

## Mystery of the Sealed Book, Part 2



## Unlocking Revelation

In our previous study we learned that the sealed book of Revelation 5 contains the entire history of God's providences, the prophetic history of all nations and the church, and each person's individual history.

In this present study we will consider that portion of history brought to view as Christ opens the seals. As He does, we behold the avenging justice of the Lion for some and the mercy of the slain Lamb for others. Some are saved and some are lost.

### What Do the Four Horses Represent?

As Jesus opens the seals we encounter four horses. What do they symbolize?

First, we should understand that the Bible often represents the whole world with the number four, considering its four quarters—north, south, east and west (see Isaiah 11:12; Jeremiah 49:36; Daniel 7:2; Matthew 24:31; Mark 13:27; Revelation 7:1; 20:8). You will remember we learned in our last study that the four living creatures have charge over the four quarters of the earth. They have power to work behind the scenes in the affairs of men. It is fitting then that they introduce the four horses.

The horses are said to represent “the four spirits (or “the four winds” in the RSV) of heaven, who go out from their station before the Lord of all the earth” (Zechariah 6:5, NKJV). God says to these horses, “Go, walk to and fro throughout the earth” (Zechariah 6:7, NKJV).

- The darkening of the moon as blood.
- The falling of stars from heaven.

During His earthly ministry Jesus foretold the very same signs, which should not be surprising since it is Jesus who opens the seals in Revelation: “Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:29-30).

Because these signs take place under the sixth seal, we should look for them sometime after the dark ages of papal persecution and yet prior to the second coming of Christ. With amazing accuracy these signs did occur, in precisely the order and during the time foretold.

1. *The Great Earthquake* found its fulfillment on November 1, 1755.

Commonly called the Lisbon Earthquake because it centered in Lisbon, Portugal, this was the greatest catastrophe the world had ever seen since the flood of Noah's day. Not only was Lisbon destroyed with the loss of an estimated 60,000 to 90,000 lives, but the quake was felt by the greater portions of the continents of Europe, Africa, and even America. Two cities in Africa, 400 miles away, were leveled. A tidal wave struck the island of Barbados in the Caribbean, over 4,000 miles from Lisbon. The sea rose fifty feet above its normal level. If a modern quake of this magnitude were to occur in San Francisco, not only would Frisco be destroyed but so would Los Angeles. And the rumbling would be felt throughout America and on continents across the oceans.

2. *The Darkening of the Sun* was fulfilled on May 19, 1780. In history books it is called “The Dark Day.” R. M. Devens, in his book entitled, *Our First Century*, pp. 89-90, says this about the event: “Almost, if not altogether, alone as the mysterious and yet unexplainable phenomenon of its kind, in nature's diversified range of events, . . . stands the dark day of May 19, 1780—a most unaccountable darkening of the whole visible heavens and atmosphere in New England.” In *Noah Webster's American Dictionary of the English Language* (1882 edition), we find this entry under the *dark day*: “The true cause of this remarkable phenomenon is not known.” Since then some have suggested that the dark day can be accounted for by natural causes. But of course, God has often used the powers of nature to accomplish His purposes. The point remains that, from whatever cause, the sun was indeed darkened on May 19, 1780.

3. *The Moon Turned Blood Red* the evening of May 19, 1780, after the dark day.

4. *The Falling of the Stars* occurred on November 13, 1833. *The American Journal of Science and Arts*, 1834, records: “The morning of November 13th, 1833, was rendered memorable by an exhibition of the phenomenon called SHOOTING STARS, which was probably more extensive and magnificent than any similar one hitherto recorded. . . . Probably no celestial phenomenon has ever occurred in this country, since its first settlement, which was viewed with so much admiration and delight by

one class of spectators, or with so much astonishment and fear by another class. For some time after the occurrence, the ‘meteoric phenomenon’ was the principal topic of conversation in every circle.” Charles A. Young, a Professor of Astronomy at Princeton University says: “Probably the MOST REMARKABLE of all the meteoric showers . . . was that of the Leonids, on November 13, 1833. The number . . . was estimated as high as 2,000,000 an hour for five or six hours.”

At just the right time, when God's prophetic time-clock struck the hour, the signs of the sixth seal occurred.

### What's Next?

We are now between the thirteenth and fourteenth verses of Revelation 6. The next item on the agenda is an earthquake of even greater magnitude than the first one revealed under the sixth seal. Verse 14 says of that future quake, “every mountain and island were moved out of their places.” It seems that the signs listed in verses 12 and 13 are merciful beacons of warning for the wise. The stupendous amplitude of the earthquake in verse 14 seems to say, “It's all over.” It must be scheduled to occur sometime very near, if not just prior to, the second coming of Christ. For shortly thereafter the sixth seal portrays the terror of the unrepentant world as they witness the coming of Christ in the heavens.

The sixth seal closes with the sober question, “For the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” (verse 17). Chapter 7 is devoted to answering that question. It brings to view the 144,000 and the great multitude, which will be the subject of our next study. After the question is answered in chapter seven, the opening of the seventh seal is brought to view in Revelation 8:1.

### The Seventh Seal

“And when He had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour” (Revelation 8:1).

All the seventh seal reveals is silence in heaven. But it is not difficult to discover its meaning. The sixth seal closes with the second coming of Christ. So the silence of the seventh seal must be intended to reveal the solemnity of that glorious event. All of heaven will be emptied. Jesus proclaimed of His coming: “He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels” (Luke 9:26).

Every angel of heaven and the Father Himself will attend Jesus to earth. No wonder there is silence in heaven! Not only will the third heaven be silent, but the first heaven that belongs to earth will be silent as well. With stunned awe, every living human being will gaze in speechless wonder as the sky above is filled with the glory of Christ, His Father, and all the angels.

