

Revelation 6-7 • The Seals

Introduction

[Note to Group Leaders: This is a longer than usual study.]

In reality, Revelation cannot be either fully appreciated nor truly understood without first thoroughly understanding the Olivet Discourse. For the first sixty years of the Church's existence, God purposely withheld Revelation, and the earliest generations of the Church and its Apostles (save one) all lived and died with no knowledge of what would be revealed to the Apostle John, but rather taught as the primary Scriptures for Christ's Second Coming the Olivet Discourse. In fact, when Revelation finally arrived, the only reason it was accepted as part of the canon of Scripture is because it conformed with the Olivet Discourse. The mistake so many make is to reverse the order and make Revelation the priority as if it were given first without taking into consideration the foundation which was laid before it was even given and why this study will constantly refer back to the Olivet Discourse.

The sequence of the Seals, Trumpets and Bowls, along with the supporting terms and language, must therefore be understood in the context of the Olivet Discourse and the New Testament teachings which are essentially commentaries on that central teaching of Christ, as well as recognizing all the parallels to it already provided in the rest of God's Word. It needs to be born in mind that before Christ provided Revelation as His final teaching on His Second Coming, He first gave the Olivet Discourse to serve as Revelation's foundation.

Foundational Issues

Q: From this point forward, Revelation is obviously organized into a "seven" unfolding into a "seven". Are there any other examples of this pattern in Scripture?

1. The Conquest of Jericho. (Josh. 6) Not only does a "seven" unfold into a "seven", but many other eschatological parallels are present in the two spies (as the Two Witnesses), silence followed by trumpet blasts and a shout, a rapture (the rescue of Rahab and her family), Joshua with his army (Christ—also named "Joshua" with His armies), etc.
2. Noah. (Gen. 7:1-5) They entered the ark seven days before wrath of God in the form of the Flood began.
3. Enoch. (Jude 14) There was a "six" before Enoch's rapture in the seventh generation from Adam.
4. Job. (Job 5:19) "From six troubles He will deliver you, even in seven evil will not touch you".

Q: How might this pattern also be reflected in the pattern of the Exodus of Israel from Egypt?

1. Like the Two Witnesses, Moses and Aaron battle an Antichrist figure and his false prophets in the form of Pharaoh and his magicians.
2. The ten plagues are actually three sets of three followed by final judgment as the tenth, when only the blood of the lamb can save.
3. Everyone experiences the first set or third of the plagues, but then God's people are exempted for the next two thirds. (Ex. 8:20-23)
4. God's people come out to build a tabernacle to worship God in a new kingdom foreshadowing similar activities in the Millennial Kingdom.

Point: The pattern of Revelation 4-19 is not entirely new. Previous biblical examples demonstrate that to a point, everyone experiences what is taking place until God exempts and then rescues His people going forward. This is the point where "judgment" turns to "wrath".

³⁶"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but **the wrath of God** abides on him." (Jn. 3:36)

⁹Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from **the wrath of God** through Him. (Rom. 5:9)

⁶Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things **the wrath of God** comes upon the sons of disobedience. (Eph. 5:6)

¹Then I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, "Come." ²I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.

³When He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come." ⁴And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men would slay one another; and a great sword was given to him.

⁵When He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, "Come." I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. ⁶And I heard something like a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not damage the oil and the wine."

⁷When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come." ⁸I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.

[Read v.1-8]

Q: Does the breaking of the 1st Seal take place on the very first day of the final seven year period we call the 70th Week of Daniel or which some call "The Tribulation"?

A: We do not know. Scripture specifies that the first day is the treaty with Israel initiated by the Antichrist (Dan. 9:27), which is never spoken of in the New Testament. It is only speculation if the treaty and the 1st Seal occur on the same day.

Q: How might the activities of the first four Seals parallel the Olivet Discourse?

A: These are the same activities described in the Olivet Discourse as "birth pangs", earthly events which come with ever-increasing frequency and potency.

Q: What appears to be the relationship between the "birth pangs" and the Seals?

A: The "birth pangs" seem to foreshadow the ultimate and final fulfillment of each Seal. In other words, each Seal is the "birth event"—the final and most powerful fulfillment of the "birth pangs" which come in successive waves before it.

Q: How is this "final fulfillment" in each of the opening four seals indicated?

