

DATE of MESSAGE: April 10th, 2016

MESSAGE TITLE: The Scroll and the Sovereignty of God

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 6:1-7:8

GETTING STARTED

John began Revelation with a message to the 7 churches. Now he records his vision of the Lamb opening the 7 seals of the scroll in God's hands. This scene reveals the power and purposes of our Sovereign God. John's vision introduces divine instruments, employed by the Lamb, to bring his enemies to justice.

OBSERVATION

Who or what do each of the 4 horsemen represent? Who calls for the horsemen to arrive on the scene?

What do the instructions given to the horsemen tell us about God's sovereign control over the earth and world systems? Notice the limitations each horsemen is given.

What is the rider on the black horse told not to touch? Why might the living creature tell this rider not to harm these agricultural products?

What does the opening of the fifth seal reveal? How do the martyrs under the altar address God? What do they ask of God?

What does God's response to the martyrs under the altar reveal about his sovereignty over the death of believers? What does He mean when He tells them to rest a little longer?

How do the world's leaders respond to the opening of the sixth seal? What does their terror-sicken response tell us about God's wrath on sin?

Those in verses 15 and 16 beg to be hidden from God's presence, asking, 'Who can stand' [before God]? How does Revelation 7:1-8 show them to be wrong in their assumption that no one can stand before God.

APPLICATION

What do we learn about God and the Lamb from this passage? Record one-word descriptions or phrases on paper or the whiteboard. Which of these descriptors do you find most comforting? Which do you find more convicting?

Where do you see God's mercy revealed in this passage? Cite specific examples. How have you experienced God's mercy recently?

John's vision reveals God's righteous judgment against rebellion. What do we learn from this passage about how serious God treats sin? What does this say about our need for a Savior?

Have you received by faith the payment Jesus made on the cross for your sins? How will God expect unredeemed people to pay for their sins?

PRAYER

Sovereign Lord, You hold the world and all that is in it in your hands. There are no maverick molecules in the universe! Nothing takes You by surprise, escapes Your control or advances beyond Your set limits. You have appointed a time for exercising your holy judgement on sin, and this is what we read about in the book of Revelation. Help us trust You in the midst of living in a fallen world that is becoming darker. Remind us that one day we will worship You around the throne in heaven, far from the presence of sin!

SHARE POINT

Read Revelation 6:1-7:8 and review the application questions. Share with someone in your life how God's Word is changing you into a growing disciple. Encourage that person to do the same. That person could be a family member, a friend, a co-worker or a neighbor.

COMMENTARY NOTES

6:1-2 Many futurists, understand this to mark the beginning of the great tribulation. The rider on the white horse, armed with a bow and given a crown, rode forth to conquer. Some think this rider represents Christ, the sword-wielding 'Word of God' who rides, a white horse in 19:11-16. However, this rider, armed with a bow probably symbolizes political and military leaders' destabilizing quest to expand their realms, leading to war (red horse) and epidemic disease (pale horse). Others think this rider on the white horse represents the Antichrist.

6:3-4 The rider on the black horse carries scales for measuring grains and their prices. A heavenly voice comments on the scales' significance, citing inflated grain prices (8 to 10 times normal). Siege and disruption of commercial routes will produce scarcity, driving prices up. Local crops such as oil and wine are unaffected, however, showing that the scarcity is limited, not comprehensive. Some think the command not to harm the oil and wine may have a social significance, since the rich were the primary consumers of oil and wine.

6:7-8 Death and hades ride the pale horse which is either a pale yellow or a yellowish green, the color of corpses. Their authority to kill is limited to a fourth of the earth. God's providence restrains His own wrath. Sword, famine and pestilence sum up the disasters symbolized by the red, black and pale horses. They also echo covenant curses inflicted on Jerusalem in the exile.

6:9-11 The fifth seal reveals the Lamb's rationale for releasing combatants to devastate the earth. Under the altar in heaven, where sacrificial blood would pool, John sees the souls of believers who were slain for bearing witness about Jesus. Their lament and question about how long they would have to wait for justice echoes that of the psalmists against his witness' assailants until the last martyr has been slain. Until then, these deceased souls will need to rest a little longer in the white robe of victory and purity.

6:12-17 The sixth seal shows a preview of the coming destruction of the first heaven and earth at the full display of the wrath of the Lamb. An earthquake previously announced the terrifying arrival of the Lord in his glory, and his final arrival will shake both heaven and earth. John sees the sun blackened, the moon turned blood red, the stars cast like figs in the wind, the sky rolled up like a scroll, and every mountain and island displaced. The luminaries that have marked earth's time since creation will be removed. All of this communicates the truth that the end has arrived. Rebellious humanity, from kings and the rich and the powerful to everyone, including slaves and free, will seek cover from God and the Lamb. They will beg mountains and rocks to fall on them to hide them. Their desperate question, 'Who can stand in the face of God and the Lamb?' assumes that no one can. Yet John is about to see those who stand by grace.

6:13 The stars of the sky fall to the earth. Those who do not view the sixth seal as predicting the destruction of the first heaven and earth believe that this refers to a massive meteor shower.

7:1-3 The sixth seal showed an earthquake and a wind that shook the stars from the sky. God's cringing enemies asked, 'Who can stand?' The answer is, those 'sealed' with the seal of the living God. Therefore, John sees four angels charged to hold back those winds of judgment until all of God's servants have received his seal. The seal of the living God evokes a picture of a royal signet ring by which kings authenticated documents or marked ownership of an item. This seal is the name of the Lamb and of God, a gift promised to all who conquer by faith. It is antithetical to the mark of the beast and symbolizes God's ownership and protection for his people. Circumcision functioned as such a seal under the old covenant and God's Holy Spirit seals people as His property under the new

covenant.

7:4-8 The selection and order of the 12 tribes suggest that the 144,000 sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel have symbolic significance, representing the church. These are not Jacob's sons, for Dan is omitted and Manasseh included. They are not the tribes that inherited land in Canaan, for Dan is omitted, Levi is included, and Joseph is listed instead of his son Ephraim. Judah, the tribe of the Messiah appears first rather than Reuben, the firstborn. When 7:5-8 is compared with the list of Jacob's sons in Genesis 35:22-26, the promotion of tribes descended from concubines Bilhah and Zilpah over the sons of Leah and Rachel suggests that those once excluded from privilege are now included. The number 12,000 reappears in the dimensions of the new Jerusalem. Indeed, the number 144,000 ($12 \times 12 \times 1,000$) suggest symbolism here, but that does not necessarily decide the question of whether 'Israel' is also a symbol for the church, or is intended to refer to literal, ethnic Israel.

SOURCES CONSULTED

The ESV Study Bible

The HCSB Study Bible

Serendipity Bible for Personal and Small Group Study

The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament