

lesson five

JANUARY 26–FEBRUARY 1

The Seven Seals

“You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for you were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:9, 10, NKJV).



Just as an unbroken window reflects almost perfectly the scene outside, so we should be mirroring Christ to all we come into contact with.

Deut. 32:43;
Matt. 24:3–14;
Heb. 12:1, 2

Introduction

“Lift Up Your Heads, Redemption Draweth Nigh”

I have never run a marathon, and the thought of it is daunting. Were I to attempt a marathon today, I am almost certain that I would be unable to finish the 26.2 miles. I can almost hear my legs and muscles screaming, “We didn’t train for this!” or “How much longer?” Yet I have confidence that with training and preparation, running a marathon is a goal that I could someday accomplish. Avid runners are well aware of the training and dedication that goes into preparing for a marathon. And just as runners need to prepare physically and mentally for marathons, Christians need to train and prepare daily in order to finish the spiritual race.

Like a marathon, our spiritual race and nearing the end can be scary, difficult, and painful.

Runners may face dehydration, pain, exhaustion, and changes in body temperature, particularly near the end of the race. Likewise, in our spiritual race, we too may face periods of pain and exhaustion and may draw courage from the fact that the race will soon end. There have been “wars and rumors of wars”; “nation[s] [have risen] against nation[s], and kingdom against kingdom”; and there are “famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in various places” (Matt. 24:6, 7, NKJV). Jesus also tells us that we will be hated and possibly killed for His name’s sake (Matt. 24:9). These signs give us hope that Jesus is soon to return. Like a marathon, our spiritual race and nearing the end can be scary, difficult, and painful. But Jesus tells us to “rejoice, you nations, with his people, for he will avenge the blood of his servants; he will take vengeance on his enemies and make atonement for his land and people” (Deut. 32:43, NIV).

As the world’s history comes to an end, let us hold fast to the promises of Jesus, our Conqueror, Redeemer, and Friend. As we wait, “let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:1, 2, NKJV). As the song goes:

Signs of the times are everywhere.
There’s a brand new feeling in the air.
Keep your eyes upon the eastern sky,
Lift up your heads, redemption draweth nigh!

REACT

What strategies do you use when you feel nervous or anxious? Could these help when you feel worried or scared about the end times?

1. Gordon Jensen, “Redemption Draweth Nigh,” copyright © 1970 by Silverline Music, Inc. Assigned to Goldline Music, Inc., 1971.

Logos

Watch the Throne

Lev. 26:21–26;
Zech. 1:8–17;
Gal. 3:13;
Rev. 5:1–10; 6:1–17

Jesus Is King (Rev. 5:1–10)

It may come as a surprise that Jesus, who is God, actually gained authority after the Resurrection, becoming the King of this world. Right before He went to the cross He said, “Now the prince of this world will be driven out” (John 12:31, NIV). After the Resurrection, Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matt. 28:18, NIV). When God created the earth, He gave its authority to Adam, but when Adam sinned, that authority was transferred to Satan, who has held the whole world under his rule of sin and death (Luke 4:6). Jesus, who never sinned and was resurrected from the dead, conquered Satan and took back the authority that Adam lost.

Thanks to Revelation we can see what happened when He took His throne in heaven and what has been happening since.

Were it not for the book of Revelation, the last time we would see Jesus would be in the book of Acts when He was taken up into heaven. Thanks to Revelation we can see what happened when He took His throne in heaven and what has been happening since. Revelation 5 records the wondrous events taking place in heaven when Jesus is given authority and power after the Resurrection. Jesus, who lived as a tempted human being and can relate to the human experience of death, is now uniquely qualified to be our Judge; because of His qualification and authority, Revelation says that He was found worthy to “take the scroll and to open its seals” (Rev. 5:9, NIV).

Jesus Is a Man of Action (1 Kings 16:11; Acts 1; 2)

What is this mysterious scroll with its seals that Jesus opens? One thing we know is that Jesus begins to open the scroll’s seals immediately after His resurrection when He sits down on His throne as King. When we look at the Old Testament, we see that the moment a king took the throne, he began to execute judgment. This was a time to take action and exercise his newly given authority. One example is in 1 Kings 16:11: “As soon as he began to reign and was seated on the throne, he killed off Baasha’s whole family” (NIV). Similar instances are repeated throughout the history of the kings of Israel and Judah in the Old Testament, so it should come as no surprise that Jesus takes immediate action upon receiving His new role as King of this world. Upon coronation, Jesus sends the Holy Spirit and works for the salvation of humanity in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1; 2).

Jesus Is Judge (Lev. 26:21–26; Isa. 10:5, 6; Rev. 6:1–8)

Judgment comes first to the house of God (1 Pet. 4:17). When we look at what happens on earth as Jesus opens the first four seals, we see language that calls to mind the judgments that would come upon the people of God if they were unfaithful to His covenant. The white horse of the first seal represents the success of the gospel during the apostolic movement, but progressively declines through the subsequent seals.

The covenant curses are spelled out in Leviticus 26:21–26. Here we see that if God’s people were unfaithful to Him, they would suffer from famine, sword, plagues, and wild beasts. These are the very same afflictions that occurred on earth when Jesus opened the first four seals in heaven. God has a hedge of protection around His children, but we see in Scripture that when the children of Israel went astray, God would remove this protection and allow other nations to afflict them in order to lead them to repentance and faith (Lev. 26:23).

Jesus Is an Avenger (Zech. 1:15; Rev. 6:9–11)

Another common scenario we see in the Old Testament is that once the nations God has used to bring judgment on His people have overstepped their bounds, God judges those same nations for being too violent or oppressive: “ ‘And I am very angry with the nations that feel secure. I was only a little angry, but they went too far with the punishment’ ” (Zech. 1:15, NIV). In the opening of the fifth seal, Revelation 6:10 records the cry of martyrs asking, “ ‘How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?’ ” (NIV). God’s martyrs call for justice for how they have been brutalized, just as Abel’s blood figuratively cried from the ground. The time has come for God to vindicate His people through the judgment. The white robes reveal what their verdicts are. Ultimately, the sixth seal then records God’s judgment of the nations and the second coming of Christ.

Jesus Is Savior (Rom. 8:37; Gal. 3:13)

Jesus Christ is uniquely fit to be Judge because He has taken on all of the curses that God said would befall those who break His law. Jesus not only took our curse but was tempted and overcame, even overcoming the grave. Because of this, He can relate intimately with our pains while giving us power to overcome. Jesus promised that those who overcome as He overcame will sit on His throne with Him. So we can look at every trial as an opportunity for God to make us an overcomer and fit us for the throne!

REACT

1. Can you think of a trial that you have faced lately? How can God use it to make you an overcomer in the same way that Jesus overcame?
2. What is something Jesus overcame that inspires you?
3. What are sources of encouragement that we can draw on from seeing that Jesus is calling His people to repentance through the trials they face?
4. What are some of the curses that Jesus took on our behalf as recorded in Leviticus 26:21–26?

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Testimony

The Slain Lamb of End Times

Rev. 6:1–8;
Lev. 26:21–26;
Matt. 24:1–14

John responded with a great sobbing when he realized there was no one worthy of opening and reading the scroll. Consider how different our view of life would be had the scroll not been opened to unveil prophecy of the future.

John looked in the middle of the throne where the elders stood, and a Lamb that was slain took the scroll. The Lamb represents Jesus, who came to take away our sins (John 1:29). Says the revelator, “Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, ‘Come and see.’ And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer” (Rev. 6:1, 2, NKJV). The whiteness of the horse demonstrates the purity of faith during the first centuries of the church. The crown given to the rider, going forth and conquering with eagerness and success with truth, represents what the earliest ministers experienced. The rider upon the horse took the gospel to all the world.¹

**“God calls for men who will prepare a people
to stand in the great day of the Lord.”**

Jesus foretold that there would be “wars and rumors of wars” and “earthquakes in various places,” and that “all these are the beginning of sorrows.” The whole world will be reached with the gospel, “and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:6–14). “In this age, just prior to the second coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven, such a work as that of John [the Baptist] is to be done. God calls for men who will prepare a people to stand in the great day of the Lord. . . .

“In order to give such a message as John gave, we must have a spiritual experience like his. The same work must be wrought in us. We must behold God, and in beholding Him lose sight of self.”²

REACT

1. Why was John distraught about no one being able, initially, to open the scrolls?
2. What happens when you knowingly walk contrary to God?
3. What signs will occur as the end draws near?

1. Uriah Smith, *Daniel and the Revelation* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1897), p. 432.

2. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, pp. 332, 333.

Rev. 6:1-8

Evidence

We Already Know How This Story Ends

When John wrote Revelation, it was a tumultuous time for the early church as Rome was beginning to demand that citizens worship the emperor. Disobedience to this new rule led to John being exiled on the island of Patmos, where he received the visions we read about today (Rev. 1:9). These revelations were a message that may have seemed like a mystical tale of fiction to some readers at the time. In fact today, movies, television shows, and books have been made about the apocalypse, glorifying destruction, death, and chaos. But is that what the book of Revelation is truly about?

Is that what the book of Revelation is truly about?

In modern English the word *apocalypse* has come to mean “the complete destruction of the world.” However, the word *apocalypse* means something else; from Greek, *apocalypse* translates to “uncover” or “reveal.” While we often read this text in the context of preparation for the future final days, the four horsemen of the Apocalypse also provide us with a glimpse of God’s character to help us keep the faith as the end draws near.

Revelation 6 discusses the six seals, sharing the events of the end days. Although we often focus on the events of each seal, there is a crucial piece of evidence in the very first line. Revelation 6:1 opens with “As I watched, the Lamb broke the first of the seven seals on the scroll” (NLT). Before we even get to the descriptions of horsemen and the deception, war, famine, and pestilence they bring, we see another character, the Individual who breaks the seals, who allows all of the impending action to happen. That person is the Lamb, Jesus Christ.

Reading about the end times can often feel confusing. However, we should not be overwhelmed but encouraged that Jesus will soon return. We should never forget that there is an ongoing spiritual battle that we cannot see (Eph. 6:12). While the four horsemen of the Apocalypse give us a glimpse of the end, we can be comforted in knowing that the final battle has already been won.

REACT

1. Color symbolism is often used in the Bible to deepen our understanding (cf. Ps. 51:7; Isa. 1:18; Jer. 14:2; Dan. 11:35; Matt. 17:2). How does the use of color deepen our understanding of Revelation 6:1–8?

2. List the symbols in today’s passage. Where else in the Bible are these symbols and images used? Using this context, think about why each specific symbol was used. What does its inclusion teach us about God’s character?

How-to *Reality Is Better*

Rev. 6:12

Hollywood has been known to take artistic license when telling Bible stories, rendering them without respect to the greater context of salvation. Chapter six of Revelation in particular has suffered from this unfortunate re-interpretation. You could imagine what most people would say if you asked them what they thought the four horsemen of the Apocalypse represented. Perhaps that they bring destruction and ruin so that a shadowy figure can take over the world. But we know better than to give our own private interpretations. Here are a few lessons that we can take from the biblical understanding of the four horsemen and the rest of the seals.

We know better than to give our own private interpretations.

Peace. Rather than being influenced by the world's anxiety-ridden interpretations of Scripture, we can rejoice and have peace. Instead of villainous henchmen, the horsemen of Revelation 6:1–8 represent the goodness of the gospel being proclaimed. God is not in the business of fearmongering. Each seal opened is an invitation. The Lamb's scroll, the living will of Jesus, reveals Christ's inheritance, His people, a restored body that He calls us to be a part of. We can have peace knowing that we are in the body of Christ.

Courage. The horsemen represent the diverse conditions under which the gospel is going forward, be it during times of prosperity and rapid multiplication or times of persecution, famine, and threat of death. We can know that God will be with those who faithfully spread the gospel regardless of the circumstances.

Hope. Just like the servants of God in verses 9 and 10, we too may wonder how long until God intervenes, but we don't have to lose hope. We can know that God delays His coming because somewhere out there is another soul who would say yes to the salvation that Jesus brings, if only His people would present it to them. God knows there are more out there waiting for us to tell them about Jesus. Let us bring them hope and strengthen our own in the process.