A: By the command to "Come" by each of the four living creatures.

Q: What is the meaning of the 1st Seal and the white horse?

A: This is the Antichrist in a pre-counterfeit of Christ in Revelation 19.

1. Christ arrives on "a white horse...and in righteousness He judges and wages war" (Rev. 19:11) which is feigned here.
2. On Christ is found "on His head are many diadems", this imitation sporting a simpler, single crown.
3. Whereas this pretender has a bow, Christ ultimately comes with "a sharp sword, so as to strike down the nations and He will rule them with a rod of iron". (Rev. 19:15)
4. The Antichrist at first initiates a false peace and initially uses intrigue and deception (Dan. 8:23-25) as a counterfeit of Christ.

Q: What is the meaning of the 2nd Seal and the red horse?

A: In the basic character of Satan's working, what cannot be taken by deception in an atmosphere of false peace and prosperity gives way to overt military conquest. What the Antichrist cannot overcome spiritually by deception he will attempt to overcome physically by persecution.

Q: How is this different from what Christ will do in Revelation 19?

A: Whereas Christ will strike down mankind by the Word of His mouth described as a sword (Rev. 19:15), here it is a literal sword employed by the Antichrist so that "men would slay one another". (v.4)

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Q: Whereas the first two seals might equate to what the Olivet Discourse describes as “wars and rumors of wars”, to what might the 3rd and 4th Seals be likened?

A: “Disturbances”. (Lk. 21:9) All other past economic collapses and earthly catastrophes derived from “sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth” will be weak shadows of this ultimate, final holocaust which takes “a fourth of the earth” in a single action.

Point: To understand just how much more powerful these Seal events are compared to history past, the death of a fourth of mankind at this point would be just shy of 2 billion people, where the total lives lost in World War II totaled only 60-80 million. The 4th Seal alone is 25-33 times more destructive than largest human conflict to date.

Q: What might be the groundwork being laid here in terms of the economic collapse where the Antichrist is concerned?

A: In Revelation 13:16-17 we will learn that one of his chief characteristics is that no one is able to “buy or sell” without taking the mark of the beast. This not only compliments his conquest of nations in the 1st and 2nd Seals, but his subjugation of every individual heart and soul.

Q: Is there an explanation for why the final events of the Seal judgments are replayed over and over again in the “birth pangs” leading up to them?

A: It is possible that it purposely allowed by God first in order to warn of what is to come while there is still time to repent while they are still “birth pangs”, but secondly to obscure their ultimate fulfillment when the Seal judgments actually arrive.

Q: Why would God allow them to be obscured?

A: Because the actual beginning of Daniel’s 70th Week, the Antichrist’s treaty, is not specified in the New Testament. The first milestone of that final week of years which is specified is the midway point, the Abomination of Desolation. The emphasis is not so much on the final seven years as it is on the final 3-1/2 years.

Point: The “birth pangs” are events which can be replayed for every generation of the Church to test and refine their faith, but their final counterparts in the Seals will be unprecedented finales.

Application: The Seals are earthly activities which God has repeatedly used to both mete out punishment and to induce mankind to repent and return to Him, but which will have an ultimate, final fulfillment unlike anything which came before them.

⁹When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; ¹⁰and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” ¹¹And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of

[Read v.9-11]

Q: To what is the root cause of this persecution attributed?

A: “...because of the word of God, and because of the testimony they had maintained”. (v.9)

Point: This is strong textual proof that the Church has not yet been removed.

Q: Why do you suppose that this Seal is not accompanied by one of the four living creatures commanding, “Come”?

A: They are connected throughout Revelation with believers in worshiping the Godhead. It would be contradictory for them to facilitate persecution of fellow believers. This is rather Satan’s open warfare against believers.

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their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also.

Q: In the Olivet Discourse, what takes place after the wars, rumors of wars and disturbances associated with the “birth pangs”?

A: “Then they will deliver you to tribulation...” (Mt. 24:9a)

Q: When Jesus uses the term “tribulation” in the Olivet Discourse, is He referring to a seven year period?

A: No, it is a time specifically directed at believers, not the whole world.

Point: Nowhere in Scripture is it ever expressed that the 70th Week of Daniel is a seven year period called “The Tribulation”. When Christ uses the term, it describes a period of turmoil when the world turns against Christians as spiritual darkness is facilitated by persecution, apostasy and deception.

Q: What does this “tribulation” consist of?

1. (Mt. 24:9) “...they...will kill you...”
2. (Mt. 24:9) “...you will be hated by all nations because of My name.”
3. (Lk. 21:12) “...they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name’s sake.”
4. (Mk. 13:9) “...they will deliver you to the courts...”
5. (Lk. 21:16) “But you will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death, and you will be hated by all because of My name.” (These first five describe persecution.)
6. (Mt. 24:10) “...many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another.” (The very definition of “apostasy”)
7. (Mt.24:11) “Many false prophets will arise will mislead many.” (The rise of intense spiritual deception.)
8. (Mt. 24:12) “Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold.” (A deterioration of core Christian values and behavior.)

Q: But what is the “good news” which will be brought about in the midst of this persecution, apostasy and deception?

A: “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come”. (Mt. 24:14)

Point: God will use this time the world intends for harm to His people to complete the Church’s mission to “be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth”. (Acts 1:8)

Application: In both the Olivet Discourse and the sequence of the Seals, a time of tribulation comes for the Church when we will be witnesses for Christ and the Gospel.

¹²] looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; ¹³and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. ¹⁴The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

[Read v.12-16]

Q: With what are these very same signs so often associated with in other Scriptures?

A: “The day of the Lord”. (Is. 13:10; 24:23; 34:4; Eze. 32:7; Joel 2:10, 31; 3:15; Amos 5:20; 8:9; Zeph. 1:15)

Q: How are these signs paralleled in the Olivet Discourse?

²⁹“But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (Matthew 24:29)

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¹⁵Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; ¹⁶and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; ¹⁷for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”

²⁵“There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, ²⁶men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (Luke 21:25–26)

Q: What might be significant about these events where Peter’s message on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 is concerned?

A: Peter quotes Joel and these events as those things which occur at the conclusion of the Church Age. In other words, Peter does not specify that the Church will be removed when the advent of the 1st Seal, but rather with the onset of “the day of the Lord”, which does not take place until the 6th and 7th Seals. Peter is specifying this point as the Church’s conclusion.

Q: What is the contrast in the reaction to these things between believers and non-believers where the Olivet Discourse is concerned?

A: For non-believers, “...and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn” (Mt. 24:30), whereas for believers, “straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near”. (Lk. 21:28) Both witness the signs but have opposite reactions.

Q: What is the reaction of non-believers with the advent of the 6th Seal?

A: In spite of acknowledging the source as “from the wrath of the Lamb”, there is no repentance. Like Adam subsequent to his sin, they try to hide themselves from God.

Observation: This is the first of four recorded instances in Revelation of mankind’s rejection and rebellion against God, each increasingly stronger than the last, ultimately culminating with their overt and outspoken blasphemy of God. (Rev. 6:15-17; 9:20-21; 16:9, 21) In other words, rather than a “revival” of any kind, it only gets progressively worse from here.

Application: What comes for the rest of the world is not a time of tribulation in the character of what was experienced by the Church, but “the day of the Lord” when all that is left is to experience God’s wrath. Both are recognized as authored by and pending from God for each respectively.

[Read 7:1-8]

^{7:1}After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. ²And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, ³saying, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads.”

⁴And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:

Q: How does this reflect the overall pattern of the events depicted in Revelation?

A: Between each sequence there seem to be interludes or dramatic pauses before escalating to the next level. In this case an interlude between the 6th and 7th Seals which unleashes the Trumpets.

Q: What is similar to what just took place with the Seals?

A: Whereas there were four horsemen who unleashed harmful activities upon the earth, here there are four angels poised to “harm the earth and the sea” and those dwelling on the earth who are not sealed.

Q: What differentiates these ethnic Jews from the rest of Israel?

A: They are “bond-servants of our God”, meaning that they have embraced Jesus as their Messiah. They are in a born-again relationship with Christ.

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⁵From the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, ⁶from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, ⁷from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, ⁸from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand were sealed.

⁹After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; ¹⁰and they cry out with a loud voice, saying,

“Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”

¹¹And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹²saying,

“Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.”

Q: Is this group of 144,000 the same as that mentioned again in Revelation 14?

A: Yes. Whereas Revelation 7 is addressing literal, ethnic believers in Christ from an earthly view, Revelation 14 is viewing them from a spiritual, heavenly perspective “*as first fruits to God and to the Lamb*”. (Rev. 14:3-5) They are the first of many more to come as God returns to completing His work through Israel. (Rom. 9-11)

Q: Why do many commentators describe this group as “super evangelists” who will bring the Gospel to the world?

A: This is actually never stated in Scripture and is a human assumption superimposed on them. It assumes that the Church cannot complete that mission, contrary to what Jesus states in the Olivet Discourse which will be a time near the end when intense persecution of the Church will provide the opportunity to preach the Gospel to the entire world.

Application: *The time comes when God returns to primarily working through Israel to complete all as yet unfulfilled promises made to and through them.*

[Read v.9-12]

Q: If we accept that this is the Rapture and removal of the Church, aren't we violating the scriptural restriction that no one can know the day or the hour?

A: No, because this is the fulfillment of the command that we are to know the season and nearness—in other words, the environment when it is about to happen. Just because we can know the sequence or order of events in advance does not automatically mean we know the day or the hour.

³²“Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; ³³so, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door. (Matthew 24:32–33)

Q: What indicates that this is, indeed, the Church?

A: They are not only “*clothed in white robes*”, a scriptural feature of the redeemed, but the “*palm branches were in their hands*” is exactly how God's people were to celebrate the Messiah the Conquering King as part of the Feast of Tabernacles symbolizing the Millennial Kingdom to come. This is further affirmed by their outburst of praise for salvation.

Q: How is this also affirmed by the Olivet Discourse?

A: This is what comes next is the parallel sequence to the Seals in the Olivet Discourse.

³⁰“And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. ³¹And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. (Matthew 24:30–31)

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Application: *The Harpazo of the Church takes place between the 6th and 7th Seals.*

¹³Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?"

¹⁴I said to him, "My lord, you know.

And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. ¹⁶They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; ¹⁷for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes."

[Read v.13-17]

Q: First, what is the further indication of the meaning of "white robes"? How do we know this pertains exclusively to the Church?

A: Because it is further stipulated that they could only be white because "they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb". (v.14)

Q: Second, what is the difference between the "tribulation" and the "great tribulation"?

A: Whereas the "tribulation" corresponds to a time when the world turns against the Church and heaps upon it an unprecedented period of persecution in tandem with unparalleled apostasy and deception, the Olivet Discourse specifies that the "great tribulation" is an even spiritually darker period following that which is kicked off by the Abomination of Desolation and supernaturally cut short by God by the removal of the Church so that all that remains for those left behind is "the day of the Lord".

²¹"For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. ²²Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. (Matthew 24:21-22)

Point: *Nowhere in Scripture is either a 7 or 3-1/2 year period imposed on either the terms "tribulation" or "great tribulation", nor are they periods directed at the whole earth. Rather, they are escalating periods of spiritual testing exclusively aimed at the Church which each occur for a brief successive time in the course of the 70th Week of Daniel. In reality they are phases rather than 3-1/2 year halves of the final 7 years.*

Overall Observation

What is difficult for many to accept is that prior to the early 19th Century with the onset of teachings from Darby resulting in what we know as Dispensationalism, there was not a common eschatology embraced by the Church called Pre-Tribulationism. This teaching states that the final seven years and "the day of the Lord" are the same thing and therefore attempts to exempt the Church from anything taking place in Revelation 4-19. Prior to that, for the majority of Church history, it has always been expected that in the character of the Exodus where Israel experienced the first third of the judgments before being exempted, that the Church would likewise experience the first third of the judgments (the Seals) before being exempted from the Trumpets and Bowls.

One of the key indicators of this is how the character of the Seal judgments are all carried out by earthly agency, whereas the Trumpets and Bowls are effected by angelic agency. Whereas the activities of the Seals mirror those which God has historically used to induce punishment or encourage repentance and a return to Him, the Trumpets and Bowls to come are the final expression of divine wrath bringing all things to their prophesied conclusion.

As taught by Christ in the Olivet Discourse, this is still a time when there is yet an opportunity to be saved from what is to come, when as it was in the days of Noah, He shuts the door at the end of the "seven" and that opportunity is forever lost.

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