

The Seven Seals, Pt. 1: Introduction (Revelation 6:1-8)

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Introduction

1. In Matthew 24 Jesus announced the destruction of the temple (v. 2); the disciples responded by asking *when* it was to take place and presuming that it also meant the end of the world and His return (v. 3).
 - a. Jesus spoke of *trends* in our terrible fallen world, not *signs* of the end of it (vv. 4-14).
 - b. He also made a distinction between divine judgment in A.D. 70 and His personal return at the end of the age (v. 36).
2. However, the disciples were more concerned to know *when* the “these things” would happen and what *signs* would accompany the end (note v. 36 and Acts 1:7).
3. Instead, Jesus pointed them to His *purpose* for relating these things—to prepare them for suffering.
 - a. To harden them to endure suffering and trial
 - b. To bolster boldness in their witness in a hostile climate
 - c. To keep them vigilant against persistent temptation and deception

I. The Purpose of Preparation

1. The Revelation prepares God’s people to endure in this present evil age.
 - a. Jesus, in sovereign majesty, is leading His own throughout history in this wicked and very dangerous world to the glories of the new creation.
 - b. The chapters before us (6–11) detail the divine justice that is poured out on the God-rejecting rebels who are the persecutors of His people.
 - c. At the same time, His own are purged and purified through the suffering that they endure at the hands of the persecutors.
2. We would all like to believe that Revelation addresses specific future events prophesied to take place in a brief period immediately prior to Christ’s return.
 - a. Instead, the visions contain symbols that are applicable to event throughout the church age.
 - b. The exception is the final scenes at the coming of Christ to judge, deliver, and establish the final form of the kingdom in the new creation.

II. The Parade of Fours

1. Numbers play a significant role in the symbolism of Revelation, as we have already noted.
 - a. The numbers 3, 4, 7, 10, and 12 are most prominent.
 - b. In chapters 6-11, there are 3 sets of 7s—(1) seals, (2) trumpets and (3) vials or bowls.
 - 1) Five views are offered to explain the relationship of the seals, trumpets, and bowls to each other.

- a) The most popular is the *dispensational* view, which sees these as the *strictly sequential*.
 - b) The most popular *amillennial* approach is the *strict parallel* view.
 - c) The best is that set forth by Sam Storms*; the *progressive parallelism/recapitulation* view (**Kingdom Come*, ©2013, pg. 400).
- 2) The view we will take is that they are concurrent, explaining the same history from different sides.

The text supports the *progressive parallel* view; for example,

(1) In 7:1, John says, “*After this* [presumably, after the events in chapter 6] *I saw . . .*”

A fifth angel stops the four angels from blowing their trumpets with the command, “*Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God*” (7:3).

However, chapter 6 describes massive harming of the earth.

Another example—

(2) If you take the sixth seal (6:12, 13) literally, you will believe that the sun, moon, and stars will cease to shine.

However, in the fourth trumpet (8:12, 13), the light of the sun, moon, and stars is only diminished by one-third.

These examples show that the trumpets cannot chronologically follow the seals.

2. These 7s are also divided into 4s and 3s.
- a. The seals: 4 horsemen + 3 visions
 - b. The trumpets: limited disasters by 4 angels representing four divisions of creation (earth, sea, waters, and heavens) + 3 woes
 - c. The bowls: complete destruction of the 4 divisions of creation + 3 judgments on the beast system
3. The seals and trumpets also share another structural feature: six + parenthesis (delay) + one.
- a. The first six seals and trumpets bring us to a consummation, but the narrative is interrupted with a delay to address the experiences God’s people.
 - b. However, the seven bowl judgments follow each other in rapid succession without interruption.

III. Opening the Seals

1. The opening of the seals corresponds with Christ’s taking His place at the right hand of God.
 - a. This revelation supports His exhortations to persevere (chapters 2 and 3).
 - b. He alone opens the seals and commands that their contents be executed in the earth.
2. The first four seals correspond to the visions of Ezekiel in 14:12-21 (14:21 is quoted in 6:8) and Zechariah (6:1-8) respecting the judgment of His people for their idolatry.

- a. In the New Covenant setting, they set forth God's purpose to purify His church while punishing the unbelieving world.
- b. As noted above, the four horsemen act in unison, not consecutively.
- c. The number 4 speaks of creation (four corners, four winds, four seasons, etc.) and the thoroughness of God's judgment on the fallen world.

Jesus now rules from His exalted throne, and He will execute righteousness throughout the whole of creation until He has brought all things into subjection: *"For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death"* (1 Cor. 15:25, 26).

Use

1. How does the careful reading of the Revelation help us to overcome the tendency of the disciples to want times and signs rather than focus upon the purpose and duty that Christ has set before the church?
2. If God is sovereign in all things, how do we respond to the trials and suffering that we experience?
3. How do we view Satan's efforts to exert His influence in the world in light of God's sovereignty (Eph. 2:2; 2 Cor. 4:4)?