred to as the "Day of the Lord." It's the day of fear and terror for the enemies of God, while also being the day of joy and reward for those aligned with God. The Day of the Lord is the time when the "day" of this world ends, and the "day" of the Lord begins. And before Jesus came to earth, because of the book of Joel, everyone was expecting the LORD-Messiah figure described to come at the end of the world as we know it- that was the Day of the Lord- the Messiah figure would come, destroy all the bad guys who hated God, He would put an end to all the constructs of this world, and rescue and reward with a new world all the good guys attempting to love God and obey Him. But what people didn't realize was that there would be a prior 1st coming of the Messiah before all that- the baby Jesus who grew up to give His life on the cross, resurrect from the dead and return to Heaven- and then that same Jesus Messiah will return, coming a *2nd time*, to fulfill the events described in Joel.

And so the book of Joel, describing that coming day of the Lord, what we now know as the 2nd coming of Christ, says this: "*The sun will be turned into*

darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.” (Joel 2:31) So the signal that happens right before the coming of the Messiah, is that the sun turns to darkness and the moon to blood- and that’s exactly what this passage in Revelation chapter 6 tells us happens with the 6th seal. Now, we don’t know for sure what exactly that will look like, is it a permanent eclipse and the moon reflects a blood red color, or is it more intense in that the sun literally gets sucked into a black hole, and the moon melts away into a liquid-y red substance- we don’t really know- but either way, that specific language in the Bible is in reference to the sign displayed signaling that the end of this world has come, the temporary world has come to an end, judgement is arriving, and the Kingdom of the Messiah is now being installed. And if you’re curious, we’ll see later in chapter 8 that the final 7th seal is fire being hurled to the earth- again, even more finality that occurs just right before/or right as the “Day of the Lord” is occurring- the day of rescue for followers of Jesus, the day of judgment for those who have refused Jesus.

Ok, so now you’re probably thinking, “Alright Pastor Wes, if this is describing the end, what’s up with the rest of the book of Revelation?” Well, I’m glad you asked! As Pastor Dave mentioned last week, those of us in the Western world love events to be listed out in a detailed timeline- chronological, sequential- we love an orderly “there’s this, then this, then this…” and that’s just not how the book of Revelation is laid out. Rather the whole book is focused on and is reminding us of the great event of the “Day of the Lord” when Jesus returns, rescuing His followers, extinguishing His enemies, and setting up His Kingdom. That coming event, that reality, is the re-occurring theme that *every* chapter in Revelation points to. We will be reminded over and over that this day is coming through different descriptions sprinkled throughout the different chapters and events described in this book.

And that’s the point I’ve attempted to make clear in your study guide. If anyone doesn’t have a study guide, just raise your hand and we’ll get one to you. At the bottom of the chart, this bottom rectangle in bold is all the stuff about the end of the world, the Day of the Lord, the return of Jesus, the reward for His followers, the judgement for those who reject Him- and yet I’ve kept all those things in order according to the chapters which are laid out in sequential order here at the top of the chart. Most all these things in this bottom rectangle happen

after/during the 7th thing- whether that's the 7th seal, or the 7th trumpet, or the 7th bowl of wrath. The number 7 is the Biblical number of completion, finality.

So instead of attempting to view these events as sequential, as in 1-7 seals happen, then 1-7 trumpets happen, then 1-7 bowls of wrath happen- it probably makes much more sense to expect these events to be fulfilled in perhaps a different way. One way in which these events of Revelation could be fulfilled other than sequentially, would be if we were to consider the 7 seals, 7 trumpets, 7 bowls as 3 separate descriptions of *one* basic timeline, just described in 3 different ways or from 3 different perspectives. This would be like how Pharaoh in Genesis 41 had 2 similar dreams- a first dream of 7 *thin* cows eating 7 *fat* cows, and then a 2nd dream of 7 *thin* heads of grain eating 7 *full* heads of grain. Joseph told Pharaoh of his dream and explained the meaning, there was 7 years of abundance coming, that would be followed by (eaten up by) 7 years of famine in the land- and so the people needed to thus prepare accordingly- to make preparations and store food to survive. And concerning the reasoning behind why God gave 2 different but similar dreams to Pharaoh, Joseph says this in **Genesis 41:32** *"Now as for the repeating of the dream to Pharaoh twice, it means that the matter is confirmed by God, and God will quickly bring it about."* In other words, the similar, re-occurring dream was indication and proof, it was the sign that this thing would definitely happen- God had decreed it and there was no changing it, and that it would happen soon.

A similar thing happened to Peter in Acts 10. Peter had a vision 3 times in a row, a vision that told him God declares the blessing of Jesus' salvation is available for all people and not just the Jewish people. The re-occurrence of seeing the dream, the vision, 3 times- emphasized the truth, the assuredness, of what was being communicated.

Thus, it probably makes a lot of sense to see the 7 seals, the 7 trumpets, the 7 bowls of wrath, that all progress very similarly and all have the same end result after the 7th thing- as conveying the same single message that there is coming a time of progressing world tribulation that ends the world and results in Jesus' return and salvation for His followers.

