

Revelation 6:1-8

Jesus opens the first four seals

(*The People's Bible, Revelation, pages 75-79*)

Look

This section draws its symbolism from the Old Testament book of Zechariah. Read Zechariah 1:7-17. Zechariah sees many horses of the colors we find here in Revelation. The angel explains their meaning to Zechariah: "They are the ones the LORD has sent to go throughout the earth" (verse 10). They seem to be angels sent to survey the world. In Zechariah 6:1-8, Zechariah sees a similar vision. Here the horses are drawing chariots. The angel explains who they are: "These are the four spirits of heaven, going out from standing in the presence of the Lord of the whole world" (verse 5). Here they also seem to be angels who are ready to do God's bidding and rescue his people. The horses in Revelation, seen in company with the four living creatures, represent God's agents doing his will in this world.

The First Seal

6:1 -- The Lamb (Christ) opens the first seal, which means literally (as explained by the events in v. 2) that he "gives the OK" for the events to take place. All things pass through God's hands, and he will use even the worst to the benefit of his children. This was a primary comfort provided to believers by the book of Revelation which appeared on the Christian scene at the dawn of the worst Christian persecutions before modern times.

"Come" -- said by one of the "**living creatures**" -- as these creatures are instruments of carrying out God's providence (what will happen, see 4:6b-8a), the creature as part of his job bids the first even to take place.

6:2 -- *Rider on the white horse* -- In the late first century a White Horse was a symbol of victory. Caesars no longer sought to engage in battle directly, rather seeking to enlarge the empire through treaties. Caesar would then enter his new territory as a victor, riding a white horse. In Revelation 19 another rider on a horse is clearly Jesus. In Revelation white is the symbol of purity. This rider would seem to be Jesus or the Word Jesus proclaims that has gone out and conquered in the world (look at the growth of the Church.)

The Second Seal

6:3 -- Christ breaks the second seal -- bringing the next set of events about and the "**living creature**" charged with carrying out God's providence orders the actual events carried out.

6:4 -- The *red horse* symbolizes and brings about war and bloodshed -- even as the verse explains. God is a God of peace (Rom 15:33). But he is also just and must punish sin. War is one of the results of sin. It is a direct result of the heart of every person (James 4:1-2, Deut. 26:21-25). War is also a means by which God calls the faithful back to himself (Rom 8:35-37, Hebrews 12:5-11).

The Third Seal

6:5-6 -- We have here symbolized famine and economic hard times. Inflation is a punishment of God upon the society in which materialism predominates. Such materialism, which is a love for the created over the Creator, leads to God's House being empty when it is time for worship, because the material things that we surround ourselves with challenge the time and quality of our service and love for the

Lord. Haggai 1:6-9 explains this and Matt. 6:33 gives the solution. One's love for the Lord is directly related to his worship and service for the Lord.

The Fourth Seal

6:7-8 – Rider on the pale horse: Death, with Hades following: The rider on the pale horse is identified as death. The Greek word for “pale” is chloros, which really means green. Greek doctors used that word to describe very sick people. Breaking of the fourth seal is Heaven's permission for death as the result of calamities including the previous two seals. With Hades following we are reminded that physical death is not the only wages of sin.

Discuss

1. Draw up a list of the signs of the end times using Matthew 24:3-15.
2. Using the clues from this chapter and the items on Jesus' list of signs, what happens when the first seal is broken?
3. Using the clues from this chapter and the items on Jesus' list of signs, what happens when the second seal is broken?
4. Using the clues from this chapter and the items on Jesus' list of signs, what happens when the third seal is broken?
5. Using the clues from this chapter and the items on Jesus' list of signs, what happens when the fourth seal is broken?

Apply

6. Review the theme of chapters 4 and 5. Compare this with how each seal is introduced. How does the method in which the seals were opened correspond to the theme of chapters 4 and 5?
7. What evidence do we see that the seals are being opened right now?

Jesus opened the scrolls and ushered in events as signs of his second coming.

Revelation 6:9-17

Seals 5 and 6 opened

(The People's Bible, Revelation, pages 79-83)

Look

The Fifth Seal -- The Persecutions

6:9-11 -- **"the souls of those who had been slain because of the Word of God, and the testimony they had maintained."** This is a reference to those who died refusing to renounce Christ and worship false gods. As we can see here, heaven views this as a major event in the church's and the world's history. Persecution today is even at greater levels than it was in Rome at John's time.

The Lord has warned believers about persecutions, lest even we fall into false security. However, most persecution today in the West, is more subtle: the disapproval of friends or family at the time we spend at church; intolerance by those around us of expressions of our faith; disapproval of others when we refuse to join in their activities because of Christian principles. Such persecutions are considered general persecutions and every Christians is warned to expect them. 92 Timothy 3:1-15)

The cry of the sainted martyrs, **"How long, O Lord, Holy and True . . ."** Not a questioning of his wisdom but a sincere desire to know out of deep pain over the events taking place. It is also a prayer of anticipation for the ultimate and inevitable victory of righteousness (the Final Judgment) rather than a prayer out of the desire for personal vengeance.

Here we have more Scriptural proof that the souls of the dead are conscious in heaven with the Lord before the great Resurrection and we further see that they do indeed pray, even there, for the church still on earth. But of course we do not pray to or for them. This passage (among others) refutes the "soul sleep" idea, for it depicts the souls of sainted Christians very much aware of what goes on here on earth, and very capable of praying to the Lord for the church.

"A White Robe" -- Symbolizing not their holiness, for even suffering, torture and death for Christ is not enough to earn heaven. The holiness was "given" to them -- the holiness earned for them and us by Christ on the cross. Giving the saints under the altar white robes does not mean they were not already pure, but it reinforces in their minds that God loves them and will avenge their blood. God further comforts them to enjoy their rest. God knows the number appointed to die in this persecution and he is still in control of all things. No more will fall away as a result of the persecutions than would have if there were no persecutions. The persecutions simply serve to strengthen the faithful church. Beware of when Christianity is easy and acceptable in society, for then the devil is close enough to smell. The time of lack of persecution is for doing mission work. The time of persecution is for strengthening those already part of the church.

The Sixth Seal

Verses 12-14 speak of the passing away of the present earth on Judgment Day.

Verses 15-17 speak of the punishment of unbelievers, the enemies of God and his Church.

The weight of sin under which all creation groans (Romans 8:22) will finally cause collapse. The earth will finally be destroyed by fire in an event greater than the great flood of Noah, but which comes for the same reason (see 2 Peter 3:6-7). The weight of sin -- even unfaithfulness within the church -- brings these events in 6:12-17 to pass (see 2 Peter 2:1-3:7 for the events leading up to this.) 2 Peter 3:8-13 offers comfort for believers and assures us that everything will turn out all right for the faithful. 2 Peter 3:14-18 speaks of the preparation which must be made by the faithful to be prepared for these inevitable

events. Taken together, these passages provide us with one of the finest detailed descriptions of the visible church today and indicates that the final closing events described in 6:12-17 are not far away.

6:15-17 -- All will know what is happening ("**hide us from the wrath of the Lamb**") on that day of Judgment. What a tragedy that some will fear the Savior who offered them so much, a tragedy they bring upon themselves because of their own pride.

"Who can stand?" No human being, not even a Christian can stand before God on their own. But those who agree with God as to their unworthiness, and plead for mercy reminding God that Jesus, who is already their Lord, has already borne on the cross what they deserved, shall be welcomed as children for his sake.

There will also be those who knew the Bible but had no real faith -- those who did not serve to the glory of God or fell away, and those who were false leaders in the church who shall plead for entrance in Christ's Name and shall be turned away. See Matthew 7:21-23.

Discuss

1. From the clues in Revelation and from Jesus' list of events that must happen before the end of the world as signs of his second coming, what does the opening of the fifth seal represent?
2. From the clues in Revelation and from what Jesus tells us in Matthew 24:29-30, what does the opening of the sixth seal represent?
3. Analyze the confession that terrified unbelievers will make on the Last Day.

Apply

4. How do we feel about the prospect of persecution coming into our lives?
5. How will we feel on the Last Day, when many are mourning?

Jesus opened the fifth and sixth seals, leading to persecution and the final judgment.