



# THE BOOK OF REVELATION

## 12: SEALS, SCROLLS, TRUMPETS and BOWLS OF WRATH

### Chapters 5-10, 16-17



## JUDGEMENT

*Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains". (Mt.24v4-8).*

The backdrop against which the Beasts and sinners, the Lord and the righteous act out their parts in this great cosmic drama, is one of seals and scrolls, of trumpets and bowls of God's wrath and of stupendous and catastrophic judgements upon the earth. Truly the death throes of the old and the birth pangs of the new -21v4-5

These images are to be found in the language and imagery of the Old Testament prophets and are symbolic of God's judgement upon sinful humanity. Deut.28v15ff; Lev.26v14ff are the punishments that fall on those who break God's covenant and see e.g. Isa.2v9-10; Jer.4v23-29; 6v22-26; 15v1-2; 44v11-14; Ezek.ch.5-7; 14v21; Joel 2v30-31. But the same imagery is found in the N.T. e.g. The Synoptics; Rom.8v22; 2 Ptr.3v8-13.

## SEVEN SEALS, SEVEN TRUMPETS & SEVEN BOWLS OF WRATH

Seven acts are to be played out, each one marked by the opening of seals, by the sounding of trumpets and by the pouring out of terrible judgements upon the earth.

7 SEALS (6,7,8)	7 TRUMPETS (7,8,9,11)	7 BOWLS OF WRATH (16)
<b>1:</b> A Rider on a white horse, ' <i>bent on conquest.</i> ' The intent to dominate by force (6v1-2) cp Isa.2v4; Mt.5v5	<b>1:</b> Hail, fire and blood fall on the earth: a 1/3 <sup>rd</sup> of the earth and vegetation are burned up (8v7)	<b>1:</b> Ugly and painful sores are inflicted upon those who worship the Beast and have received his mark (16v2)
<b>2:</b> A Rider on a red horse – War (6v3-4)	<b>2:</b> A blazing mountain is thrown into the sea: a 1/3 <sup>rd</sup> of the sea is turned to blood: a 1/3 <sup>rd</sup> of the sea creatures die and a 1/3 <sup>rd</sup> of all ships are destroyed (8v8-9)	<b>2:</b> The sea is turned to blood and every living creature in the sea perishes (16v3)
<b>3:</b> A Rider on a black horse – Famine (6v5-6)	<b>3:</b> A blazing star falls on the rivers and springs, turning a 1/3 <sup>rd</sup> them bitter and causing many to die (8v10-11)	<b>3:</b> The rivers and springs are turned to blood (16v4-7)
<b>4:</b> A Rider on a pale horse – Death ' <i>and Hades was following close behind him</i> ', gathering the victims of the first three riders (6v7-8)	<b>4:</b> A 1/3 <sup>rd</sup> of the sun, moon and stars are struck, causing a 1/3 <sup>rd</sup> of the day and night to be without light (8v12)	<b>4:</b> The sun scorches the wicked but they will not repent (16v8-9)
<b>5:</b> The souls of the slain, ' <i>how long until you judge..?</i> ' (6v9-11)	<b>5:</b> A star (angel) that had fallen to earth releases locust like creatures from the Abyss (9v1-11)	<b>5:</b> The kingdom of the Beast is plunged into darkness but men will still not repent (16v10-11)

<b>6:</b> Earthquake: the sun turns black and the moon to blood; stars fall and the sky rolls up; the mountains and islands disappear (6v12-17)	<b>6:</b> Four angels 'bound' at the Euphrates are released to kill a 1/3 <sup>rd</sup> of mankind(9v13-19) The Euphrates stands for the place from which invasion and judgement falls on Israel – ' <i>from the north</i> ' (Isa.7v18-20; 14v31; Jer.1v14-15; 47v2; Ezek.38v14-16)	<b>6:</b> The Euphrates is dried up, allowing entry for the armies being gathered by demons for the last battle (16v12-16)
The redeemed are sealed (7v1-8)		
<b>7:</b> Silence in Heaven (8v1ff)	<b>7:</b> There is a vision of the ark of the covenant in the heavenly Temple and an earthquake and thunder and lightning (11v15-19)	<b>7:</b> A voice from heaven cries ' <i>It is done!</i> ' and the most severe earthquake in human history causes the ' <i>Great City</i> ' i.e. ' <i>Babylon</i> ' to split into three. Islands and mountains disappear and huge hailstones fall (16v17-21)

There is clearly a progression in the judgements that are inflicted upon the earth and upon the inhabitants of the earth – who will *not* repent in spite of everything! There is a growing crescendo, with the catastrophes unleashed by the Bowls of Wrath being more severe and more wide ranging – *every living creature..* and '*all the waters...*' than those of the Seals and Trumpets – a '*third*', which signifies a partial and not a total impact. But rather than us focus on the precise nature of the judgements, what John is giving is the increasing severity of these events, as the climax of the age approaches.

This, as an American friend of mine used to say, is '*Where the rubber meets the road,*' or as Hosea would have put it, '*They have sown the wind and reap the whirlwind*' (Hos.8v7). This is the complete and utter outpouring of the judgements of God upon rebellious sinful humanity, and upon the kingdom that Satan has tried to establish on earth ever since the Garden of Eden. It is the answer to the cry of the murdered martyrs in 6v9-10: '*When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"*'

## THE SEVENTH SEAL, THE SILENCE IN HEAVEN AND THE SEALING OF THE REDEEMED (7v1-8; 8v1)

The sealing of the redeemed is redolent of the command in Ezekiel 9 given to a mighty angel to go through Jerusalem and to '*put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament*' over the sin of the people. The Lord seals 144,000 from the tribes of Israel, who now securely belong to Him. 144,000 is the multiple of the square of 12 (the number of Israel) and the cube of 10, the number of perfection. So this is the perfect and complete total of 'Israel'. Some commentators take the tribes to refer literally to Israel but Revelation is concerned with the whole people of God, Jew and Gentile alike. So more likely 'Israel' is the Church, the 'true Israel' (Gal. 3v29; 6v16; 1 Ptr.2v9f cf Ex.19v6; Phil.3v3), complete and completed in Christ and sealed by His Spirit (2 Cor.1v21-22; Eph.1v13-14).

The Anti-Christ had 'sealed' his followers with a mark on their foreheads or hands (13v16) but once again this was a mere mockery and imitation of the true sealing. In Deuteronomy 6v4-8, God had said this: *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.*

Although some devout Jews took this command literally – the so-called phylactery, small boxes bound around the head and the hand and into which were placed the following Scriptures, Ex.13v1-16; Deut.6v4-9; 11v13-21, the essence of what the Lord was commanding was that He was to be given His people's utmost devotion, their love for Him filling their minds and directing everything that they did – head and hands. i.e. loving Him with all their heart, soul and strength. By imposing his mark upon the people, the Devil sought to transfer the devotion and service properly due to God, onto himself. But it was a bought and a compelled adoration (13v16-17).

### What does the opening of the 7<sup>th</sup> Seal, signify?

- The Silence of Heaven (8v1)
- The Appearance of the angels with their trumpets (8v2ff)
- The Appearance of the angel with the prayers of the saints (8v3-5)
- The Entirety of the visions associated with the trumpets (8v1-11v19)
- The Rest of the Book



### THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES ch.4-6

In the midst of the throne room of God are four 'living creatures'. Their proximity to the throne and thus to be seated in these places of honour, reveals their authority and high position. Their eyes demonstrate that they are all-seeing and all-knowing, whilst their wings denote mobility and a swiftness to serve. Their function appears to be two-fold: to worship God (4v6-8; 5v8-10; 7v11-12; 19v4) and to be involved in the pronouncing of God's judgement.

Their nearness to the throne of God is appropriate to their function as leaders of worship, both as those who lead others into the presence of God and as those whose own lives are holy and who worship in Spirit and in truth. They are also deeply involved in the breaking of the seals and the giving of the golden bowls of wrath (6v1-7; 15v7). Similar 'living creatures' also appear in the opening chapter of Ezekiel, with the faces of a man, a lion, an ox and an eagle (cf Rev.6v7), where they are closely associated with the glory of the Lord (cf Rev.1v12-16; 4v1ff).

A rabbinic saying that can be dated to 300 AD but is thought to be earlier, says this:

*The mightiest among the birds is the eagle.*

*The mightiest among the domestic animals is the ox.*

*The mightiest among the wild beast is the lion.*

*The mightiest among all is man.*

In essence what we are presented with is that which is swiftest, noblest, strongest and wisest in creation. So these angelic beings, these 'living creatures' –and like everything else in Revelation, symbolically portrayed – represent the pinnacle of God's created order.

### THE TRUMPET (cf 1 Thess.4v16)

1. The brass curved trumpet of the Roman army, marking the passing of time; giving the signal for battle; or summoning people to an event. In every sense of the word, a 'Wake-Up call'.
2. The curved horn, or *shofar*, used by Joshua at Jericho (Josh.6) and playing a particularly important role in one of the annual Jewish Festivals. On the Feast of Rosh-Hashanah, or the Feast of Trumpets, these horns were sounded to summon people to a time of deep self-examination and repentance, to prepare the people for the Day of Atonement.





## THE SCROLL

Although it would appear that the Seals and Trumpets and Bowls run more or less simultaneously, the fact that it is the Scroll and the Seals which are mentioned first, indicates that they are given particular importance.

A scroll, secured by seven threads, each sealed with the seal of seven different witnesses, was a typical Roman legal document. Seven, of course, in Revelation's terms, is also the number of perfection. Such a sealing ensured that the document was:

- Secure
- Confidential
- Authentic
- Authoritative

As each seal is broken in the Book of Revelation there comes a new revelation and a new vision.

## WHAT IS THE SCROLL?

1. The Lamb's Book of Life (13v8; 20v15; 21v27). Although a Book and a Scroll were not the same thing...
2. The fact that it is written on both sides, could suggest links to the giving of the Law at Sinai (Ex.32v15).
3. A Will - the presence of the seals suggest a legal document of some kind.

- For a will to come into effect, the death of the testator is required (cf Heb.9v15-17,24-28).

*Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."*

*Then I saw a Lamb, **looking as if it had been slain**, standing at the centre of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people. And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.*

*...I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. (Rev.5v1-9; 6v1)*

- A Will when revealed, discloses the purposes and intentions of the one who made the will and describes the distribution of his or her property. The Book of Revelation shows us the purposes and intentions of God for His 'property' – for His creation that is the earth and for all humankind. And it goes on to reveal all that will be seen and accomplished when the will of God has been fully enacted!

