

The Apocalypse - Revelation 6a (The First Five Seals)

by Steve Gallagher

The sermon explores the first five seals of Revelation 6, examining their significance and implications for the end times.

Duration: 39:18

Scripture: Psalm 11:4, Matthew 19:28, Luke 18:7

Topics: "Apocalypse Study"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the opening of the scroll in the book of Revelation. There are two main perspectives on how the seals on the scroll are opened. One view suggests that each seal opens one by one, leading to unfolding events. The other view suggests that all seven seals must be opened before the scroll can be fully opened. The speaker emphasizes the importance of staying close to the truth and not getting caught up in cynicism. The sermon also explores the fifth seal, which reveals the souls of those who were slain for their faith, crying out for justice. The speaker connects this to the Old Testament verse in Ezekiel, highlighting the various means of death mentioned, such as warfare, famine, wild beasts, and plague. The sermon concludes by acknowledging the significance of these events and the need to be expectant for the return of the Lord.

Transcript

The following message is provided by Eternal Weight of Glory. For other sermons, teachings, and articles, please visit EternalWeight.com. Lord, I do thank You just for the way that You continue to lead and unfold the truths in Your Word, the things that You did express about Your return. Thank You, Lord, for the reality of what we saw in that video, that You are coming back soon.

Lord, free us of every iota of cynicism, the kind of cynicism that the mockers say they've been saying the Lord's coming back forever. Just get that out of us, every bit of it, Lord. Make us expectant, I pray.

We pray also for this talk this morning, Lord, that the realities that are expressed in Revelation 6 would just be brought to light, Lord. Just lead us along the right path. We're not asking You to satisfy our curiosities or give us all the answers, Lord, but we do want to make sure that we are holding as close to the truth as possible.

I just ask You to help me as I share the things that I've learned. In Jesus' name, amen. Okay, so Revelation 6, we're going to get into this chapter, and we're going to be dealing with the first five seals today.

But before we get into that, I want to just touch on the scroll. If you remember when we were in chapter 5, I said that I wasn't going to talk about it much then because I had other things I wanted to kind of emphasize in that talk that day. So let's just spend a couple of minutes talking about the scroll before we get into, you know, the opening of these different seals.

First of all, the contents. What is in this scroll? What is written in it? Because it said it's written on the front and the back, meaning it's complete. It's the full picture of whatever it is the Lord is wanting to communicate to us.

And the most concise answer I had to that question was written by George Ladd. So let me just read what he said. The easiest identification of John's scroll is that it contains the prophecy of the end events, including both the salvation of God's people and the judgment of the wicked.

It is God's redemptive plan for the denouement of human history, the overthrow of evil, and the gathering of a redeemed people to enjoy the blessings of God's rule. So I think you could almost look at it like the rest of the book of Revelation. It's like the book of Revelation, you could consider it like a schematic.

And even at that, it's all over the place. You know, it's kind of a mixture. It's like a puzzle.

The pieces have been thrown all over the room. But the scroll, you put all those pieces in an exact order, and you fill in all the blanks, you fill in all the details. That's what I think the scroll is.

So the opening of it, now I got to tell you that there's two main perspectives. One is that, well, how do I describe this? Let's say this is a scroll, and the seals are along the edge right there going down. So there's two different views of it.

The one view is that each time one of these seals opens, then events begin to happen. That somehow that opens up the scroll enough to allow things to start unfolding. The other viewpoint is that all seven of these seals have to be opened before the scroll begins to be opened.

Does that make sense? Are you getting the picture of that? So that something happens when each seal is open, but it's not the contents of the scroll that's being unfolded. It's, you know, maybe a reaction or something or other. I don't know.

But anyway, those are the two basic perspectives of it. And what about the timing of it? There again, different people believe different things. George Ladd and Rex Andrews both believe the seals were opened after Calvary.

Grant Osborne believes they'll be open prior to the Tribulation period. Robert Thomas believes they'll be open during the first half of the Tribulation period. And Wolvard and other dispensationalists believe those seals won't be open until the second half of the Tribulation.

Okay, so it's kind of all over the place. I could see Grant Osborne being right, or I could see George Ladd and Rex Andrews being right. You know, in a certain way it would make sense that the seals were opened after Calvary.

It would make sense that what we see unfold in Daniel 7 and in Revelation 5, the inauguration of Jesus Christ, that that would have happened after His victory on Calvary. I mean, that makes sense to me. And that probably is the way, although no one talked about that.

I don't know why. But that probably is the way it happened, the timing of it. So did the seals begin to be opened right away? Were only five of them opened, as Rex Andrews claims? Or was it all of them, as George Ladd believes? You know, or was it a 2,000 year gap there? I don't know.

But anyway, if it was the first five, then, you know, that creates the imminency factor for the sixth seal breaking. So in other words, if the first five seals were opened and the contents have been occurring for 2,000 years, which is what George Ladd believes and Rex Andrews believe, then the next event that's going to happen is the opening of the sixth seal. So there's that sense of expectancy and imminency that at any moment the sixth seal could break.

Or it could be that they all, maybe those first six seals just break consecutively quickly or something. I don't know. But the problem I have with those seals having been opened back at Calvary is that, well, first of all, like the famine that's discussed in the third seal appears to be a definite event.

You know, with the details of it, it doesn't seem like a recapitulation of historical events in general. Like you could say about the deception or about the wars and death. You could generalize those seals.

But the famine, that seems like a certain type of famine that occurs. And I'll get into that in a minute. Also, the other thing is that the martyrs in the fifth seal are crying out for vengeance upon the people who are still alive on earth.

So it seems as though these are martyrs who have been killed right during that timeframe. And that they're in heaven crying out for vengeance, but the people who murdered them are still alive on earth and they want vengeance on those people. So that doesn't really add up with the whole idea of 2,000 years of martyrdom.

So those are a couple of hesitations about believing that some of those seals were broken open right after Calvary. But it does seem like there is some kind of an increase in intensity that goes on prior to the events that start to happen after the sixth seal. And that's what I tend to think.

It's like the message I gave yesterday, ready for the Lord. I kind of said the same thing that whether you believe like Grant Osborne that they will be open before the tribulation period or that they were open before. Either way, I don't know exactly what to make of it, but it seems like as each seal opens, there's a reaction.

But it could be that there's some kind of a buildup before it's actually opened. So I don't know what to tell you exactly, but those are kind of some of the ideas to kick around on that. One thing is certain.

There's a direct connection between the opening of these seals, at least the first six, and the Olivet Discourse. In fact, if you want to open your Bible to Revelation 6 and to Matthew 24, we'll take a look at some of these comparisons real quick. And I'll be making the comparisons as we go as well.

The first seal, and I'll explain why I believe it's deception here in a few minutes. The first seal, obviously Revelation 6, 1 and 2, correlates with Matthew 24, 4 and 5, which is about deception. The second seal in verses 3 and 4 correlates with Matthew 24, verses 6 and the first part of 7. The third seal, the scarcity of

food, would correlate with 7b, where you see there will be famines.

The fourth seal, which is death, verses 7 and 8, would also correlate with 7b, kind of roughly. It's not real clear there, but just talking about violent things going on on earth that are going to bring about death. And the sixth seal, you don't see that until all the way to verse 29 in Matthew 24.

And there you see the direct tie to the terminology used in the sixth seal. So you can just kind of say that it's a loose pattern that Jesus laid out in the Olivet Discourse that you now start to see unfold in these six seals. And this, of course, is 65 years later.

All right, now notice also in the Matthew 24 passage, verse 8, Jesus said, but all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. And I think some translations use the term sorrows. I think King James used the term sorrows, but really birth pangs is more the literal meaning of the word.

And I want to make a few comments on that because, you know, thinking about these seals as being just kind of the early rumblings of the heavy duty devastations that will come later, these are kind of like the first fruits of it, if you could say it that way. But let me just make four observations. The first one is that in Isaiah 26, in the middle of Isaiah's apocalypse, he compares what the Jewish people will go through during the end times to a woman in labor.

So there again, we see the tie into Old Testament scripture, which happens constantly through the Revelation. The second thing I want to mention is that Jewish scholars alive during the intertestamental period, in other words, between the time of Malachi and John the Baptist, men during that period of time believed that there would be a time of great distress on this earth for the Jewish people before the appearance of the Messiah. And they coined a term that they called the messianic woes.

Of course, it's in Jeremiah, I think, where he referred to the time of Jacob's trouble, which is the same period. Okay, the third thing I'll mention is, I'm just going to read what the pulpit commentator said, because it's very interesting. He said, these great events are called labor pangs because they usher in the new creation, the regeneration spoken of in Matthew 19 28, where Jesus said, truly, I say to you, that you who have followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you also shall sit upon 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel.

So in other words, the pulpit commentator is comparing this whole thing to the regeneration of earth. And that's a whole nother huge subject in which we don't have time to get into now. We will later at some point.

But it's not just the redemption of believers that occurs in these last days. It's also the redemption of earth and creation is going to be refined by fire and redeemed by the Lord. It's really a whole fascinating subject.

So he's tying these birth pangs into this regeneration that Jesus spoke of, you know, this rebirth of the world. Okay. And the last thing about this is that Rosenthal, who wrote a book called Pre-Wrath Rapture, he basically believes that will be a rapture, but it won't be before the tribulation, it'll just be before the wrath begins.

And it's an interesting concept. And I read the book. But anyway, in that book, he made the point that there's a difference between the beginning of birth pangs mentioned here.

And what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, he said, for you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying peace and safety, then destruction

will come upon them suddenly, like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. But there's a difference between the beginning of labor pains and the intense labor pains towards the end, right? He's pointing out that there's a difference.

These events that are occurring in Matthew 24 and the breaking of the six seals, or at least the first few seals, that that's just the beginning of woes. That's just the beginning of things starting to change and open up and this whole process beginning to unfold. But what Paul is referring to, apparently this is what he's referring to, the sudden destruction that will come just prior to the second coming of the Lord or at the second coming of the Lord.

So one way or the other, anyway, it's just interesting to me. So let's look at these six seals. The first seal, the first two verses.

Boy, I've really got to get moving, man. Then I saw when the lamb broke one of the seven seals and I heard one of the four living creatures saying, as with a voice of thunder, come. I looked and behold a white horse and he who sat on it had a bow and a crown was given to him and he went out conquering and to conquer.

All right, now there have been those who have believed that this refers to Jesus Christ because he's on a white horse and Jesus will return on a white horse later in chapter 19, but it really can't be Jesus. And I'll give you a couple of reasons why. First of all, when he returns in chapter 19, he's going to return with all the hosts of heaven.

That's a completely different picture than this. Secondly, he's in the throne room breaking the seals. It doesn't make sense that he would, at the same time, be one of the horsemen that respond to that breaking of a seal.

And also, it wouldn't be appropriate for an angel to call Jesus Christ forth like that, you know, to order Jesus to do something. That wouldn't make sense. And also, it doesn't fit in with the order of events in the Olivet Discourse, you know, meaning the Lord returning like that.

So it's not Jesus. But if it isn't Jesus, then it must be someone who's attempting to look like Jesus, right? And that is where the whole idea of deception comes, you know, that this is someone who's... How does it say about the beast in Revelation 13, that he speaks like a lamb? Doesn't it say something like that? All right, so is this the Antichrist? And I would say, no, it's not the Antichrist. But let's just take a look at it real quick.

I mean, it says this horseman is out to conquer, and that's certainly true of the Antichrist. And it says this horseman has a bow with no arrows. This signifies that he will conquer through a peace movement and not through actual warfare.

And that's a very interesting thing, and it certainly fits in with the Antichrist, because we'll find out in Daniel that that's what he does. And the Antichrist is identified as the one who deceives the nations in a number of different locations in the book of Revelation. So, you know, it certainly looks like the Antichrist, but the problem is that the rest of the horsemen represent large movements.

