

# The Seven Seals

by W.J. Erdman

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*The sermon explores the significance of the seven seals and the events that precede the appearing of Christ, emphasizing the supreme triumph of Christ and the worship of God by all created beings.*

**Scripture:** Revelation 4:1, Revelation 5:1, Revelation 6:1, Revelation 7:1, Revelation 8:1

**Topics:** "Christ's Triumph", "Eternal Security"

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## Description

W.J. Erdman preaches on the powerful vision of Christ in the place of universal power, depicted in Revelation chapters 4 and 5. The vision reveals Christ as the Lamb that was slain, receiving worship and praise from all created beings, leading to His ultimate triumph as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The sermon emphasizes the assurance that despite the trials and judgments on earth, Christ's people are safe in His care and will be rescued from the wrath to come.

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## Transcript

### Introductory Vision

CHRIST IN THE PLACE OF POWER. Chapters. 4:1 to 5:14.

1 After these things I saw, and behold, a door opened in heaven, and the first voice that I heard, a voice as of a trumpet speaking with me, one saying, Come up hither, and I will show thee the things which must come to pass hereafter. 2 Straightway I was in the Spirit: and behold, there was a throne set in heaven, and one sitting upon the throne; 3 and he that sat was to look upon like a jasper stone and a sardius: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, like an emerald to look upon. 4 And round about the throne were four and twenty thrones: and upon the thrones I saw four and twenty elders sitting, arrayed in white garments; and on their heads crowns, of gold. 5 And out of the throne proceed lightnings and voices and thunders. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God; 6 and before the throne, as it were a sea of glass like unto crystal; and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, four living creatures full of eyes before and behind. 7 And the first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face as of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. 8 And the four living creatures, having each one of them six wings, are full of eyes round about and within: and they have no rest day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, is the lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.

9 And when the living creatures shall give glory and honour and thanks to him that sitteth on the throne, to him that liveth for ever and ever, 10 the four and twenty elders shall fall down before him that sitteth on the throne, and shall worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and shall cast their crowns before the throne, saying, ;j

11 Worthy art thou, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honour and the power: for thou didst create all things, and because of thy will they were, and were created.

1 And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the Back, close sealed with seven seals. 2 And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a great voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? 3 And no one in the heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth, was able to open the book, or to look thereon. 4 And I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open the book, or to look thereon: 5 and one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not; be hold, the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Boot of David, hath overcome to open the book and the seven seals thereof. 6 And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, having seven horns, and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth. 7 And he came, and he taketh it out of the right hand of him that sat on the throne. 8 And when he had taken the book, the four living creatures and the four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sing a new song, saying,

Worthy art thou to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; for thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood f men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, 10 and madest them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests; and they reign upon the earth.

11 And I saw, and I heard a voice of many angels round about the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; 12 saying with a great voice, Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom and might, and honour, and glory, and blessing.

13 And every created thing which is in the heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and on the sea, and all things that are in them, heard I saying, Unto him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb, be the blessing, and the honour, and the glory, and the domination, for ever and ever. 14 And the four living creatures said, Amen. And the elders fell down and worshipped.

As the Letters to the Seven Churches were preceded by a Vision of Christ in the midst of the Candlesticks, so in this second division of the Book, the opening of the Seven Seals is introduced by a Vision of Christ in the Place of Universal Power. To Christ is entrusted the title deed of the world. He has been given all authority in heaven and on earth. In spite of all the disorders and distress of the world, the unfolding events of human history are in his hands. Thus this Vision reveals him as the "Lamb that was slain" receiving with the Creator all worship and praise from all created beings, and from the representatives of the innumerable company of the redeemed.

It is a picture of the investiture of the Son of Man with supreme power. The worship depicted may be described as the Music of Heaven. Two great oratorios are here. There is, in the fourth chapter the Oratorio of the Creation; in the fifth chapter is the Oratorio of the Redemption. The vision of Christ in the place of universal power and worshipped by all creation, intimates the supreme triumph towards which all the events and judgments of the opening Seals move and tend. The Lamb that was slain is yet to be King of

Kings and Lord of Lords, and he controls the movements of history which lead to this great consummation.

The vision does not represent the Church as in heaven before the opening of the seals begins. Rather it has been recorded to encourage the suffering church on earth, in all times of trial, by the vision of Christ's supreme and universal triumph.

According to the principle of interpretation mentioned, "And I saw" occurs four times in the scenes of the Investiture, and each time as introductory to something which is to be viewed by itself.

1. The first opens the Vision of the Throne and Thrones, the Elders and the Living Creatures, and their worship of the holy Jehovah the Almighty Author of all Creation. 4:1-11.

2. The second introduces in most brief and solemn statement the sealed Book to which all the subsequent Visions are related. 5:1.

3. The third prefaces the great scene of the taking of the Book by the Lamb once slain, and the new song of Redemption sung by the Living Creatures and the Elders. 5:2-10.

4. The fourth brings in the great Investiture when myriads of angels and all creatures in responsive song ascribe blessing and glory and everlasting Dominion to God and the Lamb, the whole concluding with the solemn "Amen" of the Living Beings. 5:1 1-14,

It is affirmed by certain writers that either the Living Creatures or the Elders or both in different relations are the Church already in glory before the Seals are opened. There are, however, reasons to the contrary.

In the introductory Vision the most prominent characteristic of each is that while both worship, the Living Creatures are associated with the Throne in judgments on the guilty nations, and the Elders are associated with the Throne in worship after the wrath has been poured out. The Angels evidently under the supremacy of the Living Creatures are the special executors of the wrath, and also the agents of the deliverance of the saints from the Wrath. The Church certainly cannot be the Living Creatures nor the agent of its own deliverance.

The Living Creatures show, in their relations to the Four Seals, that they dominate and direct for Christ the course of the world. They summon the horsemen of the four Seals and one of them gives the seven Bowls of wrath to the seven Angels. 15:7.

In the scene of the Seventh Trumpet the Living Creatures do not appear, for there the Lord is viewed as having come in wrath, and they are with the Throne and the Cloud in the execution of the judgments, but in the final rejoicings they are again beheld and for the last time, for there the proleptic announcement of his Kingdom and the Marriage Supper views the time of wrath as past, and they conclude all with a final solemn Amen. 11:16-18; Ezek. 1:1-28; 19:4-8.

In brief, the Living Creatures in cherubic forms are seen not only as having a preeminence in judicial and governmental functions, but, also, as setting forth the ideal contrasts, in reverence and righteousness with the "beasts" of the world power. "When the living creatures (zoa) appear, the beasts (theria) disappear."

In the great and complete Vision of Ezekiel they are both bearers and attendants of the Throne of judgment; in the Vision of Isaiah as the Seraphim they are seen in the aspect of worship; in the Vision of John all these relations and aspects appear united. They evidently represent in the highest, holiest, fullest

form of creature-hood, governmental wisdom, executive power and holiest worship. With deepest insight and consciousness of the holiness of God and of the lowliness of the creature, and of the glory of God as the chief end of creation and of redemption and universal rule, they lead elders and angels and all creatures in the worship of him that sitteth on the throne and of the Lamb that was slain. They worship, they stand and wait, they serve. They begin the worship and their Amen closes it. 5:14; 19:4.

In a word, these Living Ones existed, and as not fallen or needing redemption, ages before the Church began.

On the other hand, as to the Elders and their identification with the Church, a few adverse observations can be made.

1. It is clear from the teaching in the epistles to the Thessalonians that at the time our Lord comes to raise the dead and change the living he is on his way to the earth, and the saints are caught up to meet him in the air. He descends from, heaven, he is on his way to destroy the "man of sin" and his adherents, but first rescues the saints from the wrath to come. In brief, there is not a hint that our Lord returns with the saints to heaven to be with him before he opens the Seals. Such alleged Advent and return to heaven before the wrath is poured out plainly contradicts the opening Visions of the Apocalypse, but all is made consistent and harmonious with the preparatory scenes of the Vision of the Throne and the sealed Book by the great announcement that the Lord God is yet to come and to execute judgment upon the ungodly.

Resurrection is inseparable from the Coming, but the two events are not conjoined until the sounding of the Seventh Trumpet; and that certainly is sometime after the first vision. It is significant that at the time of his sounding of this Trumpet the words "who is to come" are omitted from the holy ascription heard in the first Vision. 4:8. The Parousia is viewed as having taken place at the Seventh Trumpet for the resurrection and deliverance of the saints, and for the subsequent destruction of the wicked. 11:15-18.

