



## **Seals and Trumpets**

### **Revelation 6-11 – Leaders version**

**Check in** – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including the leaders, how they are and how they're feeling about studying the Bible today.

### **What does the passage say and mean?**

90 minutes

1. Think back to the last study. What is sealed and who is worthy to open it? (5 v 1 and 5 v 5)

*V1, a scroll is sealed with seven seals. We learnt last time that the scroll makes sense of history and the one who can open it is the one who can interpret its meaning and actually carry it through – someone who can make real sense of our existence and our destiny.' (Bewes 2003, p46).*

*V5, the one who can open it is 'the Lion of tribe of Judah, the Root of David' i.e. Jesus.*

### **Revelation 6**

2. **SHOUT-OUT** As the first four seals are opened in Revelation 6, things happen. How are the four horsemen described and what do you think they represent?

This isn't an exercise about what we think things mean, it's about getting to the truth of what they do mean. Revelation is full of symbolism, most of which we are meant to understand – we are not free to make up our own interpretations. Having said this, opinions do differ as to the meaning of some of the imagery given in John's revelation. Where there is debate, I will try to explain.

*V1-2 this horseman probably represents Christ (dressed in white, has a crown, riding out as a conqueror, see 19 v 11 (Bewes 2003, p55)) although there is debate.*

*V3-4 war*

*V5-6 famine (the prices of the goods are extortionate, as in time of famine)*

*V7-8 death*

*The four horsemen illustrate judgment, but not final judgment. They are sent by Jesus, who is opening the seals. They are 'symbols of the course of ordinary history between the comings of Christ... fore-shadowing the end when God's victory over his enemies will be total.' (Johnson 2001, p122).*

3. What happens when the fifth and sixth seals are opened in verses 9-14 and what are we to understand from this?

*V9-11 John sees the souls of those who have died for their faith. They are told to wait because more people will die for their faith before the end comes.*

*V12-14 the end has come.*

4. How do people respond to what has happened? (see 6 v 15-17)

*Remind the group that this is a vision of things to come, not a record of past events. Everyone hides from God's face and from His wrath. They know that they cannot face God's wrath.*

So far, six of the seals on the scroll of history have been opened by Jesus and judgment has come. Now there is an interlude, given to reassure the believer. Four angels with the power to harm restrain their power at the command of a fifth angel, who has the seal of God. A seal is the mark of ownership, such as you would put on a document.

## **Revelation 7**

5. Read Revelation 7 v 1-4 to the group and summarise vv5-8. Who is sealed and what are we to understand from this?

*12,000 people from each of the tribes of Israel = 144,000 people. We know from elsewhere in the Bible that this seal (mark of ownership) is the Holy Spirit living in the believer.*

*Explain that the Bible often uses numbers symbolically and there are various numbers with symbolic meaning. These are not always to be taken as literal numbers (although sometimes they are). For example, 3 is a number of completion ('Holy, holy, holy', Isaiah 6 v 3), 40 is a number that means a long time (40 years wandering in the desert, 40 days of Jesus' temptation) and 12 is another number that symbolises completion (12 tribes, 12 disciples).*

*144,000 is 12 x 12 x 'a big number' – we are meant to understand completion and a big number, not a literal headcount. It may symbolise the church = 12 apostles x 12 tribes x big (Bewes 2003, p58).*

6. Read Ephesians 1 v 13-14. How do you know that you are sealed with the Holy Spirit?

*We know that we are sealed firstly because God's word tells us that we are as a believer in Christ! Physical evidence would include our deepening love for God and for His children, our obedience to God, a desire to serve Him and a hunger for more – a deeper relationship with Jesus, a better understanding of his word etc.*

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John is seeing a vision of things to come. He is told that judgment is coming to all and no-one can stand in the face of it (6 v 15-17) but some people are sealed to be protected (7 v 3). How do you respond to this? Bear in mind that some of the group will be assured of their protection and others won't.

*As believers, this should encourage us to keep going! We should be confident that the outcome of our judgment will be a verdict of 'Forgiven and case dismissed!'*

*For those believers who don't have this assurance, try to help them to unpack why and to see their situation in light of the Bible's promises.*

*For those who are not yet believers in Christ explain that, in His death, Jesus paid for all our sin and when we repent and believe in Him, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. Believers won't face God's wrath for their sin because Jesus already did.*

Read Revelation 7 v 9-10 and 13-17 to the group.

7. This is a description of those who have 'washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb' – symbolic language describing God's forgiveness. What do we learn about what it means to 'be in heaven' from verses 15-17?

*We are at God's throne and serve Him continually*

*God shelters us*

*There will be no suffering*

*The Lamb (Jesus) will be our shepherd (spend some time thinking about what this means – protector, one who leads you to nourishment, one who loves you and cares for you etc)*

*We will have eternal life (springs of living water)*

*There will be nothing to cry about (remember, this is written to the suffering church)*

## **Revelation 8**

8. Read Revelation 8 v 1-2. What happens when the seventh seal is opened?

*Silence, v1.*

*'This silence is the calm before the storm. For God's enemies on earth it is a silence of dread, but for those who dwell in heaven it is the silence of eager expectation.'* (Johnson 2001, p136)

*Seven angels are given seven trumpets, v2.*

*The seven trumpets are part of the opening of the seventh, and final, seal on the scroll of history. As they are sounded, stuff happens, similar to the way things happened when earlier seals were opened. Things are not necessarily happening in time order; this is a duplication of what has already happened. Rather than a new set of events, we are now seeing what is to come from the point of view of the unbelieving world, whereas*

*the opening of the previous six seals showed us what is to come from the point of view of the church.*

Questions 9-11 are **SELF-DIRECTED QUESTIONS**. You need to write them on flip-chart sheets for the group to work on in pairs.

9. **SDL** Read Revelation 8 v 6-12. What happens as each of the trumpets are sounded?

*V7, burning up of 1/3 of the earth*

*V8-9, 1/3 of the sea destroyed*

*V10-11, 1/3 of the rivers and springs turn bitter*

*V12-13, 1/3 of the planets destroyed and their light is lost*

Explain that next an eagle cries out 'Woe!' because of what is to come with the next three trumpet blasts, as if things could get any worse! This is not final judgment, as only 1/3 of each thing is destroyed. This is just a warning...

## **Revelation 9**

10. **SDL** What happens with the remaining trumpet blasts in Revelation 9 v 1-5 and 9 v 13-15?

*9 v 1-6, a fallen star (representing Satan) is given the key to hell (don't forget, it is Jesus who holds the keys to death and hell and has authority to release death's captives (1 v 18); Satan doesn't get to keep the keys). Satan lets out creatures from hell (i.e. destructive satanic forces) to torture the unbelievers. Remind the group that this is picture language of something that hasn't happened yet. We are not to look for creatures of this exact description, we are to be aware that Satan is real and that he doesn't look after those who have not followed Jesus; here we see him attacking his allies. Hell is not a party.*

*9 v 13-15, 1/3 of mankind will be killed. Again, not complete destruction, but a warning.*

11. **SDL** Read Revelation 9 v 20-21. How do the survivors respond to the warnings of judgment they have witnessed? Why do you think this is?

*They do not repent of their idol worship or their sin. It seems that they saw what happened to others but did not think it would happen to them. They saw the warning but did not receive it.*

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Are people around us any different?

*Think about why this might be and whether this affects our efforts to share the gospel.*

## Revelation 10

In Chapter 10 there is another interlude; another message of hope in the middle of warnings of coming judgment. Another angel comes and speaks, but John is told not to write it down. This angel is holding a little scroll – probably the scroll from Rev 5 v 1 with seven seals, six of which have already been opened (Johnson 2001, p159).

### 12. Read Revelation 10 v 9-11. What happens and what do you think this tells us?

*John is told to eat the scroll – this is a picture of him internalising the message that he is to give to others (v11). The message is bittersweet – God's eternal purposes will experience no further delay; but there will be suffering (NIVSB footnote p1896). The message glorifies Christ but tells of 'humanity's delusion and rebellion...' (Johnson 2001, p164). The message is truth but people are not listening (Bewes 2003, p71).*

## Revelation 11

13. In Chapter 11 we are introduced to two witnesses. They represent Moses and Elijah, who themselves symbolise the mission and the outreach of the church. Read Revelation 11 v 7-13. What happens when they have finished giving their testimony? What do you think we are meant to understand from this imagery?

*When they have finished speaking (and not before!) they are killed by the beast from the Abyss (hell) and abandoned in the public square. The people reject their teaching and celebrate their deaths. But they are brought back to life by God and taken to heaven. Then there is another act of cosmic destruction and this time the survivors do recognise and worship God.*

*We are meant to understand that the message the OT prophets and the church give – God's love for us, our sinfulness, our danger as we stand in judgment before the Holy God and His rescue plan – is, for the most part, rejected. However, our rejection of the message does not make it untrue and the witnesses triumph!*

### 14. Read Revelation 11 v 15. What happens when the final trumpet is sounded?

*Loud voices in heaven announce that the kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and his Messiah, i.e. the kingdom of God has come in fullness and Jesus will reign for ever!*

### 15. What do the elders say as they worship God in v18?

*That the time has come for judgment and reward.*

### 16. What do we see in heaven in v19 and why?

*God's temple is opened and John saw the ark of the covenant; the box containing the 10 Commandments. The ark was not on public display in the OT, it was kept in the holy of holies where it symbolised God's presence, but now John sees it, as a symbol of God's glory and covenant faithfulness.*

*We also see some more natural disasters, this time probably symbolising God's majesty, rather than*

*judgment.*

**Summary:**

As the seven seals on the scroll have been opened, we have seen a foretaste of God's judgment on a rebellious world and all hell let loose. John was given a prophecy to tell the people which would be bittersweet and we are told about two witnesses, the OT prophets and the church, who will share their testimony and then be killed but resurrected. After all this, Jesus' kingdom comes and heaven is opened for John to see in his vision.

**?**

Why should reading about these visions of God's judgement and coming Kingdom encourage us to share our faith with unbelievers?

**Check out** – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they found the study and if they are safe to go back to the cell.

## **Seals and Trumpets**

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16. What do we see in heaven in v19 and why?

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