You know, in other words, you wouldn't personify those other three horsemen. So a better way to look at it is that this is a movement of deception that paves the way for the Antichrist and his deception later. Okay, does that make sense? So he is part of that first horse, but you wouldn't say that it's just him.

Robert Thomas says this, the book is full of satanic imitations of Christ. This writer is one of them. This writer, like the other three, is not an individual, but a personification of a growing movement or force that will be at work during this future period.

All right, and like I said, the deception certainly fits in with the Olivet discourse. When Jesus was talking about those misleading people and coming in his name saying, I am the Christ. In other words, what he's saying, there will be many who will come who will claim to represent him or even to make claims that put themselves on a par with Jesus.

You know, so it could mean either one of those things. So this whole growing movement of deception is going to pave the way for the Antichrist, and all of that also fits in with what's laid out in 2 Thessalonians 2 as well. Okay, the second seal, verse 3, When he broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, Come.

And another, a red horse, went out. And to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men would slay one another, and a great sword was given to him. Manny and I were talking a couple of weeks ago, and Manny made the statement that considering some of the evil men who have had access to nuclear weapons over the last decades, it's amazing, and it's only a sign of God's sovereign control on this earth that we haven't entered nuclear war.

And it's a good point, but that day is probably going to come. I mean, that could be what's being described here is nuclear war. It could be that what comes forth in the second seal and the fourth seal, the massive amounts of death, it could certainly be nuclear war, but I don't know.

Anyway, here he's talking about a restraint that is removed, some kind of restraint. As we continue to move closer to the breaking of the sixth seal, it's like things are being opened up increasingly. And I think I touched on this in one of the other talks about how crazy people are becoming.

The guy who murdered all those children in that school, and now, right now what's going on is this ex-LA cop who's going around killing other cops and so on, and you're seeing it's like as if a restraining power is being lifted little by little. The word slay here is actually slaughter. It's the same word used to describe Jesus in the fifth chapter, and it's just describing bloodshed, not necessarily the numbers, although that's probably reflected as well, but just the nature of the slaughter.

It's not just the word killed like you would expect. When you think about the rumors of wars that Jesus talked about, what always comes to me is newscasts. And when you think about up to the last hundred years, there were no such things as newscasts.

I mean, you might get a newspaper story that would reflect something that happened a month before, but it just didn't come instantaneously over the television like it has during the last century. And, you know, the deaths in the 20th century are amazing. I mean, 16 million people died in the First World War, and somewhere between 60 and 80 million died in the Second World War.

That is a lot of people dying. Osborne said this, it's a very interesting comment. He said, God is not so much pouring down judgment on the earth dwellers as allowing their depravity to come full circle.

This is a common theme in this book as sin turns upon itself and self-destructs. And, you know, we understand this whole concept of God giving sinners over to their sin, and that's what seems to be occurring here in the breaking of these seals. It's just a little more letting people have their own way, you

know, in their sinful condition.

Okay, the third seal, verse 5, When he broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, Come. I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard something like a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not damage the oil and the wine.

All right, now let me just make a couple observations real quick about this. A denarius was a basic common laborer's day's pay in the first century. So what they're saying is food is going to be expensive.

To get wheat flour, it'll take a whole day's pay just to get one measure, but you could also get three measures of barley, because barley is a poor man's version of wheat, you know. So that's what they're saying, that it's going to be hard to get food. Food will be scarce, so it's a famine, but it's a famine with a limited extent.

In other words, food is going to be scarce and expensive, but not completely absent, you know. So that's what the whole concept of weighing it out shows the value of it, that when you're to the point where you have to weigh out food, you know that you are, I mean, you're not going to waste a single crumb. You are really being very careful with it.

So what does this reflect? It means that the wealthy at this point will not be affected, you know, at least by this famine, whatever it is. It's the poor people of the world who will be mostly affected, and also the oil and wine represent luxuries, you know. So the people with money and who have the means to do it will not be denied their indulgences.

If they have the money to get the things that they want, that they're accustomed to having, they're going to get them. Okay, the fourth seal, verse 7, When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, Come. I looked, and behold, an ashen horse, and he who sat on it had the name Death, and Hades was following with him.

Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth. All right, now when it says the fourth of the earth, does that mean a fourth of the people around the world, or does it mean some particular section of the world, you know, Europe, let's say, or whatever? I don't know. I don't know exactly, but if it's talking about the people, the numbers are staggering.

It would be like 1.75 billion people, or you could put it in terms of something we could get our minds around. Take the city of Dallas, which is Chris's hometown, which is roughly a million people, a little over, figure 1,700 cities that size being wiped out. That's a lot of people, but the picture here, and you know, more of the poetical way of seeing it, is death stalking the land with Hades following right behind them, gathering in all the victims.

There are four different means of death that are mentioned here, and this also is a tie-in with an Old Testament verse, Ezekiel 14, 21, and it had to do with Jerusalem where the sword, famine, wild beasts, and plague were mentioned. So we see the same kind of thing happening here. The sword refers to warfare and murder, of course.

Famine speaks for itself, but apparently on a much greater magnitude than what was occurring in the third seal. Pestilence probably indicates plagues, diseases, viruses, and you know, here again, look at the

things that have come about during the last 30, 40 years. AIDS, and some of the STDs that were never in existence before, and different kinds of viruses that they've never seen happen before, you know, and are all starting to come about, and to me, again, it's a picture of how things are becoming increasingly more like the things that we're seeing here.

The wild beasts, it could mean that animals will be taking advantage of defenseless people who have either been wounded or weakened by famine or something or other. It could be that, or it could be an increase in the savagery of animals, that they'll become more aggressive and violent. That's what I tend to believe, is that it's going to be something like that, and also, again, kind of tied in with some of the things that are happening on the earth, that video that we saw, I wish it would have included some of these things, but it was only covering a, you know, two-month period there in that video, but some of the weird animals that have washed up on shore or been spotted, you know, Bigfoot, some of these different things.

I was telling Manny this one day, he scoffed at me, but I've always been very cynical about anything like that, but I am getting to where I am backing off on my cynicism, you know. I mean, to me, it doesn't make sense, the Bigfoot thing, but nothing would surprise me. Nothing would surprise me, the way things are going, you know, and there are just some weird things happening in nature, so does that mean new mutant-type animals will start being seen? I don't know, maybe not, you know, it could be a stretch, but it wouldn't surprise me.

All right, the fifth seal, when the lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar, the souls of those who had been slain because of the Word of God and because of the testimony which they had maintained, and they cried out with a loud voice saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, will you refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth? And there was given to each of them a white robe, and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed, even as they had been, would be completed also. All right, now I want to make four observations about this fifth seal. Number one, Ladd brought out the point, you know, is this a throne room or is it the temple? When you think of a throne room, that's a whole different scenario than the temple that we see in the Old Testament.

You know, the temple had its, you know, the altars and all that stuff going on, but a throne room is, you know, where a sovereign is sitting there ruling a country or whatever, a realm. Let me just read what he said, It is precisely the fluidity of apocalyptic thinking which makes this possible, meaning it could be both at the same time. Apocalyptic pictures are not meant to be photographs of objective facts.

They are often symbolic representations of almost unimaginable spiritual realities. In fact, God does not sit upon a throne. He is an eternal spirit who neither stands or sits or reclines.

It's like, duh, why didn't I think of that? You know, that's why he gets paid the big bucks, and I'm just a lowly teacher. He also brought out the point of like Isaiah 6, where Isaiah saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled, what? The temple, right? And also there was an altar in that picture as well. And Psalm 11 4, the Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven.

You know, so we see them tied together there as well. So it's both. All right, what about these prayers for vengeance? You know, that doesn't sound very Christ-like, does it? Jesus died saying, forgive them.