2. Much stress in favour of the ' theory considered has been laid on the words "us" and "we" in the song the Elders sing when the Lamb has taken the Book, but the word "us" is omitted by many authorities; and also by writers who teach the saints will be in heaven before any trumpet is blown. Besides, in such song the Living Creatures have part, but as already noted it cannot be of their redemption they sing, for they are sinless beings who never fell. And again, the Elders discriminate themselves from the redeemed in that they are seen bearing "golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints;" they rejoice, too, that such redeemed men are to be a "kingdom of priests" and to reign over the earth. 5:9-10.

3. In a kindred theory the apostle himself, the Seer, is made to represent the Church as taken up into heaven before the Seals are opened, but John is seen in later Visions on earth again. Besides, John and the Elder in the Vision of those who come out of the great Tribulation cannot both be the Church; and the Elder is in heaven before John is called up. Ch. 7.

4. Neither can the 144,000, called "the first fruits unto God and unto the Lamb," be one with the Elders, for they are seen singing "before the Living Creatures and the Elders." 14:1-5.

5. "The Elders and the Living Creatures" are to be distinguished also from "the great multitude in heaven" in the two final Hallelis which have in view the throne and the Kingdom. 19:1-8. In all the Visions the Elders and not the Creatures are seated on thrones around the Throne of God. They are like honoured courtiers of a prince, and not his servitors; they adore, they pray, they give thanks, they behold and rejoice in his glory. "And his glory shall be before his ancients" (elders). Is. 24:21-23.

In brief, both the Living Creatures and the Elders existed before the Church. They as heads and leaders of the universal intimate worship may picture what the Church as the Body of Christ in the place and dignity of the first born among the Sons of God, will be, when the Lord Jesus is made manifest as the Head in whom are summed up all things in the heaven and upon the earth. Doubtless in vision David was shown these "pat terns" of the twenty-four courses of priests he was told to institute and as "patterns" of persons existing in heaven long before these Visions of John. I Chr. 24:1-9; 28:19.

But in no wise do the Elders furnish proof that the Church was removed from earth before the Lord descended from heaven "with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God," making the destruction of the Beast and the false Prophet the final objective point.

Progression

THE SIX SEAL. Chapter 6:1-17.

1 And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, Come. 2 And I saw and behold, a white horse, and he that sat thereon had a bow; and there was given unto him a crown: and he came forth conquering, and to conquer. 3 And when he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying Come. 4 And other horse came forth, a red horse: and to him that sat thereon it was given to take peace from the earth, and that they should slay one another: and there was given unto him a great sword. 5 And when he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, Come. And I saw, and behold, a black horse: and he that sat thereon had a balance in his hand. 6 And I heard as it were a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, A measure of Wheat for a shilling, and three measures of barley for a shilling; and the oil and the wine hurt thou not. 7 And when he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, Come. 8 And I saw, and behold, a pale horse: and he that sat upon him, his name was Death; and Hades followed with him. And there was given unto them authority over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine, and with death, and by the wild beasts of the earth. 9 And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of them that had been slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: 10 and they cried with a great voice, saying, Now long, O Master, the holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? 11 And there was given them to each one a white robe; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little time, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, who should be killed even as they were, should have fulfilled their course. 12 And I saw when he opened the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became as black as sackcloth of hair, and the whole moon became as blood; IS and the stars of the heaven fell unto the earth, as a fig easteth her unripe figs when she is shaken of a great wind. 14 And the heaven was removed as a scroll when it is rolled up; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. 15 And the kings of the earth, and the princes, and the chief captains, and the rich, and the strong, and every bondman and freeman, hid them selves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains; 16 and they say to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:17 for the great day of their wrath is come; and who is able to stand?

The visions which follow the opening of the seven seals depict the various events which precede the Appearing of Christ and by which he will prepare for the establishment of his glorious kingdom. His people are warned that such judgments will visit the earth in the present age and will be ended only by his return.

The white horse of the first Seal pictures Peace, which is taken away by War which follows under the second Seal. The third is a vision of Famine, the fourth of Death under four of its most fearful and familiar forms. The Vision under the fifth Seal is that of Martyrdom, the sixth gives a vision of those "Signs" whether physical or political, which immediately precede the appearing of Christ.

Some interpreters identify Christ, or his cause, with the White Horse of the first Seal. But the preceding verse pictures Christ as enthroned in heaven and opening in succession each of the Seals, which unfold visions of events transpiring upon earth.

As previously observed when one "and I saw" introduces a very brief statement of an object, person, or act, it intimates something worthy of greatest and exclusive attention and consideration. This is the case of the Vision wherein the Lamb is seen opening the first Seal. Vs. 1.

This supreme act, as well as the formal phrase limiting its application to that act, should utterly exclude the thought that Christ is the rider of the white horse in the next Vision. Vs. 2. To open the Seals is to be entrusted with the judgment and governance of the world; he is the Sender, not one of the Sent. 6:1-2.

Moreover, the first rider and horse are brought to view by an "and I saw" distinct from that which introduced the Opener of all the Seals, and it is made to apply also to the two horses, the white and the red together, whereas for the other two horses the phrase is used separately. This is most suggestive; it implies that the white and the red thus viewed in one vision are related to each other as peace and war, for if the red, as it does, represents a time of war and bloodshed, so the white is the emblem of a wide extended victorious peace. And this fact utterly excludes the thought that the rider on the white horse is Christ. All this is in accord with the self interpreting symbolic horses and colours in the visions of an earlier prophet. Zechariah 6:3-4.

He beheld red and black horses precede white; that is, when the judgments of "the Lord of all the earth" had done their work "in the north country" then peace followed there, and his "spirit was quieted" there. Zech. 1:7-11; 6:1-8.

John, on the other hand, saw a white horse followed by red; That is, afar reaching peace is "taken from the earth" by a great war; to the rider upon the red horse "was given a great sword."

It is evident from the Visions of these two seers that the horses and chariots of the one, and the horses and riders of the other in their forthcomings and ongoings symbolize divine providences and judicial dispensations; which affect the nations for weal or woe. The order of the first four events is that of human history in every age. The colour is the symbol of the character of the dispensation. And they are all under the ordering of the Lord Jesus to fulfill the purpose of God concerning his people and his kingdom. In view of all this, the Opener of these Seals should never be confounded with the rider on the white horse, that is, with a mere agency or instrument or dispensation of the divine will.

The rider upon a white horse in a later vision of the Wine press of Harmegeidon is expressly said to be the Lord Christ, "the Word of God," "King of kings and Lord of lords," and is seen issuing forth not as one of earth, like these four horses and riders, but out of the opened heaven, and even then is not seen as the Prince of Peace, but rather as the smiter of the guilty nations. 19:11-16; Ps. 2:1-10.

As already intimated, each of the last two horses (famine and pestilence), is introduced by an "And I saw;" likewise the Fifth Seal (the Martyr Seal), and the Sixth Seal (the Sign Time); but no "And I saw" introduces

the Seventh Seal (the Consummation Time), for its contents were not then to be seen, these being not the Trumpets which immediately follow, but the Seven Vials, the Seven last plagues, subsequent to these Trumpets. The "silence in heaven" during this Seventh Seal is not premonitory to the Trumpets but is fulfilled at the seventh trump and the Seven Vials, just as in the Old Testament predictions of great national crises of Israel an ominous silence precedes the final judgments of Jehovah, and such the Seven Vials are. 8:1; Hab. 2:20; Zeph. 1:7; Zech. 2:13.

Also the first four Seals are preparatory, and cannot be contemporary with and parallel to the Trumpets: because the first four Seals affect the "fourth part of the earth," the four Trumpets the "third part" of the earth, and also a third part of the sea, rivers and luminaries, while the inflictions of the Vials are total and final 6:8; 8:7-12; 10:2-8.

None of these can be parallel. In the nature of the case, the seven Vials which form the "third woe," or seventh Trumpet, cannot be assigned to the time of the first and second Woes, the fifth and sixth Trumpets; each Woe has its own time. 9:12; 11:14.