Another option that makes more sense than seeing the 7 seals, trumpets, bowls as sequential events, is *similar* to this option I've just described; but- we

acknowledge that though these events are presented separately in Revelation, they could very well be layered *together -on top of each other- happening simultaneously-* when they happen in real time. In other words, the 1st seal, 1st trumpet, 1st bowl could all happen together, then the 2nd seal, 2nd trumpet, 2nd bowl happen, and onward in crescendo type fashion all the way through the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th until the 7th seal, trumpet, bowl occur giving way to the Day of the Lord described in detail in Revelation 19, that Joel chapter 2 and many other Old Testament passages point to, as well as all the rapture verses I have printed on the other side of your study guide point to.

I like this option best, because the descriptions of the 7 seals, 7 trumpets, 7 bowls seem to progress in intensity; rather than just being similar, separate, repetitions. In other words, the trumpets seems worse than the seals, and the bowls seem even worse than the trumpets. And you can see that in your study guide, for example, if you look at these boxes in bold from left to right- *if* the 2nd seal, 2nd trumpet, 2nd bowl all happen together around the same time frame, you can see the connections: perhaps tensions will already be high amongst the nations of the world, peace is being removed (2nd *seal*), and then a meteor hits one of the oceans (2nd *trumpet*), which has an impact of causing 1/3 of all that is in the Earth's oceans/seas to be destroyed- that would definitely at the same time be cause for countries to militarize and re-evaluate resources, trade routes, etc, quickly leading to even more peace being removed, and then that 1/3 of death in the ocean would spread, eventually leading to *all* of the Earth's oceans dying (which is what happens in the 2nd *bowl*).

Same kind of thing with the 3rd seal- there is food scarcity that occurs- and that fits with the 3rd *trumpet* when fresh water becomes more scarce as 1/3 of the world's fresh water is poisoned, and that escalates in short time to *all* the Earth's freshwater being unusable, which is what the 3rd *bowl* brings.

I'll point out one more example- you can see the crescendo effect also in the 5th seal, trumpet, bowl- there's the "darkness" of followers of Jesus being martyred for their faith (the 5th *seal*), then physical darkness arrives for all the world with the 5th *trumpet*, then the darkness is concentrated on the bad guys in the world- the kingdom of the Beast (with the 5th *bowl*), getting us closer to the finality that eventually occurs after the 6th and 7th seal, trumpet, bowl when

Christ returns to topple the kingdoms of the world and fully install His good Kingdom of eternal peace.

Now, there might be some here today that are thinking, when is all this going to happen? And the answer to that is, we don't know for sure, but the time of it happening is getting closer with every tick of the clock. How long will it last? Many say that it will be a 7 year time span of tribulation, but the Bible repetitively mentions a 3.5 year time span for the tribulation, and I'll plan in the near future to have a specific message on that 3.5 year timeframe view, connecting all the places that timeframe is mentioned in conjunction with Daniel chapter 9. Another question might be: Are we in this time period right now? My answer would be no, I don't think so, but due to the things we have witnessed over the past 6 years, I think we could all admit that this sequence of events could be started literally any day. The world in real time, right now, is being tested, with the concept of certain powers having the ability to quickly conquer other nations, take their resources, and use them to benefit an alliance of world leaders. That 1st seal sure does seem close to being broken off the book. And it appears to me that the 1st seal, with the rider being on a *white* horse, it almost seems like the conquering white horse rider could appear to the world to be a good thing. Perhaps this rider is an imposter type figure, a perversion, a fraud, a world's substitute of Jesus- who later will return to conquer on a white horse (Revelation 19). Maybe the anti-Christ figure will be responsible for this first conquering? And I say this not to cause fear or anxiety, or to use it in order to manipulate anyone- rather what I'd rather us all focus on are the things listed at the bottom of this study guide: the world becoming the Kingdom of Jesus, reward for His followers, the temple in Heaven opened, us overcoming Satan and his demons because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of our testimony, victory over the beast, the evil forces in this world being stopped, Jesus appearing in the sky, ruling with Jesus in His Kingdom, experiencing the River of Life, healing fruit trees, eating from the Tree of Life, entering into the new city, His coming reward. These things are the focus of Revelation, these things are the arrival point revealed throughout all the chapters.

You see, God wants victory and blessing for you. And whether you and I experience the temporary sting of death through the process of normal life, or through the process of the Great Tribulation- our focus must be on our allegiance to Him and on the joy He has set before us that we will one day realize. Maybe

there are some here today who feel like you're already in a tribulation of sorts in your personal life. And I'm not here to sugar coat it- there could be some really hard things that you might have to persevere and work through. But I promise you, if you persevere and keep your focus on Jesus, you have really amazing things to look forward to. Again, God ultimately wants victory and blessing for you- that is the end game for those who persevere. So hang in there, no matter what comes in this life, do not fear- hold on tightly to King Jesus, rest in the fact that He loves you dearly, and that He is cheering you on as you wait for His redemption.

I'm going to pray for us now to close out our service today, but Pastor Dave and I are going to be available in the open room here to the left outside these doors to talk with anyone who has questions about our study so far in the book of Revelation. I'm not promising we'll have all the answers, but we want to hear from you and know of anything that you're wrestling with in your mind, that's come up since we began this study. If you don't have any questions today, or are in a rush today, don't worry, we're going to attempt to make this a regular thing for this season of study in Revelation, so there will be more opportunity for feedback and questions in the weeks ahead as well. But for those who want to interact a little today- after I pray, give us just a few minutes, and we'll meet you there. Let's pray...