

6.1-17

Opening the Seals

Introduction: The Tribulation of the Church

- Whenever the Church is faithful to its calling, bearing testimony to and living according to the truth of the gospel (lightbearing), tribulation follows from persecution *by* the world
- The Church is also in the world and suffers *along with* the world such things as war, famine, disease (think, "COVID") which occur as the result of sin introduced into the world that leads to common woes

The first seal: the white horse and its rider (6.1-2)

The white horse

- The first 4 seals issue in 4 horses and their riders
- Some see all four horses as symbols of tribulations for believers, with the white horse signifying conquest, militarism and lust to subdue; white signifying victory

The white horse: symbolizing Christ

- It is better to understand the white horse as symbolizing Christ
- In the context of this section in the Apocalypse, Christ has already been presented as the conqueror (3.21; 5.5)
- White, in the apocalypse, is always associated with that which is holy or heavenly

The white horse: symbolizing Christ

- The rider receives a crown (better, wreath)
- In the direct parallel passage (19.11), there is a white horse, and he who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and wages war; at *that* time, he is pictured as wearing many *royal diadems* (19.12)

The white horse: symbolizing Christ

- As we have seen before, the theme of the book is the victory of Christ and his Church

EXCURSUS ON THE PATTERN OF HORSES TWO THROUGH FOUR

1. Remember that the symbolism of the Apocalypse is rooted in the Old Testament
2. We find the symbolism of four horses in Zechariah (1.8ff); God using a sword in judgment in Ezekiel (5.17; 14.21)
3. We ought not to miss the pattern from Zechariah in our passage: horses two, three and four are subservient to the first

EXCURSUS ON THE PATTERN OF HORSES TWO THROUGH FOUR

4. Moving to the NT, Christ's eschatological discourse (Mt 24; Mk 13; Lk 21; we will use Luke 21.10-13, 16-19)
 - there are signs that reference mankind in general: wars, earthquakes, plagues, famines
 - Followed by signs that more directly concern believers: they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for my name's sake

EXCURSUS ON THE PATTERN OF HORSES TWO THROUGH FOUR

- even though the woes of the first kind are experienced by believers *along with* the rest of mankind, the woes are presented from the aspect of their significance for believers
- so there are two types of tribulations that believers experience: those that they experience because they are *in* the world and suffer *along with* the world; and those they experience as persecution *by* the world because they are not *of* the world

EXCURSUS ON THE PATTERN OF HORSES TWO THROUGH FOUR

5. We will find this same pattern in Rev 6: the second and third riders describe what happens to believers because they remain loyal to their Lord and suffer the persecution *by* the wicked; the fourth rider discloses what God's people experience *along with* the rest of the world

The second seal: a red horse (6.3-4)

- refers to religious persecution, not war in general between nations; i.e., to slaughter (*sphatzō*) (sacrifice) rather than to make war
- whenever the rider on the white horse appears, the rider on the red horse soon follows
- do not look for one definite person as the rider on the red horse; Domitian may be thus understood, but the world is always persecuting the Church; no time is without its rider on the red horse
- remember that this is in God's hands, and he is using it to purge and purify his Church; he gives ("it was granted") the sacrificial knife to the rider

The third seal: a black horse (6.5-6)

- A pair of scales and cost of grain by weight indicate economic hardship
- In the ancient world food was distributed by rationing using scales when it was scarce
- the second and third horses both describe tribulation of the Church *by* the world

The fourth seal: a pale green (ashen) horse (6.7-8)

- the color
- here we have it easy; the horse's rider (above the horse) is named "Death," with Hades following after
- However, they cannot do as they please
- believers have suffered *along with* the rest of the world throughout this entire dispensation (can anyone say, "COVID"?)
- but unlike non-believers, the woes have a very specific meaning and purpose for the Church: they are Christ's instruments for the sanctification of his people and the extension of his kingdom

The fifth seal: the cry of the martyrs (6.9-11)

- Remember that John is not seeing heaven but a symbolic vision
- The altar would have to refer to the altar of burnt offerings with the souls of the martyrs under it ('the soul is in the blood'; Lev 17.11)
- Some question the vengeful attitude of the martyrs, pointing out that both Jesus and Stephen invoked forgiveness for their killers (they forget that **this is apocalyptic!**)

The cry of the martyrs

- The martyrs are given white robes, white symbolizing holiness or heavenliness
- They are told to rest for ‘yet a little while’

The sixth seal: final judgment (6.12-17)

Introduction of the final judgment

- in the first series (the 7 lampstands) there was only an announcement of Christ's coming in judgment
- in the second series, final judgment is not merely announced, it is definitely introduced

Final judgment

Twofold symbolism of the final judgment

- a crashing universe and completely terrorized humanity
- the terror only affects the wicked

This final judgment is God's response to the saints' pleas in vv. 6-9

Final judgment

7 objects of creation affected

- earthquake
- sun turns black
- moon becomes as blood
- stars of heaven fall to earth
- heaven is rolled up like a scroll (cf. Isa 34.4; Heb 1.12)
- every mountain
- and island will be removed from their places

Final judgment

7 classes of mankind affected

- Kings,
- great ones, nobles
- commanders (chiliarchs: military leaders of 1000)
- rich (leaders in commerce; capitalists)
- strong (those who exert powerful influence in any sphere)
- slave
- freeman (released slaves) – lower class

The entire godless world will be seized with sudden terror

The sealed multitude

7.1-17

A delay in the execution of the judgments

- After this, 4 angels at the four corners of the earth, who control destruction (“harm the earth and the sea”) throughout the earth
- another angel from the rising of the sun with the seal of the living God commands them to wait
- no harm until the servants of *our* (i.e., of the angels) God have been sealed on their foreheads (the mark of the beast is not the first mark in Revelation)

Threefold sense of the seal in Scripture

Threefold sense

1. It protects against tampering
2. It marks ownership
3. It certifies genuineness

For the people of God

1. Protected by the Father, the One who is on the throne
2. The Son has sealed us, purchasing and redeeming us with his own blood – we are his possession
3. The Spirit seals us, certifying that we are truly sons of God

Sealed on their foreheads

- In chapter 14, this same sealed multitude (144,000) have on their foreheads the name of the Lamb and the name of the Father

John *hears* the number: 144,000

- They are throughout the earth; John cannot see them
- 144,000 is clearly symbolical
- This is not Israel
- Chapter 21 confirms that this must indicate the Church of the old and new dispensations, God's people of covenant

John *sees* a great, innumerable multitude

- All of God's elect from *every* nation, tribe, people, and tongue
- Clothed in white robes: holiness – they are saints
- With palm branches in their hands
- Now *all* the angels are around the throne, along with the 24 elders and 4 living beings
- 7-fold ascription of praise, bracketed by reduplicated “Amen”

Identification of the multitude

One of the elders asks John to identify the multitude in white robes; not able, he returns the question to the elder

- the identification closes out this section, whose theme is the Church in tribulation
- the Church might be in tribulation, but will not remain so – they come out of the great tribulation
- their robes were made white in the blood of the Lamb

Privileges of the multitude

- In the Presence of God, serving him day and night
- Protected, sheltered by the Father (cp. Eze 37.26-28)
- No more hunger, thirst, misery (sun, heat) – Isa. 49.10 fulfilled
- God wipes every tear *out of* their eyes: tears shed are wiped *off of* the face; to wipe tears *out of* eyes means there can be no more!

The Seventh Seal

8.1-5

Silence in heaven (8.1)

- Keeping in mind our understanding that each of the successive 7 sections pictures events occurring from the cross-resurrection to the final judgment, we would place the silence at the point of final judgment
- Once again, we need to go back to the OT to seek the meaning of the silence
- The silence is for dramatic effect

Half an hour

- First, let us remember that time references in Revelation have little to do with chronology
- This would *not* be an empty time period, just a silent one
- Although 30 minutes seems a relatively short period of time, think of what it would be like if all of the sudden in the middle of a worship service there was half an hour of silence!

7 Angels with 7 Trumpets (8.2)

- An interruption (parenthesis) in describing final judgment
- This allows vv. 2-5 to act as a transition, concluding the seal judgments and introducing the trumpet judgments

Angel with Golden Senser (8.3-5)

- Incense added to the prayers of the saints, confirms that this is a response to their prayers (6.9)
- The golden altar (of incense): typically in apocalyptic literature, a heavenly altar combines aspects of both the altar of burnt offering and the altar of incense
- This is God's final judgment: peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake