**The Lamb, The Seals, and the Sovereignty of God**

Revelation 6

When I was in college, I had the amazing opportunity to take a semester abroad in Israel. During this time, I studied at a university there that took us on field studies all over the region. In all my time there, there was one place, one geographical region that caught my eye. I was drawn to it, curious about it, and I couldn't help but imagine myself traveling through it thousands of years previous to when the Israelites themselves journeyed through it.

This region is called the Negev. The Negev is a desert region in southern Israel. When we think of Israel from pictures or movies, this is what is most commonly thought of. A vast landscape with sand, dirt, rocks, and little to habitable life other than the few streams. When the Israelites escaped from Egypt and departed from their time residing at Mount Sinai, this is the land they ventured through for part of their 40 years of travel. (Photo Images of the Negev)

I try to imagine myself in their shoes, or sandals, to be more specific. I imagine myself walking through a desert, following the presence of the Lord in the appearance of a cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. The endless sand and rocks stuck in my shoes, my tired legs after days of traveling non-stop, the endless disruptions in our journey from nations opposing our God, desire from relief from the burden of carrying my equipment, the constant sun beating down on my body, and the seemingly endless journey that finds a glimmer of hope in the words of Yahweh communicating through our leaders.

As I look at the journey of the Israelites, I can’t stop myself from comparing it to the life of a believer. We are living in a world that is broken, burdened, tiresome, and corrupt, and we are trying to stay faithful with hope in the anticipation that Jesus will come and make all things new. This is the heart of the book of Revelation, it is a writing that gives us insight into the fulfillment of the promise God has made to His Church as we wait and travel in our journey of faithfulness and anticipation of the hope of the redemption and restoration that is to come. It is with this understanding and this heart that we approach our text today in Revelation chapter 6.

As we approach Revelation 6, we must do so with exegetical humility, recognizing that while interpretations may vary, Christ’s return is certain. Revelation presents a vision of judgment and restoration, blending literal and symbolic elements that have led to diverse eschatological views. While topics like the rapture, tribulation, and antichrist spark debate, our ultimate focus should be on the unshakable truth: Jesus is coming back to redeem and judge His creation. Though I may draw interpretive lines, I acknowledge I could be wrong—and that doesn’t trouble me because my confidence rests in Christ’s return and what he has called His people to be for this world in need of a Lord and Savior. So, with all this in mind, let us head into the passage,

In chapter 5, we see the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, taking the scroll from God seated on the throne, and this builds anticipation of the scroll being opened as it outlines God’s final unfolding plans for judgment, restoration, and redemption. Chapter 6 opens up from this grand worship scene celebrating the worthiness and glory of the Lamb of God as the Lamb begins to open the seven seals of this scroll, as a document in this time could not be opened until all the seals were broken. (Picture of a scroll with seven seals, possibly next to the Lamb)

With the seal being opened, we as the church are presented with three main points of application regarding our walk with the Lord and a theological psychological framework for God’s intended mindset for the Church before Christ’s final coming:

The first point is to Persevere in Faith in the Lamb (Rev 6:1-8)

The first four seals outline the “birth pains” of what is to come before the coming of the Son of Man highlighted in this passage and foreshadowed by Jesus in the Gospel in Matthew 24.

In Revelation 6:1-2, John the Apostle describes the scene of the first seal being opened:

“Now I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, 'Come!”And I looked, and behold, a white horse! And its rider had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering, and to conquer.” (Rev 6:1-2).

This seal introduces the first of the four horsemen, which in pop culture today has been described as “The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.” (Pop culture photo of the four horsemen) This first horseman is often the most debated, with the question of “who is he?” Some believe it is false prophets/anti-christ coming with conquest and religious deception, others either the Word of God or the Church coming to conquer the souls of men, or even Jesus Christ himself. Whatever the symbolic intent is of these first horsemen, there is going to be an overtaking of nations and peoples initiated by them. I find comparing Rev 6:1-2 with Jesus’s discussion of the end times in the Gospel of Matthew to be a helpful tool for understanding this passage:

“As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?’ **4** And Jesus answered them, ‘See that no one leads you astray. **5** For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray’” (Matt 24:3-5)

In this discussion, Jesus himself explains that the start of the end of the age begins with deception. It begins with those claiming to be Christ and leading them astray.

