

These are interesting days in which to live. Step back for a moment and consider what's happening around the world at present. Let's focus on Asia. The following assessment comes from *Operation World* in their daily prayer guide...

Listed below is a selection of the flash points of Asia that will impinge on global politics, tax the skills of world leaders, provide the stage on which the Church must perform and affect the strategies used to further world evangelization.

**1 China's re-emergence as a superpower** after 7 centuries of eclipse is possibly THE major global political factor in the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Its Marxist political structure, increasingly capitalist economy and potentially expansionist nationalism all combine to make for regional instability for Taiwan and the nations ringing the South China Sea. There are likely to be difficulties with Japan, Korea and the USA and also pressures on under-populated and under-developed Russian Siberia. Tibetan nationalism and Xinjiang's desired independence remain unresolved internal issues for China.

**2 The unresolved conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.** The breakdown of all international efforts to broker a viable peace deal foundered in 2001 on the deep differences between the claimants on the land and Jerusalem itself. A resolution is unlikely and future war, humanly speaking, is inevitable and likely to be very destructive. All sides have fearsome arsenals of weapons of mass destruction.

**3 The agony of Afghanistan** with decades of invasion and wars. It is now largely ruled by one of the most extreme Islamist movements in the world, the Taliban, which exports revolutionaries and drugs to many surrounding nations. Afghanistan has been diplomatically ostracized.

**4 Kashmir** is the focal point of the half-century stand-off between India and Pakistan. It has contributed to three wars and a nuclear arms race between the two nations.

**5 The Korean Peninsula** has remained one of the world's most dangerous flash points since the Korean War ceasefire in 1951. Pray for an end to the sufferings of North Koreans and a wisely managed eventual re-unification of Korea.

**6 The possible disintegration of Indonesia** in the face of its ethnic and geographical diversity. The complex interplay of weak democratic government, powerful vested interests, Islamic extremism and ethnic resentments have eroded the links that held the country together. Indonesia could become a tragic global nightmare.

**7 The deep mistrust between the Persian Shi'a Muslim and the Arab Sunni Muslim worlds.** The 7 year war between Iran and Iraq in the 1980s was a chapter in the centuries-old conflict.

**8 The festering problem of 27 million nation-less Kurds** directly impacts the lands where they form a large, rebellious minority — Turkey, Iraq and Iran as well as 32 other countries where they live.[\[1\]](#)

Those are certainly causes for concern for anyone living on the planet in 2010. They would be causes for petrifying fear perhaps if we didn't know the end of the story. In the Word of God, that's precisely what we have in the book of Revelation. So where is this world heading?

*Review:* Last week we began to examine the seven seal judgments in the book of Revelation. We worked our way through Revelation 6 and saw the following...

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The Judgment Begins--the Seals:

**I. John saw the Lamb open the first six seals (6:1-17).**

A. The First Seal (6:1-2)

1. John heard one of the four living creatures say, "Come!"
2. John saw a white horse.
  - a. The rider held a bow.
  - b. The rider was given a crown.
  - c. The rider was a conqueror.

B. The Second Seal (6:3-4)

1. John heard the second living creature say, "Come!"

2. John saw a fiery red horse.
  - a. The rider was given power to take peace from the earth.
  - b. The rider could make men slay each other.
  - c. The rider was given a large sword.

C. The Third Seal (6:5-6)

1. John heard the third living creature say, "Come!"
2. John saw a black horse.
  - a. The rider held a pair of scales.
  - b. A voice said, "A quart of wheat for a day's wages..."

D. The Fourth Seal (6:7-8)

Notice the repeated phrase, "When the Lamb opened." The seal judgments are the activity of the Lamb.

1. John heard the fourth living creature say, "Come!"
2. John saw a pale horse.
  - a. The rider's name was Death.
  - b. Hades was following close behind him.
  - c. They were given power to kill a fourth of the earth.

Summary of first four seals: The first four seals go together, each using the symbolism of a horse. The fifth seal utilizes a different image.

E. The Fifth Seal (6:9-11)

1. John saw the souls of those who had been slain.
2. John heard them ask, "How long?"
3. John observed the response.
  - a. Each was given a white robe.
  - b. They were told to wait a little longer.

F. The Sixth Seal (6:12-17)

1. John observed a series of catastrophic events (12-14).
  - a. There was a great earthquake.
  - b. The sun turned black.
  - c. The moon turned blood red.
  - d. The stars fell to earth.
  - e. The sky receded like a scroll.
  - f. Every mountain and island was removed.

