

The Book of Revelation

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THE SEALS

Revelation 6:1-17

Grouping of the Seals

The first four seals seem to be grouped together, with the fourth seal summarizing the other three. The final three seals would seem to make up a separate group. We will see a similar pattern with the trumpets and bowls. The 6th seal, the 6th trumpet, and the final bowl picture the Second Coming.

The Scroll

We remember from chapter 4 that the scroll is the unfolding of the end – the last days (from the resurrection and ascension until the Second Coming). We are in the last days. These days of fulfillment could not be ushered in until one worthy opened the scroll. Jesus, by His death, is qualified to usher in this fulfillment time – the last days. As a result of the Lamb slain and purchasing the salvation of His people, the seals are opened.

Old Testament Imagery

- Zech. 1:8-11; 6:1-8
Four chariots are described and the horses of each chariot are of a particular color (red, black, white, and dappled). These chariots represent the judgment of God on the surrounding nations that have done evil to Israel. God speaks of rest to His Spirit when God's judgment is spent and His wrath against sin is satisfied.
- Ezekiel 14:12-23
Four plagues are described that God will send upon those nations who have afflicted Israel (famine, wild beasts, sword, and plague).
- Leviticus 26:18-28
Judgments are described that God will bring upon Israel if she will not listen to the Lord (Drought and crop failure, wild beasts, sword, death, and famine).

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

1st Seal – CONQUEST

- Some see the rider as Christ (or the triumphant gospel or the church) leading His spiritual forces to victory throughout the age. This view is supported by Rev. 19:11-16 and Rev. 14:14 where Jesus is viewed as the conqueror. Mark 13:10 is also used in support since it describes the preaching of the gospel to all the nations as a prerequisite to the second coming of Jesus Christ.
- Others see the rider as someone who has a satanic character. Support for this view is found in the parallel of Zech. 6 where all the judgments were of the same type. Also, if the fourth rider is a summary of the other three, the first rider could not be Christ or the church.
- It is possible to see the first rider as neither Christ nor an evil power, but rather a messenger of divine judgment (Ezek. 5:16ff). In this case, military destruction in particular.

2nd Seal – CIVIL UNREST

- While the first horse may speak more directly of war, this second seal may be simply focused on restraint taken away so that people slaughter one another in civil unrest. Perhaps this even includes the persecution of Christians (Matt. 24:9).

3rd Seal – FAMINE

- Although the famine is to be serious, it is nevertheless limited so that foods essential for sustaining life will remain available.
- A denarius was a day's wage (Matt. 20:2), and a quart of wheat was about enough for one person per day. Three quarts of barley was enough for three days or for a typical family for one day. These prices are about eight to sixteen times the average prices in the Roman Empire at the time.

4th Seal – DEATH

- Referring to Death and Hades, "*The calamity they inflict is described in an allusion to Ezek. 14:21. As argued above, this rider generally summarizes the previous three (those of conquest, the sword, and famine, all of which would include to some extent 'death'...*" (Beale, page 383).
- See also Leviticus 26:18-28 and Deuteronomy 32:24-26 for the use of the four-fold judgment.
- "*The repeated occurrence of the fourfold formulas of judgment outside of Ezekiel 14 enforces the idea that Rev. 6:8 is a broad summary of the previous three horsemen and therefore, that all four are to be identified as essentially the same*" (Beale, page 383).

The First Four Seals

There is a restrained and partial judgment in the last days until the end, when God's victory over His enemies will be total. Thus, as we see societies crumble and collapse, we do not respond as if our security is bound up in human law and order. We can have anticipation and confidence for the Lamb is on the throne with God's plan for history firmly in hand.

"Therefore, just as the four 'living creatures' represent the praise of the redeemed throughout the entire creation, so the plagues of the four horsemen symbolize the suffering of many throughout the earth, which will continue until the parousia. That the horsemen's plagues represent all kinds of woes is clear from the fact that the fourfold covenant curse formula cited in 6:8b is used in the same figurative manner in the O.T. This is why no precise historical background can exhaust the meaning of these judgments in Revelation 6" (Beale, page 385).

The Problem of Evil

• Problem

It is the Lamb who is sending for the horsemen. How do we resolve the problem of a good God controlling evil?

• Biblical Answer

The only answer that the Bible gives is one that is two-fold. One – the creature and the creature alone is responsible for any evil that is performed (Acts 4:27). Two – God determines all things and, in a way that we do not understand, that includes evil (Acts 4:28; Prov. 16:4; Amos 3:6).

The Remaining Seals

5th Seal – MARTYRS

- The exhortation to “rest” is a call for the saints in heaven to be patient in their desire for God to answer their request. I do not believe their request is for personal revenge, but rather for a vindication of God’s name and holiness and majesty to be publicly displayed and honored as He so deserves.
- The assurance that God will unquestionably punish the evil world becomes motivation for Christians to persevere in their witness through suffering on earth, knowing that they are key players in helping establish the kingdom (in the same fashion as their Lord – through suffering).
- The final judgment will begin when all the elect have been brought into the fold and all believers whom God has decreed to suffer finally fulfill their destiny.

6th Seal – THE END OF THE WORLD

- The sixth seal introduces the terror of judgment day for the whole world of unbelievers.
- The description makes the point that God’s wrath upon a world that hated Christ and persecuted the church will be terrible indeed. What a picture of dread and despair for the wicked; when the door of grace is closed! (Nahum 1:5-8; Mal. 3:2)
- The descriptions used of the blackness and the sky rolled up as a scroll etc. are used several times in the prophets and it is never literal. It may possibly be literal here, but all the other times, it is simply used of judgment of which God is the ultimate author (i.e. Isaiah 2:12-22; 13:10; 34:1-4; Joel 2:10).
- The events leading up to this final day are birth pangs of the judgment to come. Unless you repent, you will likewise perish.