This deception kicks the opening of the following seals:

“When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, “Come!” And out came another horse, bright red. Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another, and he was given a great sword” (Rev 6:3-4).

This next rider brings war to the earth. He is given a great sword as a symbol of judgment of war. Jesus himself warns us in Matthew by saying,

“And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom…” (Matt 24:6-7)

This horseman will come to earth and lead the world in direct conflict because of the Spiritual battle of light and darkness that ensues in both spiritual and physical levels. This includes the spiritual deception brought by the white horseman and now a physical conflict from the red horseman.

The next horseman arrives at the scene with the Lamb breaking of the third seal:

**“5** When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, “Come!” And I looked, and behold, a black horse! And its rider had a pair of scales in his hand. **6** And I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures, saying, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and wine!” (Rev 6:5-6)

The common response to war is a disruption to the food chain, scarcity, rationing, and economic inflation and disaster. This rider comes with a scale weighing the food products indicating a financial aspect to this passage. The quantity of food and its cost mentioned in this passage, during the time of the writing of the Book of Revelation, is 5 to 15 times more than the normal rate.

What follows this economic upheaval comes with the breaking of the fourth seal,

“**7** When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, “Come!” **8** And I looked, and behold, a pale horse! And its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth” (Rev 6:7-8).

Following the first three horsemen is the last horseman, who brings death. The pale horse and Hades are to spread Death throughout the world: one-fourth of Earth’s population will be slain. This progression is common in major wars. First, death and fighting occur, and then farming and food distribution are disrupted, which brings starvation. With death everywhere, disease follows, with wildlife overtaking the weak and defenseless.

In Matthew 24:7-8, Jesus describes all of these actions as just the beginning:

“And there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.” (Matt 24:7-8)

With all this conflict and chaos, we can be overloaded and withdrawn. This is where Jesus calls us to Persevere in Faith in the Lamb. This is Jesus saying to His people that Despite the Chaos, Remain Faithful. The symbols in Revelation have a shocking effect on both complacent and faithful believers. These scenes are meant to move us towards urgency and genuineness in our faith in the Lord.

But how do we remain faithful in the midst of the chaos? How do we endure suffering? We endure suffering by keeping our eyes on Jesus. I want us to notice something: **who is the one holding the scroll? Who is the one opening the seals? The Lamb of God! Jesus Christ Himself!**

Listen to the Apostle Paul’s imparting words to His disciple, Timothy:

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing” (2 Tim 4:7-8)

Paul suffered much for the sake of the Gospel, and we, as faithful believers, will suffer as well. As such, what sustains us in our race is keeping our eyes on Jesus and knowing He is in control of all of this.

This brings us to the second main application point of the passage: Proclaim Your Commitment to the Lord (Rev 6:9-11).

After the Lamb opens the first four seals, the scene shifts:

“When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.” (Rev 6:9-11)

Those who have been slain are the martyrs, witnesses, and believers of God. It is with their heavy anticipation that they cry out to the Lord, the common Davidic phrase presented in the Psalms “How Long?” With the chaos that ensues with the first four seals being opened, people will be looking for someone to bring an end to the conflict, to bring stability to the world, to unify all that has been broken. The same heart of despair and anticipation that made the martyrs and witnesses cry out, it is what makes our hearts cry out in the world today. We look at the destruction, the corruption, the death, the wars, the famines, the earthquakes, and all that is broken in this world, and we, in our way, cry out to the Lord saying, “How Long?”

It is with this request that the Lord wraps them up in white robe symbolizing the church and their holy distinction in the eyes of the Lord and he told them to “rest a little longer.” It is with this command we must respond by Resting in God’s Timing knowing that He is in control and that His response to the martyrs and witnesses was not “there has been a change of plans” but that there is a plan and at the end God will bring the judgment, restoration, and redemption God’s creation groans for.

