

UNDERSTANDING THAT WEIRD BOOK OF REVELATION - Part five

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THE UNSEALING OF THIS WORLD'S FUTURE

Revelation 6:1-17 - "Now I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, "Come!" [2] And I looked, and behold, a white horse! And its rider had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering, and to conquer. [3] When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" [4] And out came another horse, bright red. Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that men should slay one another, and he was given a great sword. [5] When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" And I looked, and behold, a black horse! And its rider had a pair of scales in his hand. [6] And I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures, saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and wine!" [7] When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!" [8] And I looked, and behold, a pale horse! And its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth. [9] When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. [10] They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" [11] Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been. [12] When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, [13] and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. [14] The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. [15] Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, [16] calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, [17] for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

The theme of chapter five was the worthiness of the Lamb - Jesus Christ, crucified, risen and exalted - to open the seals of the book of the will of Almighty God for this world - **Revelation 5:7-9** - "And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. [8] And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. [9] And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation...."

When you study Revelation you have to remember you are studying a book about another book. This sealed book - the one the Lamb is worthy to open - is what the rest of the book of Revelation is about. John is going to talk about **three very important 'sevens'** in the rest of the book of Revelation.

The **first** group of seven is the **seven seals**. These are dealt with in **chapters 6 through 8**. The **second** group of seven is the **seven trumpets**. These are dealt with in **chapters 8 through 12**. The **third** group of seven is the **seven bowls**. They are quickly described in **chapter 16** (though their **effect** carries on through chapters 17 and following).

Now there is one point I want to underscore today. If there is **one** interpretive key to understanding the whole book of Revelation, I believe this is it. If you don't get this one point right you will have a very hard time understanding how the rest of the book fits together.

Here is the key point: These three sets of seven do not **follow** each other in sequence. They **overlap** each other and build in intensity. Many people have typically **interpreted** these three sevens as following on the heels of each other simply because **that's the way the visions of these sevens came to John**.

In other words, first John saw the seven seals and described them. Then, after he saw the seven seals, John saw the seven trumpets and described them. Then, **after** John saw the seven trumpets, he saw the seven bowls and described them. So because John's **visions** came in this sequence, it seems simple to assume the **events** came in the same sequence.

But, as I think you will see, John only saw these revelations in this sequence because he could only see **one vision at a time**. That's

why I said at the very beginning of this study it is very important to remember what we are studying in this book of Revelation. We're studying a *series of visions*. But the order of the *visions* isn't always intended to portray the order of the *events* they picture.

I think you will clearly see this as we work our way through these fascinating chapters. Some visions look ahead into the future. Then, *after* a futuristic vision, there will come a vision that actually looks far back into the distant past. Then there are also some events that are pictured three or four times - the *same* event from different perspectives. And all of these visions come one after another. If this isn't understood the whole book will be shrouded in mystery, or *worse*, people will *force* an interpretation on the book that isn't actually there, but fits in with their predetermined prophetic system. People are making big money on this type of practice right now in the Body of Christ.

Let's get back to the *three sevens*. Typically, for the last forty years or so especially, these three sets of seven have been looked at something like this:

<u>SEALS</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7													
						<u>TRUMPETS</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7							
										<u>BOWLS</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	-	<u>THE END</u>	

As popular as that interpretation is, I don't believe it will stand up to an honest examination of the text. And I believe there is a much better way to explain the *meaning* of John's vision in the context of *other* significant prophetic Scriptures in the New Testament, including the key teaching from Jesus Himself in the gospels.

I think a better picture of the three sevens would look something like this:

<u>SEALS</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 - END					
					<u>TRUMPETS</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 - END
								<u>BOWLS</u>	1234567	-	END	

In other words, the important point here is *each of the three sevens brings us right up to the end - the Second Coming of Jesus and the end of this age*. My drawing couldn't show it quite accurately. I think what you will find as you read the text of Revelation is the seventh seal *contains* the seven trumpets. And likewise, the seventh trumpet *contains* the seven bowls. That's why, if you study it closely, you will find that the seventh in each series (seventh seal, seventh trumpet and seventh bowl) contain basically the *same events* (8:5, 11:19, 16:17-18) - thunder, voices, lightening, earthquakes, and always divine wrath.

So what you have here is an *intensifying* of activity as the age winds down. Things *build to a fast climax* as the very end approaches. Both the persecution from the enemy and the judgment of God intensify on this earth until those days will be shortened (as Jesus says) for the sake of the elect - Matthew 24:22 - "**And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.**"

Here's why all of this matters. *All* Christians believe the church will be protected from the outpouring of God's wrath at the end of this age. Jesus promised this to His disciples very clearly:

Luke 21:25-36 - "**And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, [26] people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. [27] And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. [28] Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. [29] And he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. [30] As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. [31] So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. [32] Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place."**

[33] "**Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. [34] "But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. [35] For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. [36] But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."**

We will *not* experience the wrath of God as it is poured out. We will "*escape all these things*" (36). And many people interpret this to mean the church will be raptured at the *beginning* of the Tribulation (usually said to be seven years, from the book of Daniel). But they interpret it this way because they have decided that all of the seven seals and trumpets and bowls in the book of Revelation are

the outpouring of the wrath of God.

