

## THE OPENING OF THE SEALS

Scripture Reference: Revelation 6; Matthew 24

Last session we looked at near / far prophecies that Jesus revealed to John and the “messengers” of seven specific churches. We also began to look at the vision John had of the throne-room of God and the specific beings that continuously dwell in the presence of God. At the end of chapter 5, John realizes there is One who is worthy and able to break the seals on the scroll.

<b>QUESTION?</b>	<b>Why was Jesus the only One who could open the scroll?</b>

Today we will look at the breaking of the seals. Each seal carries with it an event(s) in the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel. As a reminder...

<b>QUESTION?</b>	<b>According to Daniel 9:27, what event marks the beginning of the 70<sup>th</sup> Week?</b>

Once the covenant is signed between Antichrist, Israel, and other party(ies), the events of the 70<sup>th</sup> week begin to come to pass. These events are, in part, revealed in the opening of the seals.

In addition to the details spelled out in the opening of the seals, there is another passage in which Jesus Himself outlines the sequence of events pertaining to this 70<sup>th</sup> week.

**Read Matthew 24:1-3**

<b>QUESTION ?</b>	<b>What event does Jesus foretell?</b>

<b>QUESTION?</b>	<b>What Three Questions do the disciples pose to Jesus?</b>

As Jesus answers the disciples’ questions, He launches into a sequence of events that amazingly parallel the events John sees throughout the opening of the seals. So, let’s examine these in parallel using the opening of the seals as our guide.

**The First Seal: The Conqueror on the White Horse (Revelation 6:1-2)**

What are the different objects or specific images John sees? \_\_\_\_\_

John sees a white horse, a rider, a bow, and a crown. He also sees this rider conquering. Let’s look at each of these objects to see the identity of this rider.

- 1) White horse and rider: The first four seals have a horse involved. The meaning is most likely in the color more than anything. “White” usually refers to one of two things: either purity or peace. As we see in Revelation 19:11, Jesus comes riding on a white horse, He who is pure and is the Prince of peace. This rider here in the first seal will come with “purity and peace,” but given the context and the surrounding events, we see it will only be an “appearance” of purity and peace, but his real agenda is conquering. So, most scholars see this rider as none other than the Antichrist himself. He will be attempting to mimic Christ in every way in this first portion of the 70<sup>th</sup> week – thus the white horse here refers to the charade of the Antichrist as posing to be the Messiah.
- 2) The bow: Bow refers to battle and war. With the false sense of peace which comes with the signing of this covenant, the real intention of the Antichrist is war and conquering with the specific intent of destroying God’s people and being worshiped himself.
- 3) The crown: There are two Greek words that we in English translate “crown.” The first is the word “diadem” which we ascribe to the crown worn by Christ or kings. The other is “stephanos” which refers more to the winner’s victory wreath or laurel athletes would wear on their heads. In Roman times, when a Roman general would successfully conquer another territory or country, he would proudly wear his “victory crown” (Greek word *stephanos*) to proclaim victory. That is the idea in mind here – the Antichrist would go forth with his bow and be victorious.

Now, let's look at **Matthew 24:4-5**. In answering the disciple's questions about the end of the age, what is the first event Jesus says must take place? \_\_\_\_\_

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Does this agree with the First Seal? \_\_\_\_\_

**The Second Seal: War on the Red Horse (Revelation 6:3-4)**

What are the different objects seen in this seal? \_\_\_\_\_

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Here, John sees a red horse, a rider, and a great sword. Again, let's examine these.

- 1) The red horse and rider: Throughout Scripture the color red usually suggests the shedding of blood. There are few, if any, events in which more blood is shed than war. And with verse 4 emphasizing that this rider had the power to take peace from the earth, we know war is what is in mind here.
- 2) The great sword: Again, a sword suggests battle and war. With the word "great" describing the sword, we can infer that these battles and wars would be no small skirmishes but be of the utmost intensity and ferocity.

**Daniel 11:39** says, "*He will take action against the strongest of fortresses with the help of a foreign god; he will give great honor to those who acknowledge him, and he will cause them to rule over the many, and will parcel out land for a price.*" During this time of wars, the Antichrist will establish his position as a world leader by the defeat of his enemies; he will consolidate the various nations and political factions who are willing to give him their allegiance. And, because his true intentions to rule the world, to demand the world's worship, and to annihilate God's people will not yet be evident, Antichrist will still be viewed by much of the world as a benevolent warrior who uses his military might to bring order to a chaotic world.<sup>1</sup>

Read **Daniel 11:40-45**. This passage goes on to describe some of the nations involved in these wars. Most speculate the king of the South refers to the Egyptian king/leader, while the king of the North could refer to Syria/Iraq or Iran and even Russia. Interestingly, according to this passage, God will either protect or rescue "Edom, Moab, and the foremost sons of Ammon." These would be located in modern-day Jordan.

Now read **Matthew 24:6-7a**. According to Jesus, what is the next event(s) Jesus says will take place? \_\_\_\_\_

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Does this coincide with the Second Seal? \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Van Kampen. *The Sign*. (Crossway Books: Wheaton, IL. 1992) pg. 200

**The Third Seal: Famine on the Black Horse (Revelation 6:5-6)**

What are the different objects seen in this seal? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

With this seal we see the black horse and rider with a pair of scales.

- 1) Black horse and rider: Black usually is associated with death... but sometimes it refers to famine. As the context shows us, the latter is the case here.
- 2) The scales: This was the common measuring device – two small trays hung from the ends of a balance beam. This object indicates that the scarcity of food will lead to rationing and food lines.

This famine is a natural result of the wars that are ongoing. Food will be in high demand. According to this passage, a days’ wage will only buy enough bread and barley for one – maybe two people. With the combination of the deaths caused by the second seal and the deaths caused by this third seal, we easily move to the fourth.

Now read **Matthew 24:7b-8**. What is the next item in Jesus’ outlined sequences? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Does this agree with the Third Seal? \_\_\_\_\_

Notice also here Jesus says in verse 8, “*All these are the beginning of sorrows.*” This is a good time to ask ourselves, “To whom is Jesus talking?” \_\_\_\_\_

Jesus is talking to the disciples who are to be the leaders of the early church. So, who are these “sorrows” going to effect? Let’s read on and we’ll see.

**The Fourth Seal: Death on a Pale Horse (Revelation 6:7-8)**

Unlike the first three seals, there is only the horse and the rider in this seal, with Hades following. The word “pale” is the Greek word for the color they used to describe a corpse – that pale, ashen color. This seal which is death and “Hades” (place of the dead) results in death through war (“the sword”), famine (“hunger”), and beasts, how much of the world’s population will be gone? \_\_\_\_\_

Now let’s again go to **Matthew 24:9**. What happens next in Jesus’ sequential outline? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Here Jesus says, “...*they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you.*” If Jesus is telling this to the disciples and He uses the word, “you”; who will be in tribulation and be killed? \_\_\_\_\_

Also, here is yet another example of near and far prophecies. How did John see these people being killed?

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_

As we look at history, we see these were the three primary methods employed by Rome to kill the Christians in the first two and one half centuries AD. Therefore, the persecution of the early Christians by the Romans serves as the fulfillment of the near prophecy whereas the persecution of Christians and Jews (all of God's people) at the hand of Antichrist will serve as the fulfillment of the far prophecy.

Two other questions to ask here,

- 1) How do we know Jesus is using the "near and far" prophecy in this passage?
- 2) Does the next seal and sequence of events fit the interpretation that Jesus is talking about the church in Matthew 24?

The answer to number 1 is found in **Matthew 24:15**. In this verse Jesus refers to the prophecy of Daniel (**Daniel 9:27, 11:31**) that saw its "near" fulfillment in the person of Antiochus Epiphanes who desecrated the altar of God in the Temple by sacrificing a pig (the most unclean animal) in the Holy Place. Here Jesus applies the "far" aspect of this prophecy to the Antichrist in the "end of the age." So with this, Jesus already demonstrates He is using "near and far" prophecy to outline the end.

As far question 2, let's see.

### **The Fifth Seal: The Cry of the Martyrs (Revelation 6:9-11)**

When this seal is opened, what does John see? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The opening of the Fourth Seal began an intense persecution of God's people greater than the world has ever seen. The result of that, of course, is the death of many saints of God.

What was their cry to God? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

When they ask God to "judge and avenge" they are asking God when will He unleash *His wrath* against sin and injustice.

What was the response to them? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The persecution will have begun but will not be complete. The persecutions would continue until the "number of your fellow servants and brethren are complete." Here the terms "fellow servants and brethren" are both terms used throughout Scripture to refer to believers. So, we see that this fifth seal does support that Jesus and this revelation to John are both referring to God's people.

