

The number 12 stands for the people of God, via the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles of Jesus. 144,000 probably stands for the whole people of God. Note that Judah is listed first as Jesus is the lion of Judah.

In verse 9 the 144,000 are now a great crowd that no-one can count. The palm branches remind us of Palm Sunday (John 12:13.) We are also reminded of 5:9 (every tribe and language etc.) These people join with the angels in praising God. The praise of 5:11-13, which will come from all creation, is already on their lips. These people are dressed in white robes, symbolising purity through the blood of Jesus (3:4-5, 3:18, 6:11.)

Verses 11-12 remind us of 4:11. The sufferings of Jesus and his people lead to the ultimate victory. Verse 14 says once more that victory comes from Jesus death. Compare 1:5 and 5:9. This is the seventh mention of white robes in Revelation. (see 3:4., 3:5, 4:4, 6:11, 7:9 , 7:13.)

Verses 15 to 18 describe the victory to come. The earth's population may be in dread of what will happen when the seventh seal is broken but the vast crowd see it differently. The lamb is now their shepherd. And he is on the throne. (try counting the number of times you see the word 'throne' in these chapters and Revelation so far!) He is protecting them and leading them to springs of living water (a symbol of the Holy Spirit in John's gospel.) He will wipe every tear away.

The seventh seal (8:1)

What will happen when the seals are broken? See you next time!

## Revelation 6&7: the seals

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Last time the lamb, symbolising Jesus, had the scroll with the plan of God in his hand, ready to open the seven seals that would release the plan.

This means we have to wait for the lamb to break all seven seals before God's plan is executed. It's time to learn about the state of the earth before God takes control, what will happen to the church and God's promise to his people. All the seals must be broken before we reach the destination.

This is the second sequence of seven, after the letters to the seven churches and there will be more. As usual, the idea of 'seven' is to give a complete picture of something. Each time a seal is broken we get a picture of what things will be like before God makes his move.

The message is that God will judge the world. What is wrong must and will be put right. The lamb who was slain will triumph, but first the powers of evil will do their worst, as they did to the lamb. Those who are faithful to Jesus will eventually emerge victorious, as they were promised in the second letter. The lamb, Jesus, will in the end receive what he is due, as we already read at the end of chapter 5.

## The first four seals - the four horsemen

We now come to the 'four horsemen of the apocalypse.' The word 'apocalypse' is the Greek word for 'revelation.'

God is prepared to use evil people to bring about his purposes. He does not condone what they do, but he will allow them to do their work. An example is Isaiah 7:18 when God's people refuse to listen and God 'whistles' to the Assyrians to do their worst against them.

The four living creatures each call out a coloured horse, each with a rider that represents the evil people bring on the earth. The first horse is white. This is surprising because white in Revelation is the colour of purity and victory. This horse represents empires fighting each other. Maybe the white represents the claims of the empire, not the reality.

The second horse is bright red, symbolising blood. This is out and out warfare. The word 'slay' in verse 4 is the same word that is used to describe the lamb three times in chapter five.

The third horse is black, symbolising death. This horse brings shortages, inflation and economic disaster. The reference to oil and wine may suggest that the poor will suffer most.

The fourth horse has been described as 'sickly green.' It represents death on a massive scale.

Here is a picture of human beings doing their worst, and of the world spiralling out of control. Yet the lamb who breaks the seals is the one who has already gone through the suffering and emerged victorious. There is hope.

## Seals five and six - hope and terror

As the fifth seal is broken, John sees the souls of those who have been slain (that word 'slain' again) because they have borne witness (testimony) to Jesus. This harks back to 1:2, 1:5, 2:13 and 3:14.

These people have followed Jesus all the way to death. They cry out in a loud voice to God who is holy (3:7, 4:8) and true (3:7, 3:14) to judge and avenge their blood (1:5, 5:9) This means they call on God to judge in their favour. They are told to rest; the work of the martyrs is not yet complete, but they are given a white robe symbolising purity and victory.

The sixth seal describes the earth's population being reduced to terror, from those in power to the lowest of the low. They are in dread of what the lamb will do. This is symbolised by natural disasters, which are often used in the Old Testament to symbolise what we might call 'earth-shattering events.'" See Isaiah 24:18-20 and Isaiah 34:1-4. See also Joel 2:28-32, and Malachi 3:2 for the question 'who can stand?' Wrath means 'agitation.' We wait to see how this will work out.

## Chapter 7 - the people of God.

We are waiting for the seventh seal to be broken, but we like the martyrs must be patient. Before the seventh seal is broken it's time for many more seals: God's people must be marked with God's 'seal,' to keep them from ultimate harm. (And yes, it is the same word.)