

**“More Than Conquerors”**  
*Revelation 6-7*

**Contemporary Contact** – **SLIDE1**

The book of Revelation (though not called Revelations), does contain a series of revelations, of unveilings. We are told right up front in the opening verse (turn to it) that this “revelation from Jesus Christ” was given “to **show** his servants what must soon take place”. Given that the revelation is an actual letter to the seven churches,<sup>1:4,11</sup> means that its primary purpose is not predictive but prophetic, prophetic is the biblical sense of the word (divine *insight* vs. *foresight*). As commentator Nelson Kraybill wisely explains, **SLIDE2**

*“Biblical prophecy often has more to do with spiritual insight into the writer’s immediate circumstances than with forecasts of the distant future. John’s vision gave insight into ‘what must soon take place,’ in his era (1<sup>1</sup>). ”<sup>1</sup>* **BLANK3**

Like other biblical prophets, John is given a God’s-eye-view of the world, how it really is and looks from God’s perspective. So in chapter one John was given a God’s-eye-view of Jesus in all his heavenly glory, something far bigger and fuller than the earthly Jesus who, as Paul described it in Php. 2<sup>7</sup> “made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.” Paul had spoken also of Jesus’ exaltation by God the Father, but what Paul had spoken of John now saw and was naturally overwhelmed by.<sup>1:17</sup>

The unveiling of Jesus was followed by an unveiled perspective of the church in chs. 2-3, the way Christ sees and knows every church as it really is. In chs. 4-5 John was given a God’s-eye-view of the control room and who is really “on the throne” captaining this ship, guiding where the world is headed.

We noted that the songs and symbols of those chapters had strong political overtones since the emperors and empire had claimed for themselves, as they so often do, titles and honours that belong exclusively “to him who sits on the throne” and “to the Lamb” who alone is worthy to open the scroll. The

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<sup>1</sup> J. Nelson Kraybill, Apocalypse and Allegiance, p. 22

scroll “contains the full account” of God’s plan to bring his original purpose of creation to its intended fulfillment.<sup>2</sup> (i.e. the Lord’s prayer, “Thy kingdom come, *thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*”) (the seal breaker = unique in his *authority*<sup>3</sup> and *ability*)

The actual breaking of the seven seals therefore is a dramatic and indispensable follow up to the vision in chapter 5. So it is important to read Revelation 6 wearing the glasses shaped by chapters 4 & 5 for there John saw that, contrary to the ways things appeared (i.e. with John in prison and the churches under persecution), the world did not revolve around the one on the throne in Rome, but around the one on the throne **in heaven** (heaven = greater or fuller reality, deeper not detached). In chapter five John saw more clearly and decisively than he had ever seen before that Jesus, the slaughtered Lamb using “Lamb Power” rather than “Lion Power”, is the only one in the whole universe who is able to open the scroll and make God’s plan to save the world operational.<sup>4</sup> (Jesus title “Lamb” is used 28x in Rev.)<sup>Mounce,145</sup> Before getting into today’s texts (Rev. 6-7) I want to show you a short video from the guys at “The Bible Project” who have been working for years at putting together amazing helpful visual summaries of each book of the Bible. Here is a portion of their video on this section. **Rev6 Clip**

### Read Revelation 6. **SLIDE5**

The Lamb himself opens the first seal. He alone is worthy to set in motion the events which will bring human history to its ultimate goal. And yet the four horsemen of the apocalypse that come in rapid succession seem hell-bent rather than heaven-sent right? Especially when we hear the cry of the martyred saints with the breaking of the fifth seal as they call out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” (**N.B.** “the inhabitants of the earth” in Revelation = humanity “in its hostility to God”<sup>Mounce,159</sup> and opposed to His ways—3<sup>10</sup>; 8<sup>13</sup>; 11<sup>10</sup>; 13<sup>8,14</sup>; 17<sup>2,8</sup>)

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Mounce, Revelation (NICNT), p. 142. See also Darrel Johnson, Discipleship On The Edge. 167.

<sup>3</sup> As Darrell Johnson notes, “Seals are on the scroll as signs of ownership. In the first century, documents were sealed not to prevent their contents from being known, but to say that only the one authorized by the author could open them.” Discipleship On The Edge, p. 168.

<sup>4</sup> “In one brilliant stroke John portrays the central theme of NT revelation—victory through sacrifice.” Mounce,144.

The rising tide of evil even *after* Jesus himself had come to turn the tide and establish God's kingdom<sup>5</sup> must have puzzled many Christians in John's day. If the kingdom or rule of God had really come, then why does the empire seem to be growing more evil and hostile toward Christ and his followers?

The great theological question = “What in the Sam Hill is going on here anyway?”<sup>6</sup>

The question of why such evil forces<sup>7</sup> are allowed to stampede through human history clamors for an answer. We hear in the martyrs' cry, those who are bearing the brunt of the worse of these human caused atrocities (e.g. watching “disPLACE”) Most suffering in the world has been, and still is, and will be caused by humans “bent on conquest”.

“The first four seals form a unity. They show us the self-defeating character of sin”<sup>Morris,100</sup> (cf. Rom. 1<sup>18ff.</sup>). Commentator Darrell Johnson echoes this when he says that the four horsemen represent the kinds of things that happen when Jesus and his kingdom, when the Lamb and his way, are resisted and opposed. “As long as he and his way are ignored or resisted, the four horsemen will continue to ride. As long as violence is glorified and marketed, the world will continue to suffer violence.”<sup>Johnson,173</sup>

**SLIDE6**

**SLIDE7** *Seal one says that if we do not go the way of the Lamb there will be greater and greater conflict and the drive to conquer. Seal two says if we do not go the way of the Lamb there will be greater and greater violence. Seal three says that if we do not go the way of the Lamb there will be greater and greater injustice and hunger. Seal four says if we do not go the way of the Lamb there will be greater and greater sickness and death.*<sup>Johnson,174</sup>

Is the church spared all this? (e.g. pre-tribulation rapture) No. I wish I could tell you that the Bible says the church will be spared all this, but the breaking of the fifth seal (like the rest of the NT) **SLIDE8** is very clear that the church isn't spared the effects of human caused wars and famines and plagues

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Mark 1:15, “The time has come...The kingdom of God has come near...”

<sup>6</sup> Annie Dillard ranked this as the chief theological question of all time. (see Peterson, Reversed Thunder, 72)

<sup>7</sup> The first two are champion warriors with symbols of military conquest who together “take peace from the earth”. The third envisions a “siege economy” which makes it impossible for the poor to survive (inequality & injustice). The fourth is named Death, with Hades gathering the victims of sword, famine and plague and wild beasts (used by Romans to persecute Christians in the arena).

and persecutions. Those who follow the Lamb and his ways get caught in the clash of the kingdoms, just like Jesus did (cf. Mt. 5<sup>10-12</sup> “Blessed...insult...persecute...”).

- Comment on where the martyred saints are (“under the altar” = where the blood of the sacrifices ran down—cf. Rom. 12<sup>1-2</sup>)
- Comment on their cry being not “will you judge the inhabitants of the earth”<sup>8</sup> but “when will you”. (N.B. “inhabitants of the earth” = the language used to refer to human beings in opposition to God and his ways) In their suffering they have not lost faith in God’s justice.<sup>9</sup>

When we experience evil in any form it tends to feel and seem all encompassing and all consuming.

e.g. a toothache makes us forget and lose sight of the health in the rest of our body. Yes, 1/4 of the earth<sup>v.8</sup> = a big disaster that calls for our attention, but don’t forget that ¾ of the earth is spared by God (vs. total disaster). This is not to minimize the pain, and Revelation doesn’t minimize it in any way. But it does not treat evil as being unrestrained and all consuming—which would lead to despair if we believed that.

Despair also happens when we assume that the ways things are, is the way things will always be (v.11 “they were told to wait a little longer...” NOT the news they wanted to hear!). Notice that there is no question “if” evil will be dealt with. We will see in the breaking of the sixth seal that it is and in the mean-time there are limits on the scope evil is allowed and limits on the time evil is given.

