



*Revelation*  
*Cracking the Code*  
or  
*Why you won't be left behind!*

Week 3  
Scene 2 – The Church Suffers  
(Revelation 4:1 – 8:1)



*What will John see in scene 2?*

- ❖ John is beckoned to heaven, to the very throne room of God!
- ❖ There is a scroll that cannot be opened . . . except by the Lamb who was slain, the one who is worthy!
  - When you read these visions, pay attention to the worship!
- ❖ Six seals and four horsemen – the Church suffers
- ❖ Can no one stand before God? Yes, by God's grace. We see the 144,000, the faithful, the great multitude, who will be protected from wrath.
  - The multitude, waving palm branches and rejoicing, praise God – "who will wipe every tear from their eyes." (see Jeremiah 31:16)
- ❖ The seventh seal is opened and there is silence.



## *The door to heaven is opened*

- ❖ Jesus invites the Laodiceans to open the door so he may enter – but we are left hanging! Will they open the door and invite Jesus in or not?
- ❖ Before we get an answer, Jesus opens the door of heaven to John, who is transported to the throne room of God.
- ❖ It is imagination time! Get ready for some repetition!
  - The vision of the throne room, the attendants, and the Lamb who was slain. The seals and the horsemen.
  - Repetition is standard fare in apocalypses. It would have been the readers' expectation. Repetition is a way of reinforcing the point and heightening the tension.

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## *God in his throne room*

- ❖ God is on his throne looking like the brilliance of jasper and the flame of carnelian. He is surrounded by a green rainbow.
- ❖ 24 elders dressed in robes and crowns
  - In the Greek – “elders” is *presbyters*, a word used to describe both Jewish and Christian leaders.
- ❖ 4 living creatures – these are four cherubs.
- ❖ There is lightning and thunder coming from the throne and a sea of glass in front of it.
- ❖ The living creatures (cherubim) praise God without ceasing and are joined by the 24 elders, who take off their crowns and fall prostrate before God.

It is God at the center of it all (not us!)

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## *The scroll and the Lamb*

- ❖ God holds a scroll with seven seals. All creation is searched for someone who is worthy to open the scroll – but no one is found! And John weeps.
- ❖ Then, an elder SAYS to John, “Do not weep . . . The Lion of Judah has conquered . . . He can open the scroll.”
- ❖ John turns and SEES the Lamb-who-is-slain; the Lamb who is worthy!
- ❖ The Lamb takes the scroll and then the four creatures, the 24 elders, and countless angels join in singing praise and worshipping the one on the throne and the Lamb.

## The Lion , the Lamb, and the Victory of God

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## *The four horsemen*

- ❖ The Lamb opens four seals. Each time a creature calls forth a horseman.
  - ❖ A rider with a bow on a white horse
    - A conquering army
  - ❖ A rider with a sword on a red horse
    - People will slaughter one another
  - ❖ A rider with scales on black horse
    - There will be economic hardship
  - ❖ A rider, followed by Hades, on a pale green horse
    - There will be death
- 
- Are the riders bringing anything that isn't already here?
  - Should we place our trust -- our security -- in armies or in police or in bank accounts or in our health?

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## *The fifth seal & the martyrs*

- ❖ The opening of the fifth seal takes us to a scene of martyrs, Christians who have been slain because of their faithfulness.
  - Even by the 90's, many Christians had died for being nothing more than Christians. Tacitus, the Roman historian, tells us that Nero crucified Christians, burned them alive, and fed them to dogs! Domitian, the emperor in the 90's, was an active persecutor of those who would not worship him.
- ❖ The martyrs seek justice and vengeance. Wouldn't we? (See Psalm 79:5-7)
- ❖ They are told to rest awhile longer until "their number would be complete."
  - Why would God wait? (John will learn more about this in Rev 11).

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## *The sixth seal*

- ❖ After being reminded of the martyrs, John is shown the opening of the sixth seal.
- ❖ We might think that we can be protected by earthly power, but even the great kings of the earth will hide in caves. Any remaining idea that we can be secure in anything or anyone other than God is crushed by the opening of the sixth seal.
- ❖ These depictions of great tribulation and disaster are not to be read literally.
  - John uses language from Haggai, Isaiah, Joel, and Amos – all OT prophets – to depict the cosmic significance of what he is seeing.
  - These are passages and phrases where cross-references are particularly helpful. For example, see Joel 2:30-31.

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## *The great multitude*

- ❖ Just when it seems that the earth must be torn into pieces, when it seems that no one is able to stand before God – four angels restrain the winds. There are some who will stand before God and they will be marked out!
- ❖ John HEARS the listing of the 144,000 – 12,000 from each tribe.
- ❖ Then, John SEES the great multitude, robed in white and waving palm branches.
  - Where else did John HEAR and then SEE?
- ❖ The multitude are the countless peoples who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb – made able to stand before God.
  - Again, John draws on the OT to paint thrilling portraits of comfort and joy and peace. For example, see Isaiah 25:8 and 49:10.

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## *“A seal on their foreheads”*

- ❖ This business about seals is not new. Paul uses imagery of seals several times in his letters.
- ❖ For Paul, the Spirit is the certain *evidencæ* that the future had dawned & the *guarantee* of the yet-to-come consummation.
  - The Spirit is the “down payment” or “first installment” (2 Cor 1:21-22; Eph 1:14).
    - “But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us, by putting his seal on us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts as a first installment.”
  - The Spirit is the “seal” – “with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:30). The Spirit (the seal) marks us as God’s possessions.

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## *Looking ahead*

- ❖ Some of the most perplexing visions in the whole book!
- ❖ Chapter 8 begins the third cycle of visions
  - First we had churches, then seals, and now trumpets
- ❖ These will be trumpets of terror and of hope
  - We'll get everything from hail to locusts!
- ❖ As with the seals, six trumpets are blown, the terror crescendos relentlessly, and just when it seems that all must end – there is another interlude before the seventh trumpet.
  - We meet two witnesses who will prophesy for 3½ yrs, showing that the faithfulness of the suffering Christians causes others to give glory to God. The wait and the suffering of God's people will not have been in vain!