Revelation Study 3
The Seven Seals

Read: Rev 6:1-8:1

In 5:7 the Lamb receives the scroll from the One who sits on the throne. The Lamb is the one who is worthy to open the scroll and reveal its contents. Now in chapter 6 the seven seals that hold the scroll closed are broken open one at a time. Note: A scroll is not open until all the seals are broken. Therefore we must look at the events that accompany the opening of the seals not as the contents of the revelation contained on the scroll but rather as events that prepare us to receive the revelation.

The First 4 Seals (Rev 6:1-8)
The similarities between the events of the first four seals are striking:

- Each time the Lamb opens a seal, one of the 4 Living Creatures says "Come"
- Each time a seal is opened a horse and rider appears, each associated with a colour and a function (task/power)
- Each time John *hears* a voice and *sees* a horse
- All the actions of the horsemen take place on earth (i.e. not in heaven)
- Each of the actions symbolize plagues that are associated with war or the ravages of war

Discussion Question

> ***Within the living memory of John's first readers the Roman Empire had conquered most of the world known to them. How would the events described in the opening of the first four seals have been familiar to them (see the 4 weapons given to Death and Hades in v8)? Consider how a modern war (say, WWII, Iraq, Ukraine, Gaza) or the rise of modern empires could evoke similar memories today.***

The 5th and 6th Seals (Rev 6:9-17)
With the opening of the 5th seal the scene changes to heaven. Here, under the throne the martyrs cry out to God "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" They are given an indirect answer – they should rest a while longer until their *number* is complete (i.e. there are yet more to suffer martyrdom). (*Are these the souls of the Christians who died under Nero, and does John anticipate those who will die under Domitian?*)

At the opening of the 6th seal the events are more devastating than anything mentioned before and now not only the earth (earthquake) is

affected, but the heavens too. Now all people (complete humanity designated by 7 references in v15) are forced to take shelter and they believe this is the end of the world (Note: John does not hold this view. John is yet to describe still greater tribulations before the end comes!)

Discussion Question

> ***What events can make people believe that the end of the world has come? Have you ever felt that the end of the world has come?***

The 144,000 Sealed and the Great Multitude in White Robes (Rev 7)

2 Questions from Ch 6 remain unanswered:

- How long before the number of martyrs is complete? (6:10-11)
- Who can stand in the day of God's wrath? (6:17)

In Ch 7 we receive an answer to these questions.

First John ***hears*** the number of those who are to be sealed with a seal on their foreheads as the servants of God.

The Number is 144,000. 12,000 from each of the 12 Tribes of Israel.

> The order of the tribes may or may not be significant. Judah is mentioned first (the Lion is of the tribe of Judah) and Dan is omitted (the antichrist was believed to come from the tribe of Dan).

Then John ***sees*** a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe people and language standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.

This multitude are martyrs – "they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (7:14).

This audio-visual dream refers to the same reality in two guises (just as the Lion and the Lamb in 5:5-6).

The sealing of the 144,000 and the washing of the robes of the multitude can also be understood as the sign of Baptism and the washing of believers in the death of Christ (rather than their own death).

Discussion Question

> ***Read 7:14-17 again. How would this passage have brought comfort to John's first readers? How can this passage bring us comfort today?***

The 7th Seal (8:1)

"When he opened the seventh seal there was silence in heaven for about half an hour."

> ***Feel the suspense…***