Stephen died saying, forgive them, Lord. And these guys are up there demanding retribution. What's up with that? Well, Jesus was making a different point, but I'll just touch on it in Luke 18 7. He said, will not

God bring about justice for his elect who cry to him day and night, and will he delay long over them? You know, so Jesus does make mention of this in a different spot, but let me read what three commentators said.

Robert Thomas said this, when grace has exhausted its long-suffering, only judgment is left, and prayers for righteous retribution are appropriate. Such prayers come not just from a thirst for revenge. They are at least in part a protest against iniquity.

The petition is to carry out vengeance against, quote, those who dwell upon earth. Throughout the apocalypse, this expression is a semi-technical designation for mankind in their hostility to God. They are ungodly people who have no home but earth and want no home but earth.

It is not just the beast. The whole race is in rebellion and is set on removing as many of God's servants as possible, and that is the way it'll be. A pulpit commentary said, the cry is not a petition for personal revenge but a request for the termination of those ills which for a time afflict man, and the termination of which must, by virtue of God's eternal justice, be accompanied by visible retribution on the wicked.

Yeah, that says it right. And Ray Steadman said, these martyrs are not living in days when God patiently endures the injustices of men. These are days of judgment, days when wrongdoers are being called to account, the time of vengeance.

The prayers then of God's people reflect the mind of God at that time. Led of the spirit, they pray for what God intends to do during the last days, and that's well spoken too. All right, the third thing I want to touch on is this designated number.

You know, the way I see it, it's like the Lord says, it stops right now. You know, He allows it to go on for some period of time, and then He puts a stop to it right when He wishes to. But the Lord only allows evil to continue until, as it is quoted in Genesis 15, the iniquity of the Amorite is, you know, there it says not yet complete, but is complete.

You know, in other words, there's a cup of iniquity, and it's also mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 23, you know, talking about the Pharisees filling up their cup. It's the same idea. It's only going to go on so long, and then the Lord's going to step in and put a stop to it.

All right, lastly, this fifth seal says something about the church. Ladd said this, one of the repeated emphases of the entire New Testament is that it is the very nature of the church to be a martyr people. And you better just go ahead and embrace that, you know, because it very well could be that you and I will be in that number one day.

Osborne said this, throughout the persecution and suffering in the book, the church is presented as a witnessing church. They do not flee for their lives or compromise the gospel in order to avoid persecution, but boldly maintain their witness in the desperate situation. And that is very true.

You get the sense of that all through the book of Revelation. The believers aren't cowering in a corner, and they're not like these ridiculous end-time movies where they've got computers and they're going to overthrow the Antichrist with computers or something. They are full of the Holy Spirit and boldly in the face of persecution, the worst persecution this earth has ever seen, they are boldly going out and proclaiming the truth.

You know, the truth is about the different rapture theories that we talked about last week. You could shoot holes in any of those theories, including the sixth seal theory. You know, when you start really taking a look at them, I don't care which theory you hold to, you can shoot holes in it.

But this is why I believe in the sixth seal theory. The main reason why is because I just believe that God is going to culminate mankind's existence in a powerful life of victory. You know, that His people are going to live to the full measure of what Jesus purchased on Calvary.

You know, that makes a lot of sense to me. Rex Andrews really laid it out to where it's understandable. And, you know, it just makes sense to me that the Lord is going to come upon His people and revival isn't even a strong enough term.

It's going to be a great outpouring. And when that happens, here's my hope. Here's why I don't look at the future with fear.

It's because if I am full of the Lord, I'm not going to be concerned about martyrdom or persecution or suffering. My mindset will be completely different. Yeah, the way I am now, I would have concerns.

I would have fears and all of that. But if the Lord completely took possession of me, if He really filled me with His Holy Spirit, my mindset is going to be completely different, you know, on a completely different level. Amen? So, you know, again, I'm not trying to push for my theory.

If you hold a different theory, it's fine with me. I don't know what's the right theory. I'm just sharing with you that I do believe believers are going to be living in victory throughout the tribulation period.

Okay, that's it for this week. God bless you all.

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