And the Lord also stresses that as the martyrs and witnesses wait for the resolution to God’s great plan, there will be other servants and believers who will die for His name and who will serve as faithful witnesses to the Lord. This should be an encouragement and challenge to us that God is not done working in this world, even with the chaos of these signs. Our commitment to Christ can become a testimony to the world. Just like Jesus stressed in His ascension to the Heavens:

“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Let us proclaim our Commitment to the Lord like these martyrs and witnesses and act as a living testimony to God’s plan for redemption and restoration to a world in need.

The chapter ends with the breaking of the sixth seal:

**“**When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb,for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” (Rev 6:12-17)

It is within this cosmic disturbance that God is calling to Patiently Wait for the Justice of the Lord (Rev 6:12-17).

In the conclusion of this chapter, we find a scene of calamity, chaos, and God’s wrath upon this earth. It is something out of the words of the Old Testament prophets:

“And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke.The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes” (Joel 2:30-31)

“Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?” (Amos 5:20)

This is the day of judgment, the day of the LORD, prophesied throughout the Bible. I want us to notice something about this part of the chapter. When the calamity and chaos arrive, it says that everyone hid; no one was spared, from the least to the most. In this chaos, a shift occurs; everyone, Christian and non-Christian alike, knows that God is orchestrating this, that the Lamb is pouring out His wrath on the injustices and brokenness of this world. The prophet Isaiah refers to this in his writings, saying:

“Enter into the rock and hide in the dust from before the terror of the Lord and from the splendor of his majesty…In that day mankind will cast away their idols of silver and their idols of gold, which they made for themselves to worship” (Isa 2:10, 19-20)

In this space, we must recognize that Those who reject Christ will face terror and regret (Rev 6:15-17), but God’s people will be vindicated (2 Thess 1:6-10).

All those oppose God on this earth will face his judgment and the wrath of the Lamb but all those who follow the Lord, who have waited in expectation and anticipation for the return of the Lamb will welcome this unmaking of the earth with faithful and clear hope that not only will it be remade but all that is broken will be restored and redeemed.

As such, we must Trust God to bring justice in His Time. As Jesus says in the Gospel of Matthew:

“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man” (Matthew 24:36)

Just like Noah was warned about the impending flood to consume the earth but did not know the exact timing of the flood. We have been given a message of warning and preparation from the Lord on Jesus’ second coming, but we do not know the time or hour when Jesus will arrive. As such, we need to trust like Noah did and be faithful in building and preparing the Church for the arrival of our Lord and Savior.

I want us to return the desert. (Return to initial photos of the Negev) This space that we reside in can seem destitute, broken, hopeless, and boring. As we wait in anticipation of the Lord, we may find ourselves wondering if He is even going to fulfill His promise. We ask the Lord, like the Martyrs in the book of Revelation, “How long, O’ Lord?” But the desert that the Israelites traveled through is not a barren wasteland, but a place of encounter with the Lord and transformation by the Lord. It is a place of God’s provision and guidance. It is a place where God's faithfulness spurs us on to faithfulness and anticipation of the promise that is to come.

So, as we close our time here together, let us remember these important ideas:

* Persevere in Faith in the Lamb (Rev 6:1-8)
  + Despite the chaos, remain faithful (Rev 6:1-17; Psa 91:4; Deut 7:9)
  + Endure suffering by keeping your eyes on Jesus (Rev 6:1; 2 Tim 4:7-8; Heb 12:1-2)
* Proclaim Your Commitment to the Lord (Rev 6:9-11)
  + Rest in God’s Timing (Rev 6:10-11; Ps 46:10)
  + Our commitment to Christ can become a testimony to the world (Rev 6:11; Acts 1:8; Matt 28:1-20; Ps 71:15-18)
* Patiently Wait for the Justice of Lord (Rev 6:12-17)
  + Those who reject Christ will face terror and regret (Rev 6:15-17), but God’s people will be vindicated (2 Thess 1:6-10)
  + Trust God to bring justice in His time (Rev 6:12-17; James 5:7-8; Rom 12:19)

Right now, we are waiting for Jesus to return. As we travel and wait in anticipation for the coming of the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, let our hearts rest and anticipate His promised restoration and redemption, and stay faithful and active in living out our commitment to the Lord as a testimony, knowing that the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, is in complete authority over what is to come.