
THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Lesson #4 (5 February 2016): Revelation 6-7 The Scroll Begins to Open: “The Lamb opened one of the seals”

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INTRODUCTION

We began with the vision of the majestic Christ in chapter 1, which led to the seven messages to the churches (chapters 2-3). Then came the pivotal vision of the Father and the worthy Lamb (chapters 4-5), where the hosts of heaven and the readers of John’s book feel to fall down and worship both begins. Finally, we are ready to see what the Lamb will do with the scroll taken into his hand in chapter 5. Representing God’s workings among men during the mortal tenure of the earth, the scroll is perfectly closed with seven seals.

But the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world is able to break the seals, and does so one at a time, revealing with each one a portion of how the Father will save his children, and what the consequences of their disobedience must be.

In these two chapters, the Savior will open the first six seals; the seventh seal and its consequences are the story of the rest of the book.

OUTLINE

There are many ways to outline any book, and Revelation is no exception. Below are the eleven lessons in this series with chapter summaries. For the lesson in these notes, the chapter is broken down into more detailed sections and bolded.

1. The Majesty of Christ (1:1-20)
2. The Messages to the Seven Churches (2:1 – 3:22)
3. God and the Lamb
 - a. The Vision of Heaven (4:1-11)
 - b. The Sealed Book and the Worthy Lamb (5:1-14)
4. **The Scroll Begins to Open**
 - a. **The Six Seals (6:1-17)**
 - i. **First seal: White horse (6:1-2)**
 - ii. **Second seal: Red horse (6:3-4)**
 - iii. **Third seal: Black horse (6:5-6)**
 - iv. **Fourth seal: Pale horse (6:7-8)**
 - v. **Fifth seal: Martyrs (6:9-11)**
 - vi. **Sixth seal: Signs and Tribulations (6:12-17)**
 1. **Seven consequences (6:12-14)**
 2. **Seven groups impacted (6:15-17)**
 - b. **The Seal of the Living God (7:1-17)**
 - i. **Four angels (7:1)**
 - ii. **144,000 sealed (7:2-8)**

- iii. **Great multitude (7:9-17)**
5. The Opening of the Seventh Seal
 - a. The Seventh Seal and the First Four Trumpets (8:1-13)
 - b. The Great War and Two Trumpets (9:1-21)
6. John’s Mission; Two Prophets
 - a. The Little Scroll (10:1-11)
 - b. The Seventh Trumpet (11:1-19)
7. The Woman, the Child, and the Dragon
 - a. The Church and the Devil (12:1-18)
 - b. The Beasts of Revelation (13:1-18)
8. Judgment and Praise
 - a. The Winepress of the Wrath of God (14:1-20)
 - b. The Seven Angels (15:1-8)
9. Seven Last Plagues and Babylon the Great
 - a. The Seven Bowls (16:1-21)
 - b. Babylon the Great (17:1-18)
10. The Marriage Supper of the Lamb
 - a. The Fall of Babylon (18:1-24)
 - b. The King of Kings (19:1-21)
11. Heirs of the Celestial Glory
 - a. The Thousand Years (20:1-15)
 - b. The New Jerusalem (21:1-27)
 - c. Blessed Are They That Do His Commandments (22:1-21)

THE SCROLL BEGINS TO OPEN (6:1 – 7:17)

Having taken the sealed scroll from the Father, the Lamb does what he alone is worthy to do—open it and expose the contents to John and the world. He sets in motion the judgment of each dispensation throughout the history of the world, some of which are represented here only briefly, with the seventh getting the bulk of the attention, starting with chapter 8.

The seven seals seemed to be grouped into four and three (as are the later trumpet and bowl judgments in chapters 8-9 and 16). Here the first four are represented by similar symbols—horses and riders—while the latter three present multiple symbols to characterize their periods.

THE SIX SEALS (6:1-17)

This section is the beginning of the ‘revelation’ or unveiling of the Father’s plan for mankind through the opening of the seven seals on the book introduced in chapter 5. There are many interpretations of the book and the seals and what their opening means.¹

Fortunately, we have D&C 77:6-7 to clarify that it is a symbol of “the revealed will, mysteries, and the works of God” during the earth’s “temporal existence.” The dispensational model works well, since the seven thousand years is a figurative and not literal time of the earth’s temporal existence.

The horse imagery used with the first four seals is from Zechariah 1:8-11 and 6:1-8. The four beasts (originally from chapters 4-5), messages, and horses represent geographical completeness—these four seal opening events cover the earth, or at least all of it in the vision.² They also represent a progression—conquest to civil war to famine to death—that demonstrates man’s self-inflicted consequences when he ignores God’s commandments.³

In opening the seals, the vision goes through the time prior to John’s day very quickly, then spends a bit more on his own day and ours. But then nearly the entire rest

¹ Various commentaries (e.g., Mounce, 141-142; Osborne, 276) propose that it is Christ; the spirit of conquest; the Anti-Christ; the Parthians; or invasion by the Roman empire. D&C 77 make the intent of the images clear and straightforward, and impact the interpretation of the entire work, knowing that the seals represent periods of the earth’s history and thus the images events or persons during those time periods.

of the book is on what happens during the seventh seal (starting in chapter 8). This fits the declaration at the beginning that John was going to write about “things which must shortly come to pass” and “the things which shall be hereafter” (1:1, 19; 4:1).

