

# “The Scroll and the Seven Seals, the Seven Trumpets, and the Objects of God’s Wrath”

A sermon by Pastor Steve Easterday-McPadden  
for FUMC Grand Junction, Sunday, Feb. 9, 2025

This sermon can be listened to on the FUMCGJ website: <https://www.fumcgj.org/>

Scripture for the day:

Selected verses from Revelation 4-11 [NLT]

- ✓ Online commentary – [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=1365](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1365)
- ✓ Also heavily referenced and frequently cited throughout the series is Craig R. Koester’s *Revelation and the End of All Things*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2018).

## PART I: OPENING

(\*Ppt Slide #1\*)

**Setting the Scene:** Highlights from Rev. 4 – Worship in Heaven – precede and introduce Readers Theater, which takes up the story at Rev. 5.

- ✓ The Throne Room of God, concentric rings model
  - God at the center in otherworldly majesty!
  - Next ring, the four living beings:
    - ♪ “Holy, holy, holy...”
  - Next ring, the 24 Elders:
    - “You are worthy, O Lord our God...”
- ✓ And the cycle continues...

(\*To Readers Theater and *Revelation 5:1 – 5:14* <sup>NLT</sup>\*)

## SERMON THOUGHTS

(\*Ppt Slide #2\*)

“The Lion of Judah” – a traditional symbol for power and majesty and “the Root of David” – and an expression describing the heir to David’s throne.

Surprise! The image of “The Lion of Judah” is not fulfilled in a mighty conquering hero,

(\*Ppt Slide #3\*)

as John might have expected and as the heady messianic imagination during and after Jesus’ lifetime hoped.

Rather, John sees a Lamb, having once been slaughtered but now standing closest to God in the throne room of heaven (\*Ppt Slide #4\*):

- ✓ The only living being worthy to take and unseal the scroll in the hand of God

In fact, the chapter ends with the same song that was sung to God upon the throne, “You are



worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power!” now being sung to the once-slain, now-living and victorious Lamb.

The point? Contrary to what most modern readers think, John did not write Revelation in some secret code seeking to conceal the identity of Jesus but to reveal it: “...God’s victory is won through suffering, and his triumph is achieved through sacrifice” [Craig R. Koester in *The Great Courses: Revelation and the End of All Things*, Notes/outline for Lecture 6, p. 32. Emphasis added.].

That is, “The Lamb is, indeed, as powerful as the Lion, but his power is exercised through what he suffers for the sake of others” [Ibid.] – “to ransom a people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation”! (Rev. 5:9)

HOLD THAT THOUGHT...

### A Quick Excursus: A Word About Word Pictures

The critical importance of “word pictures” that John uses as the device in apocalyptic literature is to convey his meaning, not to obscure it OR cloak it in layers of mystery for some future generation millennia removed from his own time to somehow decipher.

SERMON THOUGHTS:

### The Seven Seals and the Seven Trumpets

OK...with that in mind, let’s go back to Revelation. This second cycle continues in Chapter 6 with one of the more vivid and memorable sets of word pictures in the book of Revelation: Those associated with the breaking of the 7 Seals of the Scroll beginning with

(\*Ppt Slide #5\*)

the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. With a little creative coloring informed by the book of Revelation, Durer’s woodcut really “pops”.

(\*Ppt Slide #6\*)



These are images that are meant to disturb and threaten the listeners/readers of the book.

### Seal #1 – The First Horseman: The Conqueror

“This figure offers a disturbing reminder that a society created through conquest can be destroyed in the same way.” [Craig R. Koester in *The Great Courses: Revelation and the End of All Things*, Notes/outline for Lecture 6, p. 34.]

### Seal #2 – The Second Horseman: The Sword Brings Death and Destruction, Not Peace

“This rider challenges the prevailing attitude that the people conquered by Rome should be grateful to the Empire for ensuring peace. For John, the rhetoric of peace espoused by the Romans concealed violence that worked below the surface.” [Ibid., emphasis added]



### Seal #3 – The Third Horseman: Famine is Coming!

“The third horseman holds a pair scales, like those used in commerce. He also challenges the rhetoric of the time, which...[credited] Roman rule...[for making] life better than ever before.” [Ibid.]

### Seal #4 – The Fourth Horseman: Death

“This horseman pushes beyond threats of conquest, violence, and [economic] hardship to the power of death that threatens [all of us]...rich and poor in countless ways.” [Ibid.]

The images, these word pictures of John, get progressively more threatening as they move into the foreground of the woodcut. But their message is not in the fear they strike in the hearts of the listeners/readers. Rather, “They [are meant to] challenge the *complacency* of those who think that current social, political, and economic conditions are their best source of security [Remember Sardis and Laodicea?], for in John’s mind [and visions], they are not” [Ibid. Emphasis added.]. Allegiance to and trust in God are.

The breaking of the fifth and sixth seals builds the threatening images into a crescendo that the hearers/readers are sure will culminate in the divine retribution of destruction and disaster. But the divine retribution doesn’t come – and the cycle ends on a surprising up-note of restraint and hope.

(\*Ppt Slide #7\*)

Four angels positioned at the four corners of the earth hold back the anticipated wrath of God (per Rev. 7:1-3), and the cycle ends with these words of worship and praise:

*"Salvation comes from our God on the throne and from the Lamb!"* <sup>11</sup> *And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living beings. And they fell face down before the throne and worshiped God.* <sup>12</sup> *They said, 'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and strength belong to our God forever and forever. Amen!'"* [Rev. 7:10b-12, NLT]

(\*Ppt Slide #8\*)

And the second cycle ends and the third begins...

## PART II

By now, we’re getting used to Revelation’s cycles of threat and hope that characterize John’s writing. This third cycle of fiery threats of destruction and hope for deliverance is given in Revelation 8 and 9 and features angels blowing seven “trumpets of terror”, aptly named as the story unfolds...

(\*Cycle of 3 pairs of readings from Rev. 8:6-9:19 by Kathy Cherin and Mary Moore.\*)

For futuristic interpreters of Revelation, the sense of divine control over this series of so-called prophecies and world events is somehow supposed to provide assurance that God has a plan that is unfolding exactly as it should and that God is in control. I don’t know about you, but that’s not very assuring to me when I consider that I am as likely as not to be caught up in all of that violence, havoc, and devastation.



(\*Ppt Slide #9\*)

So I wonder, is there another way to read this – a way that is equally faith-filled, maybe even more so – that invites more serious engagement with the Biblical text? Because, after all, that's the reason we read and study Scripture in the first place and base countless worship services on it, right? To promote serious engagement with the Biblical text so that our life of faith with the living Word of God who is Christ might be deepened and our lives transformed accordingly.

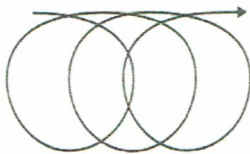
### SERMON THOUGHTS: A Literary Interpretation

Instead of this futuristic interpretive scheme that is fraught with problems, let's take the book seriously as a work of literature and see what we come up with.

#### TRUMPETS OF TERROR AND HOPE

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*Revelation 8-11*



We start by going back to earlier passages and recall that there, God is depicted as the Creator of life and the cosmos, and so God's essential identity is that of *giver of life*, not destroyer. According to the heavenly host, God and the Lamb are worthy of all praise, adoration, and thanksgiving. Kind of hard to envision God described in this way as wanting to destroy the very things He created and

loves. *No, God is on the side of life, not death. That's the first point to be made from a literary interpretation.*

And so, the question that begs to be asked is, "What, then, is to be made of the scroll, and the seals, and the trumpets, and the plagues, and the visions of devastation?" The answer is that John's Revelation is depicting what the wrath of God could look like *should it be delivered* to the earth and to humanity. *And this is the second point to be made from a literary interpretation.*

What has evoked this wrath? Well, that's not hidden from us. That's *given* to us: It's to bring about *repentance* on the part of humanity and abandonment of our evil. But to the listeners' and readers' astonishment, John writes this in Revelation 9:20-21 –

*<sup>20</sup> But the people who did not die in these plagues still refused to turn from their evil deeds. They continued to worship demons and idols made of gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood – idols that neither see nor hear nor walk! <sup>21</sup> And they did not repent of their murders or their witchcraft or their immorality or their thefts. [NLT]*

In the context of the seven churches of Asia Minor...

- ✓ There was the loss of passion for God and a loss of love for one another;
- ✓ There was the tendency to simply blend in with the culture around to avoid being alienated for their faith, and
- ✓ There was an indifferent complacency that simply couldn't be bothered with matters of injustice, poverty, division, ungodliness, and idolatry that plagued their communities.



And these things found manifestation in what John described as “evil deeds, the taking of life, witchcraft & idolatry, immorality – especially sexual immorality, and thievery” (Rev. 9:21).

Truth is, as I see it anyway, these things are as prevalent today as they were back in the late first century, which makes this a word on target for all of us today. We don’t have to guess at what the visions are prophesying; that is crystal clear: You want to see the wrath of God show up? Continue in your wicked ways – that’s the warning of this cycle of Revelation.

Those of us here in worship today can be tempted to relativize our sin as being nowhere near “as bad” as what Revelation warns of. But, I would suggest that we are just as guilty of behaviors that John would judge were he writing to Christian churches in western Colorado today instead of those of antiquity in western Turkey.

Not everyone and not all the time...but enough of us enough of the time that we can’t escape the penetrating gaze of Revelation’s warnings. But a futuristic interpretation robs it of the power to speak transformatively to us in this manner.