- Like Job (1<sup>12</sup>; 2<sup>6</sup>) and like Jesus—“at this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his time had not yet come.” (7<sup>30</sup>; 8<sup>20</sup>) This = God’s way.

There is also a final day when God’s ultimate rule and rulings will be completed as we see in the breaking of the sixth seal. **SLIDE9** The dramatic language and images are drawn from the literary palette of OT prophets like Joel, 2:31; 3:15 Haggai, 2:6 Isaiah<sup>13:10; 34:4</sup> and Jeremiah.<sup>4 23-28</sup> Indeed this is the very same cosmic catastrophic language Jesus used to describe “the day of the Lord” (Mt. 24<sup>9</sup>) when God would finally step in and wrap things up once and for all. So what this closing section of Rev. 6 is revealing to John and his readers and

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<sup>8</sup> This phrase recurs in Revelation and refers to human beings in opposition to God and his ways (3:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8,14; 17:8; cf. 13:12; 17:2).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Habakkuk 2<sup>3,4</sup> “Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay...the righteous will live by his faith.” And Hab. 3<sup>16</sup> “Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us.”

us is that the final destruction of evil is guaranteed. As commentator Leon Morris notes, “It is not a question of ‘Whether?’ but of ‘When?’.”<sup>10</sup>

South African Bishop Desmond Tutu said that during the darkest days of apartheid he used to tell people that we had already won, and invited his opponents to join the winning side.<sup>11</sup> “Of course, there were [also] times when you had to whistle in the dark to keep your morale up, and you wanted to whisper in God’s ear: “God we know You are in charge, but can’t you make it a little more obvious?”<sup>12</sup> Chapter 7 reveals what is not always obvious.

- **Rev 7 Clip and Read Rev. 7 SLIDE11**

The sixth seal has been opened, but before the opening of the seventh and final seal there is a dramatic interlude. Here we find that the servants of God are under his special protection (the OT background and purpose of being “sealed” = protects and empowers—Exodus 8<sup>23</sup>; 9<sup>4,6</sup>; 10<sup>23</sup>; 11<sup>7</sup> & 12<sup>13,23,27</sup>; Ezekiel 9<sup>4-6</sup>; and the NT language of being “sealed” with the Holy Spirit—Eph. 1<sup>13</sup>; 4<sup>30</sup>; 2 Cor. 1<sup>12</sup>). God’s protection is seen in how the four winds (“four” = symbolic for “all/whole” and “winds” usually are destructive<sup>13</sup>) are fully restrained from venting their rage, and are put under strict orders to stick to God’s plans and purposes.

God’s overarching care and control are underlined further by such details as their being sealed *permanently*<sup>14</sup> and in the complete number of those sealed. “The number 144,000 is the multiple of the square of twelve (the number of Israel) and the cube of ten (the number of completion). It thus [symbolic language that] indicates the perfect total of Israel [now made up of Jews and Gentiles].”<sup>15</sup> That is the number that John “heard”<sup>v.4</sup> but when he “looked”<sup>v.9</sup> what

<sup>10</sup> Leon Morris, Revelation (TNTC), p. 107.

<sup>11</sup> The ones who seek to conquer the world for themselves and fashion it in their image and according to their will (i.e. “the kings, princes, generals, rich, mighty”—6:15) end up powerless and lose everything. And the ones who from an earthly perspective appeared to be the biggest losers (6:9) are shown to be the biggest winners (ch.7).

<sup>12</sup> God Has A Dream, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Made explicit by the command in 7:3, “Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees.”

<sup>14</sup> As Leon Morris notes, “the perfect tense *esphragismenon* = ‘sealed permanently.’” Revelation, p. 111.