Note: Joel 2:31 said this would happen before the "coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD."

Note: In Mark 13:24-26 Jesus said these events would occur prior to the His return.

2. John saw the reaction of people (15-17).
  - a. They called to the mountains and rocks.

- "Hide us from the One on the throne."
- "Hide us from the wrath of the Lamb."

- b. They did *not* call to the Lord.

New Material...

Now let's walk through chapter 7 and the first part of chapter 8.

**II. John saw a parenthesis of events before the final seal (7:1-17).**

Notice the transition indicators in the flow of the narrative (7:1 "After this I saw," 7:9 "After this I looked," 7:13 "Then one of the elders"). John breaks the flow of the seal judgments to inform us of some other things he saw. He will do the same thing in the trumpet sequence later (10:1-11:13).

A. He saw angels (1-8).

Q: What were they doing?

1. Four angels held back four winds (1).

2. Another angel brought the seal of God (2).

a. He told the four angels not to harm the earth until the servants of God were sealed (3).

Q: Why were they to wait? The sealing seems to be to protect God's people from the coming judgments.

b. John heard the number of the sealed servants: 144,000 (4-8).

Key: Think about what this meant to the apostle John. He was a Jew. There hadn't been twelve tribes of Jews for over eight centuries (since 722 B.C.). He's living around A.D. 95. The Jewish temple where he'd once worshiped was destroyed 25 years earlier. The church is now 60 years old, and it's predominantly a Gentile church (with a Jewish remnant).

He must have wondered, "What about the promise Jesus made to the disciples just before returning to heaven as recorded in Acts 1:6--'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?'" Now John hears about 144,000 that God has sealed "from all the tribes of Israel" (4). This must have encouraged John! But the plan of God is no longer limited to Israel. Notice who John sees next...

B. He saw a great multitude (9-10).

Q: What's true of this multitude?

1. There were too many to count.

2. They were from every nation, tribe, people, and language.

Q: What does this indicate about God's plan? No hint of racism in that day!

3. They were standing before the throne in front of the Lamb.

Q: What's significant about where they are?

4. They were wearing white robes.

5. They were holding palm branches.

Q: Who else held palm branches? Remember Palm Sunday?

6. They were crying loudly, "Salvation belongs to our God...and to the Lamb."

Key: Notice the theme of their song--salvation!

C. He saw the reaction of the angels (11-12).

Q: What did they do?

D. He conversed with one of the elders (13-17).

The elder asked a question, and then answered his own question. Why?

1. The elder clarified the identity of the great multitude (13-14).

Q: Who are they?

2. The elder specified the privileges of the great multitude (15-17).

Q: Like what?

### III. John saw the Lamb open the seventh seal (8:1-6).

A. There was silence for half an hour (1).

Q: What's true of this silence? It's the calm before the storm!

Q: What breaks the silence? Seven trumpet blasts. The seven trumpet judgments actually flow out of the seven seals, and are described in chapters 8-9.

B. John saw seven angels with seven trumpets (2).

C. John saw another angel with a golden censer (3-5).

1. He offered incense to God.

2. He hurled fire from the altar on the earth.

#### Observations:

1. *The purpose of this vision (as of the entire book) is to reveal Jesus Christ.*

Discuss: What do we learn about Jesus from the vision of the seals?

2. *We need to approach this vision from the perspective of the original recipients.*

In our day God's people are taking it on the chin. All over the world there is hostility against those who identify themselves as followers of Jesus Christ. That was also the case at the close of the first century.

Discuss: What was true of the original recipients of the book of Revelation? The recipients were a late first

century church facing severe persecution.

Discuss: What would the knowledge of the coming seal judgments do for the early church? It would encourage them and bolster their faith. It would remind them that God will have the final word. It would motivate them to do evangelism and rescue those currently not right with God.

3. *This vision reminds us that the God of love is also a God of wrath.*

Think of it. The once slain Lamb is the One who will judge the world. The world will one day beg for deliverance from "the wrath of the Lamb (6:16)." The idea of a lamb showing wrath sounds strange to us.

Discuss: What's the significance of the book of Revelation using the image of the "lamb" to depict Christ as the coming Judge?

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[1] Taken from [www.operationworld.org](http://www.operationworld.org).