Now read **Matthew 24:13**. Here is the promise that we see realized by those martyrs of the fifth seal – those who persevere to the end (of their lives) will be saved. As an aside,

it is always a big point of Scripture that the ultimate test of authentic salvation is perseverance. These martyrs “pass the test.” Would we?

Jesus then goes on to answer one of the disciples’ questions of “when will these things be?” in verse 14. According to this verse, what must happen before the “end” comes?

Then Jesus goes on to add some more details regarding the events of these persecutions during the fifth seal time frame. Read **Matthew 24:14-26**.

<b>QUESTION?</b>	<b>What are some events that describes this period?</b>

Here Jesus also reveals that this will be when the Antichrist really shows who he is – Satan incarnate – the ultimate counterfeit of Christ. This will be the absolute worst time in all history for God’s people. Remember, the beast empires are defined by their horrendous treatment of God’s people. This eighth and final beast empire is, by far, the worst of all. And as we will see in future sessions – this revelation of the true identity of Antichrist takes place at the midpoint of Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> week and begins the last half of the tribulation known as the “great tribulation.” (vs. 21)

When the number of those to be martyred is complete (**Rev. 6:11**) then God will be ready to unleash His wrath and judgment upon the earth and humanity. But before He does that, He must prepare by doing a couple of more things – these are opened in the Sixth Seal.

**The Sixth Seal: Preparation for the Wrath of God (Revelation 6:12 – 7:17)**

This seal could really be an entire session in itself. But for continuity’s sake, we’ll leave it in this discussion of the opening of the seals. In **Rev. 6:12-17**, list the cosmic disturbances that take place:

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) \_\_\_\_\_
- 7) \_\_\_\_\_

Now read **Matthew 24:27-30** and list the cosmic disturbances Jesus says will take place in this sequential outline.

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) \_\_\_\_\_

Could these strong similarities in cosmic events and the sequence in which they are revealed simply be coincidence or did Jesus intend for us to see them as complimentary? Obviously, I hold they are to be complimentary in that both passages deal with the same event.

After these cosmic disturbances, Jesus says His sign will appear in the heavens. This sign will be very visible to all on the earth as He says in vs. 28.

So, the preparations of God so far in this sixth seal are 1) Cosmic disturbances and 2) the sign in the heavens of the Son of Man.

But, there's more. Back to **Revelation**. In chapter 7, John goes on to tell us what he sees. (Remember this text is all continuous. Scripture didn't have chapter divisions until the 1500's). Read **Revelation 7:1-8**.

Here John sees four angels sent to the "four corners" of the earth to hold the "four winds." These angels, as we'll see will ultimately "harm" the earth. But before that, we see another angel ascend (rise up) to seal the servants of God. In verses 3-8 we see that these that are sealed are Jews, twelve thousand from each tribe of Israel. They are sealed in order to be "protected" from the wrath of God that will ensue when the seventh seal is broken and the scroll is opened.

God has prepared for His wrath by 1) Cosmic disturbances, 2) Sign in the heavens of the Son of Man, and 3) Sealing the 144,000. But there is one more act of preparation.

**Revelation 7:9-17** discusses what / who John sees after the 144,000 are sealed.

	<b>What does John see?</b>
<b>QUESTION?</b>	

John sees a *great multitude*. As we see in the context these are believers. The elder asks John a question to which he already knows the answer. He asks, “*Who are those arrayed in white robes and where did they come from?*”

What is the elder’s answer to his own question? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How did this “multitude” come out of the tribulation? Scripture seems to suggest (as we’ll see) that not all of these are “martyrs”. What could be the answer?

Let’s see how this lines up with **Matthew 24:31** and if this passage can help us answer this question? Let’s see.

According to Jesus in His sequential outline, the next act is when His angels will *gather together* His elect from the *four winds*. We’ve already seen this phrase, “*four winds*” previously, but what about this “*gathering together?*”

We also see Paul discuss this same instance on two different occasions: **Read 1 Thessalonians 4:17** and **1 Corinthians 15:51-52**.

What is the common theological phrase the church uses today to refer to this event?  
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The English word “rapture” comes from the Latin word used in the Latin *Vulgate* in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 translated “*caught up together*” and is similar to the Latin word used in Matthew 24:31.

Once the rapture is complete, God is now ready to unleash His wrath against the ungodliness of the inhabitants of the earth. Once the seventh and final seal is opened, we will hear the *Seven Trumpets!*