<sup>15</sup> Morris, 111. Johnson, 185. While some see the 144,000 to be the literal, physical Israel (or the converted from Israel), a strong objection is that it would have only Israel sealed for protection but a mighty multitude from all nations saved without this sealing. Surely both would be sealed if they are different groups. (*Cf.* “the twelve tribes” language used for the church in James 1<sup>1</sup>; *cf.* Mt. 19<sup>28</sup>; Lk. 22<sup>30</sup>; 1 Pet. 1<sup>1</sup>; 2<sup>9</sup>; Rom. 2<sup>29</sup>; Gal. 6<sup>16</sup>) John speaks of those “who say they are Jews and are

he saw as “*a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne.*” (the promise of Abraham fulfilled—Gen. 12<sup>3</sup>)

- Not a different group of people but the same group from two perspectives.
- Same paradoxical like pattern in ch.5....Jesus = “the Lion” & “the Lamb”
- Doubling & parallelism in Hebrew = common literary device<sup>16</sup> (for emphasis, for certainty, the second often expands or deepens the first)

The two scenes belong together making different but mutually important points.

“The first scene reveals the fact that the “servants of God,” as the angel calls the disciples of Jesus, are “sealed” so that they can persevere through the great tribulation. The second scene reveals “the heavenly reward for those who do persevere” through the great tribulation.<sup>Johnson,180</sup>

The *great tribulation?* What and when is that? In John’s mind, it started when Jesus came into the world and the empire tried to strike back (cf. John’s apocalyptic version of the Christmas story in Rev. 12). The “great tribulation” has been happening since Jesus came and all through church history (**Rev. 1<sup>9</sup>**).<sup>17</sup>

- e.g. visiting with international believers at a conference in 2010—from India, Thailand, Laos, Egypt—and noticing the common denominator in their stories was persecution)

Chapter 7 helps us to fix in our mind the reality that the reward for following Jesus through thick and thin will far outweigh the pain of our adversity. (“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”—2 Cor. 4<sup>17-18</sup>) analogy = childbirth,

Three salvation songs, each providing us with a particular emphasis:

- (1) the people’s song<sup>v.10</sup> – “white robes”<sup>18</sup> and “palm branches” = symbols of purity and victory...this is song of celebration and praise (cf. Ex. 15)
- (2) the angels’ song<sup>v.12</sup> - includes seven-fold, eternal praise which = “*the ultimate blessing*”<sup>Mounce,172</sup>, “*the blessing above all others*”<sup>Morris,117</sup> framed with “Amen” at the beginning & end, “affirming the reliability of it all”<sup>Morris,114</sup>

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not, but are a synagogue of Satan” (2<sup>9</sup>; cf. 3<sup>9</sup>). John also “messes” with the traditional list of the twelve tribes, rearranging the order (Judah 1<sup>st</sup>) and omits one (Dan) and adds one (Joseph not in Ezek. 48; Manasseh not in Gen. 49).

<sup>16</sup> E.g. “*The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same....The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon.*”—41<sup>25,32</sup>

<sup>17</sup> “I, John, your brother and companion in the **thipsis** and the kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus.”

<sup>18</sup> In Rev. 3:4-5 the “white robes” suggest purity and victory. So also in 7:13-14 which adds the means of their purification (“made them white in the blood of the Lamb”).

(3) the elders' song<sup>vv.15-18</sup> – clarifies who the conquerors are and how they came to be on the winning side (v.14 – blood making white = paradoxical, and yet the life is in the blood...E.g. stem cell transplant for my cousin in 2006...Needed the perfect match...A new & better immune system...)

If anyone ever asks, “Why do Christians make such a big deal about Jesus?” this is why! Look what he *did* and *does* and *will do* for us (vv.15-18). As Paul says in Romans 8<sup>37</sup>, “we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” But the method of our conquest is not that described by the horsemen of the apocalypse in chapter 6, but by the way of the Lamb.

### **Implications & Applications**

- 1) The world needs the Lamb more than most people realize. **[SLIDE12](#)**
- 2) God is at work more than most people realize. **[SLIDE13](#)**
- 3) God's rewards are better than most people realize. **[SLIDE14](#)**
- 4) Prayer is more powerful than most people realize. **[SLIDE15](#)**