To some He will appear as the avenging Lion to execute justice. To others He will come as the merciful Lamb to rescue and reward His waiting followers.

May the words of Isaiah be found true for you and me in that day:

“And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation” (Isaiah 25:9).

Clearly, the four horses represent events that transpire on earth, by God's orchestration or allowance.

In Revelation 7:1-3, we see that there are four angels who hold the four winds in check until God's people are sealed. Once they are sealed, the winds will be released and great tragedy and destruction will occur on earth. The four horses in Revelation 6 and the four winds in chapter 7 represent the same thing—events of earth acted out by mankind—with one significant difference. The four horses represent events that transpire *before* human probation closes, while the four winds represent events that will transpire *after* probation closes. The four horses reveal the experience of the Christian church and the worsening circumstances that envelope the world as Satan works to crush the movement of Christ. The four winds reveal the total, unrestrained destruction that will occur after the gospel commission is completed and the Spirit of God ceases to hold the winds at bay.

### **The First Seal—the White Horse**

“And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer” (Revelation 6:1-2).

The white horse and its rider represent the early apostolic church riding forth conquering the hearts of men and women for Christ with the pure gospel truth of Christ's righteousness (see Psalm 51:7; Isaiah 1:18 on the meaning of white).

The bow in the rider's hand represents the arrows of conviction that pierced hearts as the followers of Christ preached. The hearers were made to realize their guilt as sinners and their need of the Savior. David describes the Lord's convicting influence on his heart as arrows: “For Thine arrows stick fast in me, and Thy hand presseth me sore” (Psalm 38:2).

The crown on the rider's head symbolizes the glory of the Lord radiating from His people: “In that day shall the Lord of hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of His people” (Isaiah 28:5). “Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God” (Isaiah 62:3).

The opening of the first seal reveals the early history of the Christian church, riding forth conquering in the name of Christ.

### **The Second Seal—the Red Horse**

“And when He had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see. And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword” (Revelation 6:3-4).

The white horse of conquest was followed by the blood red horse of persecution. Yes, Christ is “the Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6), but the preaching of the gospel can also have the effect of removing peace from the earth. “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword” (Matthew 10:34). The gospel itself doesn't

destroy peace, but those who reject it often persecute those who accept it. Not long into the Christian era this did happen. The people of Christ were severely persecuted for their faith. Much blood was shed as the Roman government sought to stamp out Christianity from its boundaries. The red horse portrays the experience of the church during the second, third and part of the fourth centuries after Christ.

### **The Third Seal—the Black Horse**

“And when He had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine” (Revelation 6:5-6).

We have moved from the white horse of gospel conquest to the red horse of bloody persecution. Now as the third seal opens we enter the black horse period of spiritual darkness. Here is represented the historical fall of the church in the fourth century on through the fifth century and the major part of the sixth century. Dense moral darkness and theological error settled upon the church. Thousands of half-converted pagans were brought in, along with their erroneous ideas of the character of God, their idolatry and authority structures.

The balances in the hand of the black horse rider, measuring out a minute amount of food for a large amount of money, is a perfect symbolic representation of the spiritual famine that enveloped the church and the world. The prophet Amos made this comparison: “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord” (Amos 8:11).

During this time the people starved for want of the pure bread of heaven. The truth of the gospel was made obscure. False doctrines were many.

And yet, in the providence of God, the command was given to “hurt not the oil and the wine.” Oil is a symbol of the anointing of the Holy Spirit (see Hebrews 1:9; Matthew 25:1-13; Zechariah 4:2-6, 12). Wine is a symbol of the atoning blood of Christ (see Matthew 26:27-29). Through that dark period of spiritual famine depicted by the black horse, there were those who continued under the anointing influence of the Holy Spirit and preserved the pure gospel of Christ.

### **The Fourth Seal—the Pale Horse**

“And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth” (Revelation 6:8).

The pale horse reveals the deepest depths of apostasy into which the church fell during the Middle Ages under papal supremacy. The rider's name is Death and the grave followed him. As a result of the church's evil rule, nations descended until they were void of spiritual and moral life. All of Europe was plunged into war and famine and disease. Approximately 50 million people were martyred for their faith by the church that claimed in vain the name of Christ. Some historians have

estimated that as much as one-quarter to one-third of Europe's population died during this time.

### **The Fifth Seal—Martyrs Under the Altar**

“And when He had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were 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, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled” (Revelation 6:9-11).

Following the pale horse of death, the fifth seal opens to reveal the martyrs of Jesus crying out for justice. Of course they are not literally confined under the altar, nor are they literally praying for vengeance against their enemies.

That they are symbolically represented as under the altar calls our attention to the fact that theirs was a sacrifice for Christ. The altar was the place of sacrifice in the Old Testament sanctuary, representing this earth, where Jesus would be crucified. Some of the blood of the sacrifice was poured out at the base of the altar (see Leviticus 4:7). As Jesus laid down His precious life for our salvation, the martyrs laid down their lives for their Savior. Their blood symbolically cries out for justice from the earth as did the blood of Abel against his brother Cain who murdered him (see Genesis 4:10). Their blood cried out as the Protestant Reformers arose to defend the cause of truth for which they died. As the story of their faithfulness is told today by those who share their faith, their blood still cries out for justice.

White robes were given to the martyrs. We take this to mean that the martyrs under the fifth seal have been approved by God and are sure of eternal life.

### **The Sixth Seal—Signs in the Heavens**

“And I beheld when He had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens 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 that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” (Revelation 6:12-17).

When the sixth seal was opened a series of attention-getting events occurred. They are commonly referred to as signs because they indicate where we are in the panorama of time.

- A great earthquake.
- The darkening of the sun.