FIRST SEAL: WHITE HORSE (6:1-2)

6:1 KJV

1 And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, ~~one of the four beasts~~ saying, Come and see.

6:1 JST

1 And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, **one of the four beasts**, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, saying, Come and see.

No words are changed here but the phrase “one of the four beasts” is moved to earlier in the verse. The result is that John sees the beast but the invitation to “Come and see” originates with the thunder in the JST, not the beast as in the KJV. In the other three cases (vv. 3, 5, and 7), the beasts do the talking with no JST change.

6:1 **Come and see.** When the first seal was opened, John first only heard a loud noise, but one of the beasts invited him to “come and see” God’s hand in the history of man (as noted above, the JST has the invitation originate with the thunderous noise, not the beast). The language is reminiscent of the gospel of John where Jesus invited him to “Come and see” (John 1:39), the phrase that began John’s discipleship to the Savior. It is an invitation to testimony and revelation. It gets repeated to John for the four seals that represent the history of earth prior to his day.

There is a strong manuscript tradition where the invitation to “Come” is not directed at John but at the horses and riders.⁴ This removes the tie of the phrase back to John’s gospel but is an appropriate way to move the story along, with a call from a beast to each rider

² Draper and Rhodes, 456.

³ Osborne, 272.

⁴ Smalley, 146-147; Mounce, 141; many modern translations approach the text in that way, just saying “Come!” (such as NIV, NASB, RSV, and NJB).

and horse to come and be viewed by the apostle and evoke their message and dispensation.⁵

6:2 **White horse.** “White” represents purity and victory. This is NOT the same rider of a white horse as in chapter 19 (where it is Christ). This rider was holding a bow and wearing a crown given to him (meaning, by God). The “bow” is a symbol of military power and effectiveness (compare Hosea 1:5 and Jeremiah 51:56), and the “crown” was a symbol of victory, like that worn by the twenty-four elders. The fact that he was riding a horse (true for all of the first four seals) indicates war and conquest.

6:2 **a crown was given unto him.** The passive verb tense of “was given” is in play all throughout the book of Revelation. It indicates that God is quietly at work, not necessarily making himself broadly noticed but nevertheless injecting himself into the flow of history and the actions of man to shape it to his own will.⁶

6:2 **Went forth conquering, and to conquer.** See Moses 7:13-16; the rider perhaps represented Enoch⁷ or the desire for conquest that is evident in his period of history.⁸

SECOND SEAL: RED HORSE (6:3-4)

6:4 **horse that was red.** “Red” is *pyrros*, meaning flame-colored, fire-like—the same color as the dragon in chapter 12. Red represents bloodshed, war, and sin against humanity.

6:4 **take peace from the earth.** People killed each other because of strife from within; see Moses 7:5-7 (Enoch saw a great battle of genocide). This could also mean war that followed the desire for conquest.⁹ See also Zechariah 14:13 (hand against his neighbor) and Isaiah 19:2 (Egyptians battle against each other).

6:4 **a great sword.** Greek *machaira megalē*, a very large knife or perhaps Roman ‘short sword.’ In John’s day, such a sword represented the power of the Roman empire to rule, march, and conquer.¹⁰

⁵ Draper and Rhodes, 435-436.

⁶ Draper and Rhodes, 438.

⁷ Draper and Rhodes, 436.

⁸ Wilcox, 69-70.

⁹ Wilcox, 70.

¹⁰ Smalley, 152.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote, “Who rode the red horse, the red horse of war and bloodshed and a sword, during the second seal? Perhaps it was the devil himself,¹¹ for surely that was the great day of his power, a day of such gross wickedness that every living soul (save eight only) was found worthy of death by drowning, which wickedness caused the Lord God of Heaven to bring in the floods upon them. Or if it was not Lucifer, perhaps it was a man of blood, or a person representing many murdering warriors, of whom we have no record. Suffice it to say that the era from 3000 B. C. to 2000 B. C., was one of war and destruction, these being the favorite weapons of Satan for creating those social conditions in which men lose their souls.”¹²

THIRD SEAL: BLACK HORSE (6:5-6)

6:5 **Black horse.** Black represents death, famine, disease, and similar experiences. If the third seal represents the dispensation of Abraham, then it fits well that time of great famine and large movements of people shifting to places where drought wasn’t killing off all their crops.

6:5 **a pair of balances.** This horse had a rider holding a scale that was used to compare the weight of items placed on either side. This was a time of scarcity and famine, which often follows war as crop planting, growing, and harvesting seasons are disrupted.¹³ The scale is used in such times to ration out the remaining food (see Leviticus 26:26; 2 Kings 7:1; Ezekiel 4:10, 16).¹⁴

6:6 **a voice in the midst of the four beasts.** What is in the midst of the four beasts in chapters 4-5? Either God and Christ must be speaking here.

6:6 **measure.** Greek *choenix*, a very small amount, about a quart.

6:6 **penny.** Or, *denarius*, which was one day’s pay for a laborer. A denarius would normally purchase ten to sixteen measures of wheat or twenty to thirty measures of barley (a “measure” is *choenix*, equaling about a quart or liter). During the famine of the black horse, a denarius only purchased one measure of wheat or three

¹¹ Draper and Rhodes share this conclusion, 446.

¹² DNTC, 3:478.

¹³ Smalley, 153.

¹⁴ Beale and Carson, 1103; Arnold, 289 references the judgment of Belshazzar in Daniel 5:27 where he was “weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.”

of barley, with nothing left over for any other needs. The ratio of what could be purchased for a day's labor matched that eaten by soldier (wheat) and his horse (barley).¹⁵

6:6 ***hurt not the oil and the wine***. 'Don't inflate those prices, too'; see Abraham 1:29-30; Genesis 26:1; 41:30-31; and Ruth 1:1 for examples of famine. Olive trees and grape vines have deep roots and can survive harsh conditions better than the grains.¹⁶ Based on some Dead Sea Scrolls content, these items may also have reference to their use in temple worship and thus the command is not to impact that practice.¹⁷

FOURTH SEAL: PALE HORSE (6:7-8)

6:8 ***Pale horse***. "Pale" is *chlōros*, a light greenish-yellow color, like a corpse, though it could also mean fear ('pale as a ghost').¹⁸ Death and disease follow famine.

6:8 ***Death, and Hell***. "Hell" is Hades who follows Death around, ready to collect his prisoners. These two are mentioned together in Hosea 13:14 and quoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:55 (where "grave" should be "Hades"), as well as Psalm 116:3 and Isaiah 28:15.¹⁹ Of course, the Savior has already declared his power over these two (1:18), so we need not fear either.

6:8 ***Power...over the fourth part of the earth***. Here and in other places in Revelation, the fractional nature of the power given to destructive forces represents that they had limitations—they could only hurt a few, not the whole earth. It doesn't mean that the destruction wasn't devastating, but it wasn't universal.²⁰

6:8 ***sword...hunger...death...beasts***. Various ways to die were portrayed—sword, hunger, death (better translated 'pestilence' or 'disease'), and wild beasts. Compare Ezekiel 14:21, which lists sword, famine, beasts, and pestilence. This was the time of some of most brutal empires in history: Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greeks, and Romans. Conversely, this was also the time of some of the great prophets of the scriptures—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Lehi, Nephi, Alma, and many more, who spoke the Lord's messages to the people of their own days.

6:9 ***he had opened the fifth seal, I saw***. When the narration reached his own day, John no longer had to be invited by someone to "come and see."

6:9 ***souls of them that were slain***. John saw martyrs, which ties back to the twenty-four elders—this is John's day. He saw them in white robes under the altar crying, how long until their blood would be avenged (verse 10)? This reflected a promise of the Lord to the house of Israel in Deuteronomy 32:43, "Rejoice, O ye nations, *with* his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, *and* to his people."

6:9 ***under the altar***. They have been sacrificed (per Leviticus 4:7 and Exodus 29:12) with their souls (meaning their blood, per Leviticus. 17:11) poured under the altar because of their testimonies of the Savior. Because John's vision is still of the heavenly temple, these people are under the altar of heaven, which matches Jewish legend that those buried there were near to God's glory.²¹ See D&C 135:7 where John Taylor wrote that Joseph and Hyrum Smith joined them. Paul also evoked a similar image in his final letter: "For I am already being poured out like a drink offering" (2 Timothy 4:6, NASB).

6:10 ***cried with a loud voice***. Going back to the first recorded murder, Abel's blood cried to the Lord from the ground where it had been spilled (Genesis 4:10).

6:10 ***How long***. Or, "How long will it be, holy and true master" (NAB). The question relates to the day of vindication when wicked oppressors will finally be punished (e.g., Psalm 6:3; 13:1; 74:10; Daniel 8:13; Habakkuk 1:2; and especially Zechariah 1:12 which comes after the horsemen have investigated the situation and reported the injustice of the wicked, which the Lord then promises to rectify).²² Most famously in latter-day revelation is the use of the phrase in D&C 121:2-3 (and D&C 109:49).

6:10 ***O Lord, holy and true***. The term used by the martyrs is not "Lord" (*kyrios*) but "master" (*despotēs*),

¹⁵ Draper and Rhodes, 449-450.

¹⁶ Mounce, 144.

¹⁷ Draper and Rhodes, 451.

¹⁸ Smalley, 155.

¹⁹ Beale and Carson, 1103.

²⁰ Mounce, 145.

²¹ Draper and Rhodes, 468.

²² Beale and Carson, 1104.

showing their submission to his will as his slaves.²³ They trust him in every way.

6:10 **judge and avenge.** Or, ‘condemn/punish’ and ‘vindicate.’ A similar plea is found in Psalm 79:10, “let him be known among the heathen in our sight by the revenging of the blood of thy servants which is shed.” This was not a call for revenge but an appeal to the great master of the universe for a reversal of the unfair judgments of worldly rulers and a punishment for their unjust decisions. “The cause of justice has been called in question, and the character and reputation of Yahweh seem to be at stake.”²⁴

6:11 **white robes.** Greek *stole*, meaning long, flowing, festive clothing, like that worn at a wedding feast. The robes given them by the Lord was an indication of his decision—they were dressed in the clothing of victory and celebration. The robes of the righteous are washed paradoxically in the blood of the Lamb through their faith, repentance, and faithfulness (3 Nephi 27:19; 1 Nephi 12:10).²⁵

6:11 **fellowservants...brethren.** “Fellowservants” is *syndouloi*, companions in slavery to the Lord. “Brethren” is *adelphoi*, which can mean both a literal brother (born of the same mother) or someone within a common group, male or female.²⁶ We use the latter today in the Church to represent the bond we have as those who have made the same covenants with God—we are brothers and sisters under Christ (as well as our pre-earth relationship).

6:11 **that should be killed as they were.** The vision did not promise that the persecution of Christians in John’s day was over but rather that more deaths were coming. The promise was that if they stayed faithful, they would still receive their great eternal reward.

SIXTH SEAL: SIGNS AND TRIBULATIONS (6:12-17)

With the sixth seal, John’s pace slowed, providing many more details. This may represent the time of the Restoration—our day—leading up to the Millennium. See D&C 88, which was given just a short time after

²³ Mounce, 147.

²⁴ Smalley, 161; Mounce, 148.

²⁵ Parry and Parry, 84.

²⁶ Smalley, 166.

²⁷ Draper and Rhodes, 482-483.

Joseph Smith did the translation of Revelation, for several interesting parallels and interpretations.

For John’s first century audience especially, the sixth seal events are the answer to the question, “How long?” In the fifth seal, they were not promised relief or vindication, but in the sixth and seventh seals, the Lord reveals his hand to do both.

SEVEN CONSEQUENCES (6:12-14)

There are seven consequences of wickedness in verses 12-15: 1) earthquake; 2) darkened sun; 3) red moon; 4) stars falling; 5) heavens rolling up; 6) mountains and 7) islands moving. Many of these same consequences are mentioned in D&C 88:87-91.

In ancient Jewish thought, mankind’s evil directly impacted the heavens, causing things to move out of their places and order. Earthquakes were also a symbol of divine displeasure. We may have scientific explanations (or think we will) for these events, but that doesn’t change the fact that God is using them to get the attention of a wicked world and call them to repent.²⁷ At any rate, they may not be literal but rather symbolic of massive divine judgment, in whatever form it may actually take.²⁸

Old Testament precedent for the phrases come from many passages, including Isaiah 13:10-13; 34:4; Ezekiel 32:6-8; Joel 2:10, 30-31; 3:15-16. Jesus also invoked these images in Matthew 24:29 and Mark 13:24-25.²⁹

6:12 **great earthquake.** Literally, ‘shaking,’ used of the earth or heavens; represented the shaking of the works of man and nations.

6:12 **sun became black as sackcloth.** Sackcloth was a black goat hair garment worn during times of mourning and was thus a symbol of darkness and sadness. It was also used for the walls of tents which let very little sun through. In modern language, “the sun shall hide his face, and shall refuse to give light” (D&C 88:87). See also Isaiah 50:3.

6:12 **moon became as blood.** The moon doesn’t become blood but it has that appearance. D&C 88:87

²⁸ If we took them literally, they’ve all been fulfilled in one way or another in the last century, even in a single lifetime, with earthquakes, eclipses, meteor showers, etc. Considering the metaphorical meaning can yield great insights into the revelation’s message for us today (Wilcox, 78).

²⁹ Beale and Carson, 1104-1105.

says, “the moon shall be bathed in blood.” Draper and Rhodes point out that the moon becomes quite red during an eclipse.³⁰ Ancient societies thought that eclipses were omens, often of a god’s anger.

6:13 **stars of heaven fell**. Compare to Isaiah 34:4 and D&C 45:42. Stars falling were also considered a sign of divine disapproval or of pending judgment.³¹ Jewish thought was that the cosmic order depended on man obeying God, so sin caused these disturbances in the heavens. These heavenly bodies were all attached to the firmament, just under God’s feet.

6:13 **untimely figs**. ‘Unripe’ (see footnote 13a), or ‘late figs’ that cannot ripen before the cold weather sets in.³² The stars fall like when a wind blows hard against the fig tree and the late, unripe fruit is blown to the ground because the tree offers little protection. Or it could be when the farmer knocks them down in order to ripen them himself before the frost ruins them.

| 6:14 KJV | 6:14 JST |
|---|---|
| 14 And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. | 14 And the heavens opened as a scroll is opened when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island was moved out of its place . |

The metaphor of the heavens revealing themselves is made clearer by the JST change to “opened.” Indeed, the Greek word for “departed” means ‘separated’ or ‘split apart’; “opened” is a good translation.

6:14 **as a scroll**. The same image is used in Isaiah 34:4, though there the scroll is closing to dissolve or rot the armies of heaven, causing them to fall down like figs. In Revelation, the scroll is held open, then quickly rolls together when cut or separated (each side rolling up), revealing what is behind it (the Lord).³³ Compare D&C 88:95 where the face of the Lord is revealed in the heavens through this action.

6:14 **every mountain and island were moved**. Besides the earthquake in v. 12, an even more severe action is the movement of tall mountains—the pillars that hold up the firmament—and islands—safe places in the

middle of the waters—to new locations demonstrates the power of the Lord to reshape his very creation.

SEVEN GROUPS IMPACTED (6:15-17)

6:15 **kings...great...rich...chief captains...mighty...bondman...free man**. With the last consequence, there are seven kinds of men who hide themselves: 1) kings; 2) great men; 3) rich men; 4) chief captains (centurions); 5) mighty men; 6) bondmen (slaves); and, 7) free men. Taken together, this list represents all mankind at every level of society.

6:16 **Fall on us, and hide us**. The great (and lesser) ones of the earth would rather have mountains fall on them than stand before the Lord to be judged of their sins and crimes. Compare Isaiah 2:10, 19-21, and Hosea 10:8b, “they shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Fall on us.” This could in turn echo back to the original Fall where Adam and Eve tried to hide from God after they committed their transgression (Genesis 3:8).

6:16 **the wrath of the Lamb**. In a fantastic paradox, the gentle, self-sacrificing Lamb has become the judge and executor of judgment upon the wicked who cower before him.³⁴

6:17 **the great day of his wrath**. The great day of God’s wrath had come. See D&C 43:23-26, where God calls man to repent by natural means. The Greek is “their wrath” (*tēs orgēs autōn*) which puzzles some scholars because it should be singular,³⁵ they believe. But the judgment is shared by Father and Son, and it is their combined action that will defeat evil once and for all.

6:17 **who shall be able to stand?** Seeing the great wrath to be poured out on the earth, the seven groups of people asked an important question that was perfectly relevant to their day and is to ours—who can survive all of this judgment? Joel likewise asked, “for the day of the lord is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?” (Joel 2:11). Malachi said fundamentally the same thing: “But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth?” (Malachi 3:2).

³⁰ Draper and Rhodes, 478.

³¹ Smalley, 167.

³² Draper and Rhodes, 479.

³³ Smalley, 167.

³⁴ Osborne, 296.

³⁵ Smalley, 172.

The answer is found in chapter 7: only those sealed up by the Father.

THE SEAL OF THE LIVING GOD (7:1-17)

Chapter 7 continues the story and message of the sixth seal. But now the focus shifts from the fate of the wicked to that of the righteous in the sixth seal period. Angels come to seal up 144,000 members of the tribes of Israel who have given themselves to the Lord, then we learn that there is also a vast number of people too large to count who will join these 144,000. With all these people saved, the men and creatures around the throne of God join them in singing praises to God and the Lamb. The promise to seal a group in their foreheads before the destruction of the wicked is also found in Ezekiel 9:4-8.

As with chapters 4 and 5, symbols in chapter 7 received particular attention in D&C 77:8-11. Armed with an inspired interpretation of these images, the meaning of the chapter is very clear—it relates to the Lord’s work to prepare the earth for the opening of the seventh seal, which is the beginning of the millennial reign of Christ after his Second Coming.

FOUR ANGELS (7:1)

7:1 **after these things**. The timing of this chapter is explained in D&C 77:10—we are still in the sixth seal.

7:1 **four angels standing**. D&C 77:8 explains that the four angels bring both blessings and destruction; they “save life and destroy.” They achieve this because they have both “the everlasting gospel” to give to the nations” and also the “power to shut up the heavens.” This allows them to selectively “seal up unto life, or to cast down to the regions of darkness.” Compare this to Daniel 7:2 where the four winds of heaven churned up the sea, and Jeremiah 49:36 where the four winds scatter the outcasts of the nation of Elam.

7:1 **four corners of the earth**. Implies geographic fullness or totality. Their jurisdiction is the entire earth.

7:1 **winds**. Greek *anemos*, a storm wind, one that brings drought, heat, and insect plagues. Wilford Woodruff: “Can you tell me where the people are who will be shielded and protected from these calamities and judgments which are even now at our doors? I’ll tell you. The Priesthood of God who honor their priesthood,

and who are worthy of their blessings are the only ones who shall have this safety and protection. No other people have a right to be shielded from these judgments. They are at our very doors; not even this people will escape them entirely. They will come down like the judgments of Sodom and Gomorrah. And none but the priesthood will be safe from their fury. God has held the angels of destruction for many years, lest they should reap down the wheat with the tares. But I want to tell you now, that those angels have left the portals of heaven, and they stand over the earth waiting to pour out judgments. And from this very day they shall be poured out. Calamities and troubles are increasing in the earth, and there is a meaning to these things. Remember this, and reflect upon these matters. If you do your duty, and I do my duty, we’ll have the protection, and shall pass through the afflictions in peace and in safety. Read the scriptures and the revelations. They will tell you about these things” (*The Young Women’s Journal*, 5:512-513).

144,000 SEALED (7:2-8)

7:2 KJV

2 And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea,

7:2 JST

2 And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and I heard him cry with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea,

John’s testimony is a firsthand account—the JST makes it clear that he personally heard the angel cry out to the other four angels to wait until the 144,000 were sealed.

7:2 **another angel ascending from the east**. D&C 77:9-10 explains that the angel from the east has “the seal of the living God” and restrains the other four angels until that seal can be used on the righteous servants of God. It also explains that “this is Elias which was to come to gather together the tribes of Israel and restore all things.”

The doctrine of Elias has several meanings and players; see the Bible Dictionary under “Elias.” D&C 77:14 teaches that John the Revelator was “Elias, who, as it is written, must come and restore all things.” So the angel from the east in this verse could well be John himself fulfilling his latter-day mission.

7:2 **from the east.** East is the direction of the rising sun and in the ancient world, represented coming from God.

7:3 **in their foreheads.** Slaves in the Roman world were sometimes marked in their foreheads when their relationship with their master was permanent. Other people put a mark of their favorite god in their forehead.³⁶ Here the messenger from the east will seal the righteous with the mark of God himself, showing to whom they belonged. Compare Exodus 12:7-28 where the doorposts were marked and Ezekiel 9:4-8 where the people were marked; in both cases, it was a mark to protect the people from destruction. Paul likely had this in mind when he wrote to Timothy that “the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his” (2 Timothy 2:19).

One of the most interesting comparisons is from Exodus 28:36-38. There the Lord instructs that Aaron, the high priest, shall wear a cap with a gold plate attached that hangs down on his forehead. On the plate were the words *qadosh l'yahweh*, “holiness to the Lord.” Wearing this, “Aaron bears whatever guilt the Israelites may incur in consecrating any of their sacred gifts [temple offerings of sacrifice and thanks].” Aaron is instructed that “this plate must always be over his forehead, so that they [the people] may find favor with the Lord” (Exodus 28:38, NAB).³⁷ The people in white robes in John’s vision are “kings and priests” (1:6; 5:10), and the image of being sealed up in their foreheads like Aaron the high priest with a phrase that consecrated them to the Lord, evokes the idea of Jesus as our great high priest (Hebrews 4:14) bearing our guilt so that we can be free and offer thanks to him eternally.

| 7:4 KJV | 7:4 JST |
|--|---|
| 4 And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel. | 4 And the number of them who were sealed were an hundred and forty <i>and</i> four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel. |

The JST change does not much alter the meaning of the verse but does modernize and simplify it. Modern translations interpret the Greek in much the same way, such as, “...the number of those who were sealed: 144,000...” (NIV).

³⁶ Draper and Rhodes, 505.

³⁷ Beale and Carson, 1107.

7:4 **an hundred and forty and four thousand.** See D&C 77:11, which explains that these “are high priests,” ordained out of every nation, “to bring as many as will come to the church of the Firstborn.” In *History of the Church* 6:365, Joseph Smith further associated them with the temple. We learn more about these people in Revelation 14.

The number 144,000 is twelve (meaning, priesthood) squared (emphasized) and multiplied by 1000 (fullness or totality). That makes it a thoroughly symbolic number, representing a huge number of priesthood holders carrying the gospel to the world (compare Isaiah 42:6-7). This is the only dispensation when full priesthood authority operates throughout the world, thus the sixth seal is the only time such a huge number of priesthood holders could be sent out.

There is also a tie to Numbers 1 where a census is taken of Israel’s able-bodied men, in preparation for military duty.³⁸ In Numbers, men are counted from each tribe who are ready for service. In Revelation, the men are “not defiled with women” (abstinence was often a requirement for military service) and they are willing to “follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth” (14:4) as an army would follow the orders of their leaders. The 144,000 of Revelation are not a military force, but they are God’s army, with his name inscribed on their foreheads (14:1), ready to carry the message to the millions of souls needing salvation in the world.

7:4 **were sealed.** The theme of sealing returns in several later chapters (13-14, 16, 19, 22). The seal story is perhaps from Ezekiel 9:4 where “mark” is *tau* or Hebrew letter “T” or the last letter of that alphabet, today written (ט) but then a († or X) like a cross,³⁹ a mark Christians in John’s day would have appreciated, as we can today.

Joseph Smith said, “Four destroying angels [hold] power over the four quarters of the earth until the servants of God are sealed in their foreheads, which signifies sealing the blessing upon their heads, meaning the everlasting covenant, thereby making their calling and election sure. When a seal is put upon the father and mother, it secures their posterity, so that they cannot be lost, but will be saved by virtue of the

³⁸ Beale and Carson, 1107.

³⁹ Draper and Rhodes, 508; Smalley, 182.

covenant of their father and mother” (*Teachings*, p. 321).

7:4 **of all the tribes**. The tribes are listed differently than those in the Genesis account of Jacob’s family:

- Dan is omitted, perhaps because that tribe is most strongly associated with idolatry. That tribe was also left off a list in 1 Chronicles 6-8.
- Levi is added. Levi was typically excluded from the list of twelve tribes in the promised land because Levites ministered in all the various cities, and were thus associated with all (or at least several) tribes (1 Chronicles 6:57-80).
- Joseph is listed but Ephraim is not—potentially a scribal error or a conflation of the two (Ephraim was Joseph’s son). Or, Manasseh should be the missing tribe, Dan.⁴⁰
- Judah is listed first, though Reuben was the firstborn. Likely the order was changed because Christ was of Judah and so his tribe is listed first.

GREAT MULTITUDE (7:9-17)

Several times John’s view switched between things happening on earth and in heaven—seeing the throne is the key to know when he is looking at heaven (v. 10-11). The vision of the 144,000 was looking at the earth, but now the great multitude he sees is clearly in heaven. The purpose of returning the view to heaven was to remind him and us of his core message—*hope*—and that God is in charge. The image of the people in this section arrayed in white and waving palm branches was invoked in the dedicatory prayer of the Kirkland temple by the Prophet (D&C 109:76).

For John, these verses are a vision of the future, for the great multitude represents those who have come through a future time of difficulty; John sees them as victorious before the trials occur.⁴¹ That he jumps around in time should not trouble us, because the entire book does that. “John’s eschatology in Revelation is dynamic, and not linear.”⁴²

7:9 **a great multitude**. This vast throng was before the throne, with the elders and beasts, praising God. The 144,000 were the high priests, whereas this multitude

is *all* the exalted. Though the connection is never drawn directly, the 144,000 were probably the means of this great multitude being brought to Christ. It fulfills the promises to Abraham that his seed would be as the stars in the sky (Genesis 15:5) and the sand on the beach (Genesis 32:12).

There are distinct parallels in phrasing and imagery with chapters 5 and 7; the Lion becoming the Lamb may align with the 144,000 turning into a vast crowd as “every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation,” redeemed by Christ in 5:9 become “all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues” who are saved out of the great tribulation in 7:9.⁴³

7:9 **white robes**. Again, the vast multitude is clothed in *stolē* or symbols of victory, purity, and celebration.

7:9 **palms in their hands**. Waving palm fronds was done in festive joy and also as a sign of victory and triumph;⁴⁴ compare John 12:13, where the multitudes shouted, “Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel” when referring to Jesus during his triumphal entry. They are also associated with the Feast of Tabernacles, a feast that celebrated God’s protection for Israel as they lived in tents in the wilderness and were now able to enjoy an annual harvest (compare 7:15-17 below).⁴⁵

7:10 **Salvation to our God...and unto the Lamb**. Or, “Salvation belongs to our God” (NIV). The Father’s plan implemented through Jesus’ victory makes all other victories possible.

7:11 **angels...elders...four beasts**. Returning to the imagery in chapters 4-5, we see the same beings worshipping around the throne of God, now shared by both Father and Son. The number of angels is huge: “The air is thick with angels in Revelation.”⁴⁶

7:12 **Blessing, and glory**. The first of seven praises in this verse to God for the blessings he is giving to mankind to be sealed up. This parallels the seven praises to Christ in 5:12, though with different words and order:

| | |
|-------------|-------------|
| <u>5:12</u> | <u>7:12</u> |
| Power | Blessing |
| Riches | Glory |

⁴⁰ Wilcox, 97.

⁴¹ Mounce, 161.

⁴² Smalley, 196.

⁴³ Beale and Carson, 1108.

⁴⁴ Smalley, 191.

⁴⁵ Beale and Carson, 1108-1109.

⁴⁶ Smalley, 193.

| | |
|----------|--------------|
| Wisdom | Wisdom |
| Strength | Thanksgiving |
| Honour | Honour |
| Glory | Power |
| Blessing | Might |

7:13 **one of the elders.** This elder, one of the twenty-four he knew—perhaps the same one that was John’s guide in 5:5—asked John two questions, though with the purpose of teaching and explaining, not getting an answer from John.

7:13 **What are these...when came they?** The elder squarely focused John’s attention on the vast crowd “arrayed in white robes” and worshipping God.

7:14 **Sir, thou knowest.** John understood this was a teaching moment and prompted his guide to explain. We might translate this in a more colloquial way by saying, ‘You tell me!’

7:14 **came out of great tribulation.** “Tribulation” is *thlipsis*, meaning a great pressure or pressing together. It represents affliction and distress. It should be “the great tribulation” (NIV, NAS, RSV), pointing to the specific troubles and judgments that are coming in the next chapters. As with the victory of the Lord over Satan in the last days—which war has already been won, though it is yet future—these saints have already been victorious and received their robes of celebration for enduring the great tribulation, even though the event is yet future (in the coming chapters). See also Daniel 12:1, where it is called “a time of trouble.”

7:14 **washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of Christ.** The elder is describing a victory achieved by Jesus’ sacrifice and by miraculous means; you can’t normally wash clothing in blood and have them turn pure white—in fact, they’d be permanently stained in John’s day. But Jesus’ blood has supernatural power to remove all stain and spot. Compare the language of Isaiah 1:18, where sins of scarlet become white as snow and red evil deeds become clean like wool.

7:15 **Therefore.** Greek *dia touta*, meaning ‘through this’ or ‘by means of this.’ “Because the protected saints have persevered, and by faith in the atoning work of Christ have survived the ordeals which Christians must expect

(verses 13-14), they are entitled to enter the presence of God and of the Lamb.”⁴⁷ This echoes the great promises in chapters 2-3 that those who are victorious (“overcome” in those chapters) will receive great blessings, some of which match those next mentioned.

7:15 **serve him day and night in his temple.** Because they were made kings and priests (applied to all, so queens and priestesses as well) by the atonement of the Lamb, they serve God and continually officiate in all temple rights and ordinances. In return, God always dwells among them and blesses them with his very presence.

7:15 **shall dwell among them.** The Greek word for “dwell” means to pitch a tent and take up residence.⁴⁸ With this image we should think of the tabernacle of Moses and compare Isaiah 4:5-6 and Ezekiel 37:26-28, where the Lord’s tent is a shadow from the daytime heat and place of covering during time of storm and rain, and a sign of the relationship between him and the people.

7:16 **hunger no more, neither thirst any more.** Many scriptures refer to God feeding and giving drink to his people; such a fundamental need is a powerful metaphor for the love of the Lord for us. See for example, Psalm 121:6; Isaiah 9:10; 40:11; 49:9-10; Jeremiah 3:15; Ezekiel 34:14-15; Zephaniah 3:13.

7:16 **neither shall the sun light on them.** Protection and screening was provided from the elements (by God’s tent—see v. 15 above), not by getting rid of the sun.

7:17 **feed them.** Or, “will be their shepherd” (NIV). The image of Jesus as the good shepherd is known from John’s other writings (John 10:11-15) and from Psalm 23, as well as Isaiah 49:9. In Revelation, the Lamb becoming the Shepherd is “an intriguing exchange of roles,”⁴⁹ full of rich symbolism, tying back to the phrase “I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last” (1:11).

7:17 **lead them.** Or, “guide them to springs of the water of life” (NAS). This also evokes Psalm 23:1, where “he leadeth me beside the still waters.” Jesus taught that he was the living water (John 4:10-14).

7:17 **God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.** A near quote from Isaiah 25:8, the final promise to those

⁴⁷ Smalley, 198.

⁴⁸ Draper and Rhodes, 525-526.

⁴⁹ Mounce, 166.

in white robes who have overcome the world by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God is that all losses, all pain, all

suffering, all sorrow, and all injustice will be done away, and they will have no more tears in their eyes.

CONCLUSION

The worthy Lamb began opening the seals in chapter 6, with short but powerful images for the first four seals. The fifth seals related to the martyrs of John's day. The opening of the sixth seal turns our attention to the time before the Second Coming—to our day. It is full of signs that should lead the world to recognize the hand of the Lord but still many do not repent, instead trying to hide from the glory of God.

But even as the wicked fear and ask, "Who shall be able to stand?", a great multitude, too large to count, called out of the world symbolically by missionaries from the tribes of Israel, are sealed up to eternal life. This vast

crowd sing praises to God and fall down to worship the Lamb, who gives them eternal food and drink without end and wipes away anything that would bring them sorrow or pain.

Said John Taylor, "And there is something that goes a little further than we think about sometimes; and that is, while we profess to be followers of the Lord, while we profess to have received the Gospel, and to be governed by it, a profession will amount to nothing unless we have washed our robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb....we must get there before we shall be prepared to inherit glory and exaltation."⁵⁰

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⁵⁰ Quoted in Draper and Rhodes, 529.

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Bible versions cited (if no version is cited, it is the KJV; any translation or paraphrase in single quotes is the author's):

KJV – King James Version (Authorized Version)

JST – Joseph Smith Translation

BYU – BYU New Testament Rendition (from Draper and Rhodes)

CJB – Complete Jewish Bible

LXX – Septuagint (Greek Old Testament)

NAB – The New American Bible

NASB – New American Standard Bible

NIV – New International Version

NJB – New Jerusalem Bible

NLT – New Living Translation