### The Episode or Interlude

#### THE SEALED AND THE SAVED. Chapter. 7:1-17.

1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that no wind should blow on the earth, or on the sea, or upon any tree. 2 And I saw another angel ascend from the sun rising, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a great voice to the four angels to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, 3 saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we shall have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads. 4 And I heard the number Of them that were sealed, a hundred and forty and four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the children of Israel: 5 Of the tribe of Judah were sealed twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand; 6 Of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand; 7 Of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand; 8 Of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand. 9 After these things I saw, and behold, a great multitude, which no man could number, out of every nation and of all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, arrayed in white robes, and palms in their hands; 10 and they cry with a great voice, saying, Salvation unto our God who sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels were standing round about the throne, and about the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, 12 saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen. 13 And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, These that are arrayed in the white robes, who are they, and whence came they? 14 And I say unto him, My lord, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they that come out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the 'Lamb. 15 Therefore are they before the throne of God; and they serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall spread his tabernacle over them. 16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun strike upon them, nor any heat: 17 for the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.

In each one of the central sections of the Book, the dramatic movement is interrupted by the introduction of an Episode or Interlude. This is evidently so in the case of the Seals, Trumpets and Vials. These interludes are usually designed to comfort the people of God by the assurance that however terrible their tribulation may be, or however severe the judgments of God upon his enemies, his people, whether on earth or in heaven, are safe in his keeping and his care.

Thus here, between the sixth and seventh Seals comes an Episode concerning the "sealed" of Israel and the "saved" out of all nations. Both companies are thus shown to have been rescued from the wrath of the "day of the Lord" which was heralded by the signs of the sixth Seal which "immediately" follow the great Tribulation of the fifth Seal. Matt. 24:29.

These Episodes in the apocalyptic Visions are both retrospective and prospective. In this one, the Tribulation mentioned goes back in time to the fifth Seal and to its second part, to the predicted complement of martyrs. It also, as to the order of Visions, anticipates the fifth Trumpet, for in it the "sealed" are expressly mentioned, and the Tribulation comes under the fifth and sixth Trumpets. There is often in these Visions a recurrence to the great Tribulation for it is the central and most momentous theme of the Book.

It should also be noted that as the "sealing" of the 144,000 takes place before the plagues of the four Trumpets, they survive both them and the "two woes" where the "sealed" appear. 9:4.

An objection to the view that the Church will be in the "Great Tribulation" is found by some in that John does not know who the innumerable multitude are. 7:13-14.

It may be enough to say that Daniel speaks of "saints" who were of his own people in the same strange and distant manner.

In all apocalyptic Visions the Seer beholds all scenes and agents as altogether objective to himself and as requiring' explanation. John is no exception to this rule when "in the Spirit." Unless the contrary can be proved, it is a fair inference from many facts that by the "saints" seen as future by Daniel and by John are meant "the Church" which consists of Jews and Gen tiles. The apostle Peter in his reference to the prophets and the sufferings of saints evidently views the latter as of Israel both of Daniel's day and of his own. Daniel beheld Jewish saints in the "great Tribulation," and Peter echoing Daniel's language speaks of a salvation in a "last season" of saints of the Dispersion who are in manifold trials. I Pet. 1:5.

The saints represented here by the 144,000 who are "sealed," as well as the Great Multitude who stand before the throne, have been on earth during the Great Tribulation but they have been delivered from the "vials" which represent the final judgments of God upon the earth.

Some have conjectured that the Great Multitude and the Servants of God who are "sealed" both represent the blessedness and safety of the Church on earth during times of persecution. It is probably better to suppose that the second Vision of this Episode represents the saints in glory. They "have come out of The Great Tribulation and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." "They shall hunger no more neither thirst any more . . . and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

Consummation

THE SEVENTH SEAL. Chapter. 8:1.

1 And when he opened the seventh seal, there followed a silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.

The opening of the seventh Seal is followed by "silence in heaven about the space of half an hour." "One half" indicates an interruption in the course of events. The contents of the seventh Seal are not revealed. There is a pause. The Trumpets which sound call attention to events which are to occur before the seventh Seal is opened. The literary method of the Revelation is that of climactic review.

The opening of the seventh Seal brings us to the very end and goal of all the dramatic movement, namely the coming of Christ; but just before Christ appears, there is a pause. The writer goes back to dwell more in detail upon the events which belong to the earlier Seals, at least to the fifth and sixth. Therefore the events of five Seals precede the Seven Trumpets; those of the last two Seals are parallel with those of the Trumpets, and together reach the very end of the age.

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