

## 02.02.2019 THE SEVEN SEALS

And they sang a new song saying, ***“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.” (5:9, 10)***

Our study this week is Revelation 6 – the study of the first six of the seven seals.

The main theme of this chapter is the history of the church and its response to the gospel. It covers the same time period of the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3, but with a different emphasis.

Revelation 5 describes the scene of Christ’s exaltation to the right hand of the throne of God. This also marked the Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the church to proclaim the gospel i.e. the truth about Jesus, in the power and authority of Christ.

The 7 seals sealed the written scroll of Revelation 5:1 i.e. they were on the outside of the scroll. They are not the contents of the scroll. As each seal is opened by the Lamb, John is invited to see what the spread of the gospel will be like until Christ’s return.

### **Revelation 6:1, 2: The First Seal - The Conqueror**

**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.**

This represents the period of the early apostolic church; the church militant. Christ Himself led the church (see the parallel in Revelation 19) and as the apostles preached in the power of the Spirit, the true gospel spread to the entire world.

White represents purity and righteousness (see Revelation 7:14; 19:8; Isaiah 1:18). The pure white church went out “conquering and to conquer.” During this time the Gospel spread like wild fire. Paul said that the Gospel “was preached to every creature which is under heaven” (Colossians 1:23), and his opponents said that they had, “turned the world upside down.” (Acts 17:6). The white horse is the apostolic church going forth victoriously under the banner of Prince Jesus.

### **Revelation 6: 3, 4 – Conflict on Earth**

**When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, “Come and see.” Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword.**

Red is the colour of sin (Isaiah 1:18), the dragon (Revelation 12:3) and bloodshed (2 Kings 3:22-23). When the faith and devotion of the Church became corrupted it lost the power of God to carry the Gospel forward in victory. It then began using the power of the state, uniting with the dragon (Pagan Rome in the form of the Emperor Constantine) to persecute dissenters. The phrase “kill one another” suggests internal controversy, discord and strife.

The second seal therefore, describes the consequences of rejecting the gospel. The red horse does not kill; he takes peace from the earth. This reminds us of the words of Jesus, *“Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword” Matthew 10:34*. Christ Himself does not cause conflict; He is the Prince of Peace. It is mankind’s response to the gospel that causes conflict. Those who reject the gospel persecute the followers of Christ.

### **Revelation 6:5, 6 - Scarcity on Earth**

**When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, “Come and see.”**

**So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine.”**

The black colour of the horse and its rider is a symbol of what happens when the church rejects the gospel. If white (the white horse) represents the true gospel, then black represents the absence of the gospel.

Grain, oil and wine were basic necessities of life in John’s day and usually plentiful. The fact that it needed to be measured out carefully and that it was very expensive (a denarius was a day’s wage – see Matthew 20:2) suggests scarcity due to famine (see Leviticus 26:26, Ezekiel 4:16).

Grain, wine and oil represent the Word of God, the blood of Christ and the Holy Spirit respectively. During this period of the church’s history, there was a famine of the Word of God. The Church, during this time, entered a period of great moral and doctrinal error, substituting pagan beliefs and practices for the truths of God’s Word, and merchandising the Gospel. Thus they caused a scarcity of the bread of life. The ‘balances’ also foretell this time in church history when men and women were told they could ‘buy’ salvation and forgiveness.

Nevertheless the famine is not fatal. God decreed, “*Hurt not the oil and the wine,*” which symbolize the Holy Spirit (Zechariah 4:3, 6) and the blood of Jesus (Matthew 26:26-29). Here is the goodness of God; even when there is a scarcity of His Word, the Holy Spirit is still available to remind His faithful people of the merits of Christ’s blood – salvation is still available to all who seek it.

#### **Revelation 6:7, 8 – Death on Earth**

**When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, “Come and see.” So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth.**

The colour of this pale horse is described in Greek as *chloros* – the ashen grey colour of a decomposing corpse. The rider’s name is Death and he is followed by Hades, the place of the dead. The fourth seal brings forth pestilence and death.

When there is a spiritual famine of the Word it results in spiritual death. The Church that should have been pointing the way to eternal life was instead spreading death. The spiritual famine of the dark Ages (the 3<sup>rd</sup> horse) was followed by spiritual death for nearly a thousand years.

War, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts were specifically mentioned in the Old Testament as God’s judgments on spiritual apostasy from God – see Leviticus 26:21-26. This is repeated in Deuteronomy 32:23-25. Ezekiel repeats the same judgments and calls them ‘God’s four severe judgments’ (Ezekiel 14:21). Jeremiah calls them ‘four kinds of destroyers’ (Jeremiah 15:3).

The Bible points out the good news that the power of Death and Hades during this time was limited to ‘a fourth of the earth’. Death and Hades have no power over anyone who believes in Jesus; He has the keys of Death and Hades (Revelation 1:18).

#### **Revelation 6:9-11 – The Cry of the Martyrs**

**When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.**

Here is pictured, in symbolic language, the many martyrs of all ages whose blood, like the blood of Abel (Genesis 4:8-10), cries out to God for justice and a vindication of the truths for which they died. They are given white robes. They will be vindicated because they have accepted Christ's offer of grace and have received His righteousness.

'Under the altar' is symbolic of the altar of sacrifice in the Old Testament sanctuary. God's people have sacrificed their blood rather than be unfaithful to Jesus.

*"How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"* has been the cry throughout earth's history of those who have suffered for Christ's sake. God promises that all who have suffered will be vindicated – see Deuteronomy 32:43, Psalm 79:10.

They will be vindicated when *'both (the number of) their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed'*.

In Hebrews 11:35-38 Paul describes unknown heroes of faith who had been martyred for their faith. He then affirms that every martyr will receive the promise of vindication when Christ returns to claim all His people who have been faithful to Him throughout the ages of earth's history... *'And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us'* Hebrews 11:39, 40.

### **Revelation 6:12-17 – Cosmic Signs**

**I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"**

These are literal signs which occurred at the end of great persecution of the Middle Ages (1798) and will occur again when Jesus comes the second time (this is similar to the prophecy of Christ in Matthew 24 where He foretold the signs that would accompany both the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 and His Second Coming).

On November 1, 1755, Lisbon, Portugal was the centre of a tremendous earthquake. Its effects were felt over an area of 4 million square miles. On May 19, 1780 beginning around 9:00 a.m, heavy black clouds blotted out the sun drawing the dark of night over New England. That night, when the darkness finally lessened and the moon appeared, it had the appearance of blood. November 13, 1833, brought the most extensive display of falling stars which has ever been recorded.

Jesus said that the same signs will be seen at His appearing... *"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory"* Matthew 24:29, 30.

Revelation 6:15-17 describes the scene of the Second Coming of Christ. It describes the reaction of those who have rejected the Lamb and His sacrifice for mankind. **Those who refuse His love will face His wrath; the wrath of the Lamb.**

On His way to Calvary, Jesus prophesied of those who had rejected Him, *Then they will begin 'to say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!"'* Luke 23:30

**Who is able to Stand?**

**Who will be able to stand in the great day of the wrath of the Lamb? Revelation 7:14 gives us the answer...‘the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’**

They are the sealed of God (Revelation 7:4); sealed by the Spirit who is the guarantor of our inheritance:

***In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory. Ephesians 1:13, 14***

*Who can stand before His indignation? And who can endure the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by Him. Nahum 1:6*

*“But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like launderers’ soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the LORD an offering in righteousness.” Malachi 3:2*

***The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness has seized the hypocrites:***

***“Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire?***

***Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?”***

***He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly... Your eyes will see the King in His beauty; they will see the land that is very far off...***

***Look upon Zion, the city of our appointed feasts; your eyes will see Jerusalem, a quiet home, a tabernacle that will not be taken down; not one of its stakes will ever be removed, nor will any of its cords be broken. But there the majestic LORD will be for us...For the LORD is our Judge, the LORD is our Lawgiver, the LORD is our King; He will save us... The people who dwell in it will be forgiven their iniquity. Isaiah 33:14, 17, 20, 22, 24.***

*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, no-one can be against us. Romans 8:31*

**Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. Jude 1:24, 25**

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