### THE SEVENTH TRUMPET: The Hinge Point of the Book

But wait, there’s more...What about the seventh angel and his trumpet? The final scene of devastation and destruction, right? Wrong! After all, this is Revelation. And the cycles of Revelation end in hope! Let’s let John tell the story:

*<sup>15</sup> The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."*

This is the vision of the future to which the listeners/readers of Revelation are called: a vision of celebration of the reign of God. John continues...

*<sup>16</sup> And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, <sup>17</sup> saying: "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign." – Rev. 11:15-17 [NIV]*

(\*Ppt Slide #10\*)

Revelation 11:18 presents visions of what that reign will look like, and it ends with what is ***the pivot point of the whole book***: That among the signs of God’s reign, is the time not for destroying the earth, but for destroying those who destroy the earth – and by extension, all in the created order that God holds dear, which includes us in the human family.

The key insight delivered to us by a literary interpretation of Revelation is that God is not fiendishly intent upon destroying His creation. Out of His great love for His creation, including all life, God is intent upon destroying those who wreak havoc and destruction on all He holds dear.

## WRAP UP

If we would look at Revelation as a two-act play, with this scene the curtain closes on Act I [Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2001), 41].

We will see that in Act II, the action focuses on the destruction of the destroyers of the earth. If God is the Creator and His will for the world is life, then he must defeat the destructive forces that threaten life.

And that is accomplished in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Lamb who was slain and who now lives –

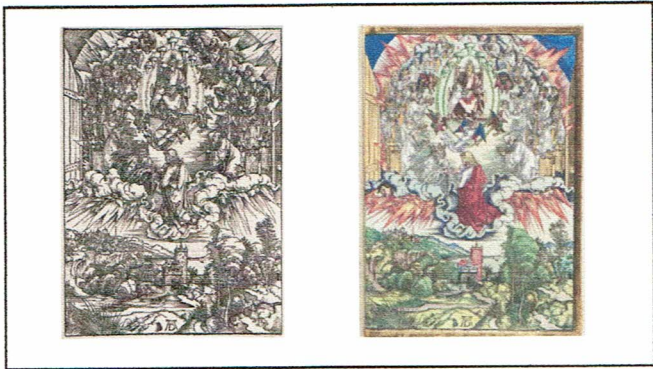
(\*Ppt Slide #11\*)

and whose living presence John of Revelation calls us with urgency to honor in every part of our lives.

Let those who have an ear to hear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches! Amen!

[This sermon is based heavily on the work of Craig R. Koester in The Great Courses: Revelation and the End of All Things, Notes/outline for Lecture 7, pp. 38-42, and on his book cited at the opening of this sermon.]





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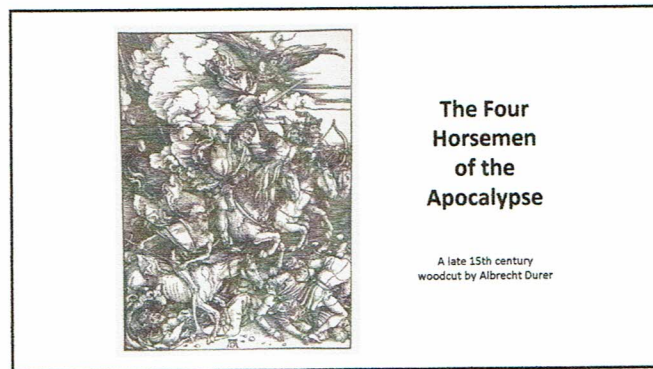
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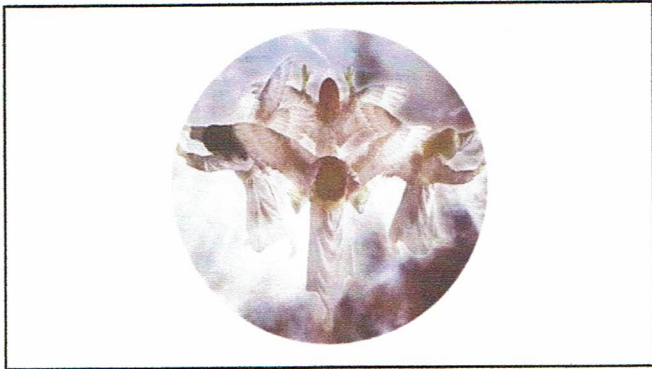
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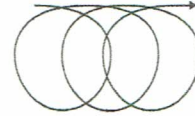
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# TRUMPETS OF TERROR AND HOPE

*Revelation 8-11*



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### The time has come:

- ❖ for judging the dead, and
- ❖ for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who revere your name, both small and great – and
- ❖ **for destroying those who destroy the earth.**

– Revelation 11:18 [NIV]

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