But they aren't. God's wrath is **not** poured out for the whole duration of the Tribulation. It will only cover a very brief, final portion of it. Many different things happen during the Tribulation. There will be human warfare. There will be persecution of the Church by Satan and the Antichrist. None of this is the wrath of God. But as the Tribulation proceeds and as time passes the time comes **at the very close** of the Tribulation for God's wrath to be poured out. **This** is the part we are promised protection from. But this comes at the very close of the Tribulation - as the seven bowls of God's wrath are poured out on the earth.

So (and this is a very important point) as the intensification of the Tribulation builds - at the very **end** - God's wrath is poured out **very suddenly and very quickly**. This will not be a long, drawn out process. It will sweep over the earth in a flash. It will bring very **sudden** destruction. This is where the church will be protected and spared.

1) **THE SEVEN SEALS ARE NOT THEMSELVES THE OPENING OF THE CONTENTS OF THE BOOK, BUT ARE THE PREPARATION FOR THE OPENING OF THE BOOK**

Jesus is pictured as opening up the seals that **hold the book shut** - **Revelation 5:9a** - "And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals....'" The seals should not be thought of as opening separate **chapters** of the book of the end. The actual **contents** of the book are revealed in the seven trumpets and seven bowls. The seals must be opened first, one at a time, **before** the book itself can be opened.

This too is a very important point. The seals represent what must happen **before** the actual unfolding of the Tribulation events themselves. In other words, the seals represent the **course of this entire age** leading right up to the events of the Tribulation and the end.

Jesus made this same distinction between the **immediate** events of the end and the **gradual progression** of the course of this whole final era:

Matthew 24:4-14 - "And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray. [5] For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. [6] And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. [7] For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. [8] All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. [9] "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. [10] And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. [11] And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. [12] And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. [13] But the one who endures to the end will be saved. [14] And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."

What I want you to see is the **similarity** between the kinds of events Jesus described as "**birthpangs**" (hatred, war, strife, persecution) and the content of the **first five seals** (death, war, strife, persecution and famine). Jesus said all of these things have been around for a long time. But, like **birthpangs**, they are not meaningless. They are **leading** to bigger events. And they grow in **frequency** and **intensity** right up to the very end itself.

This is especially true in the area of the persecution of believers (see the content of the **fifth seal** - **Revelation 6:9-11**). As time progresses - and this is a **very** important point for all of us in the church to meditate on - it will be harder and harder to remain neutral about our faith. As time progresses - right in this present age - God, in His love, is going to **force** allegiance one way or the other. He is going to use persecution to cause everyone to **declare himself spiritually**.

Right now you can come to church on Sunday and sing about how much you love Jesus. Then you can have a whole set of other friends and live like they live and love what they love. You can have a foot in both camps and nobody but you and the Holy Spirit will even know.

But all of that is about to change. You will **see** it in your lifetime. You will see this as we move further into the book of Revelation. You will read about people being "**marked**." God will mark His people and the Antichrist will mark his. The consequences of this marking will spill over into all of life - economics, food, business, politics, etc. **Nobody will be able to remain on the fence**. You will either face **persecution** for your passionate commitment to Jesus Christ, or you will face the **outpouring of God's wrath** for siding with the world. There will be absolutely **no one** on the fence anymore.

I think the Holy Spirit put all of that in the book of Revelation so we could prepare our hearts **now** for what is coming **soon**.

2) **AS THE FINAL SEAL IS OPENED WE FIND OURSELVES AT THE TIME OF THE VERY END**

Notice the content of the sixth seal as it's opened:

Revelation 6:12-17 - "When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, [13] and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. [14] The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. [15] Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, [16] calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, [17] for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

This is the sixth seal. Now it is describing something more intense than the wars and rumors of wars that Jesus said were mere "**birthpangs**." This is not **leading up** to the end. This is the **end itself**. Notice how the content of this sixth seal is almost exactly like the events Jesus said would take place right at the time of His coming:

Matthew 24:29-31 - "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 heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. [30] Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. [31] And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

So the six seals, taken together, bring us right up to the Second Coming and the end of the age. The sixth seal specifically deals with the outpouring of God's sudden wrath and parallels Jesus' words about the end of the age in Matthew 24. You simply must interpret Scripture (even difficult, challenging passages) in keeping with **other** key prophetic Scriptures.

3) **THE SEVENTH SEAL (OPENED IN REVELATION CHAPTER 8) CONTAINS NO SPECIFIC JUDGEMENT, BUT LEADS RIGHT INTO THE SEVEN TRUMPETS**

Revelation 8:1-2 - "When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. [2] Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them."

In other words, the seven trumpets flesh out in more detail the events of the **very** end which were just briefly mentioned in the sixth seal. Or, another way of saying the same thing is ***the seventh seal actually opens up the book of the end - the book that was kept closed until the proper time of the removal of the seven seals of this present age. These seals of preparation for the end are removed and the book of the very end is opened.***

The more detailed story of the Great Tribulation is upon us.