As we approach the final movements of this world's history in the sixth seal, we must hold on to the faith that Jesus gives. Even when there is "a great shaking" and some of the stars of heaven—those in the church—fall away, we can still know God stands with us.

REACT

1. Have you ever met someone who was frightened by the prophetic language of the Bible? What would you say to them now?
2. How does the gospel personally bring you peace, courage, and hope?

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Rev. 5:1–10

Opinion*The Lion and the Lamb*

In Christian circles, we often focus on the fact that Jesus conquered the grave in His capacity as the Son of God. We talk about the power of God being the only means by which Jesus could have resurrected from the grave. That, of course, is not an erroneous point of view. None but God could defy the laws of death. However, there is a tenet of the resurrection story that we do not linger on enough—the scars of Christ and their implications.

We are drawn to Christ because this power climaxed in vulnerability.

In Revelation 5, John talks about being distressed because no one could open the book with seven seals. As he is weeping, one of the elders comes and comforts him by letting him know that there is, indeed, Someone worthy to open the book. In this passage, Jesus is described as the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Lamb that was slain. At first it seems as if the apostle is insinuating that Jesus' victory and credibility come as the Lion of Judah. However, when reading verses 9 and 10, Jesus' authority to open the book is as the Lamb that was slain. In other words, Jesus won with His scars.

Jesus is worthy to open the book because He was “slain, and purchased for God with [His] blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9, NASB). Jesus' credibility is a result of His vulnerability. The power of God was needed to raise Jesus from the dead; however, we are drawn to Christ because this power climaxed in vulnerability. Through His death, He embodied what He taught His disciples to do—“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them. . . . It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant” (Matt. 20:25, 26, NASB).

Our hearts are not drawn to Christ because He was perfect; our hearts are drawn to Him because He made Himself vulnerable. No one wants a perfect friend who cannot offer an ounce of vulnerability. Thus, the Lamb that was slain rose with His scars as part of His victory. Jesus teaches us sympathy and empathy. Our best witness is our testimony. People are not enticed by our rhetoric until they know that we have walked where they are now walking. Our scars are not a source of shame; as with the Redeemer of humanity, our scars prove us worthy.

REACT

What kind of encouragement have the scars of Christ provided in your walk with Him?

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Exploration “The Seals Are Now Open”

Matt. 24:14

CONCLUDE

In Revelation 6, Jesus opens the six seals and takes us on a journey of the spread of the gospel and its reception. Seal one takes us back to when the gospel was being preached in its purest form and how the gospel spread to almost the entire world during the time of the apostle Paul. Seals two to five show how the gospel took a dark turn to governments persecuting and killing people because of the gospel, to the church taking the place of the government and killing and persecuting people in the name of the gospel, the gospel being tainted by paganism and commercialism and highlighting the martyrs who died for the gospel. Seal six brings us to the final chapters of earth's history, when signs and wonders point to the second coming of Jesus Christ. All six seals have been broken; are we ready to meet Jesus, the One who was found worthy to open them?

CONSIDER

- Listening to Joe Crews's sermon on the seven seals (<https://www.amazingfacts.org/media-library/media/e/718/f/6/t/seven-seals---part-1>).
- Making a chart highlighting the seven seals and the events in history that relate to each seal.
- Discussing with your Sabbath School class the following questions: How has the gospel become commercialized and watered down? What pagan or heathen practices have been introduced into the gospel in the twenty-first century? What can we do to ensure that we are preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and nothing else?
- Writing the quote, “If a man has not discovered something that he will die for, he isn't fit to live,” by Martin Luther King Jr. on a piece of paper or Post-it note and posting it someplace where you can reflect on it before you start and/or end your day.
- Reading *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* or researching a famous Christian martyr.
- Taking some time out of your daily prayer to pray for those who still have not heard the gospel or who have not accepted Christ as their Savior and asking God how He can use you to spread the gospel.

CONNECT

Joel 2:30, 31; Matthew 24.

Uriah Smith, *Daniel and the Revelation*, chap. 6 of *The Prophecies of the Revelation*, “The Seven Seals.”

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