

CHAPTER 6

"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?'" (6:15-17)

John now relates his vision of the seven seals. We have the first six of them recorded here. According to Frost,

All of the seals spoken of from the sixth chapter onward lie within the first half of the prophetic "week," that is, within the first three and a half years of the reign of the Antichrist. The breaking of the first, which calls forth the Man of sin, begins these years, and the breaking of the other seals continues them. By the time that the seventh seal is broken, the first half of the "week" is well advanced, though it is not finished, for the seven trumpets also lie within the first portion of the "week" period.¹

Commenting on the seals, Johnson writes:

The seals closely parallel the signs of the approaching end times spoken of in Jesus' Olivet Discourse (Matt 24:1-35; Mark 13:1-37; Luke 21:5-33). In these passages the events of the last days fall into three periods: (1) the period of false Christs, wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, and death, called "the beginning of birth pains" (Matt. 24:8); (2) the period of the Great Tribulation (Matt 24:21; NIV, "great distress") and, (3) finally, the period "immediately after the distress of those days," when the sun, moon, and stars will be affected and Christ will return (Matt 24:29-30). This parallel to major parts of Revelation is too striking to be ignored. Thus the seals would correspond to the "beginning of birth pains" found in the Olivet Discourse.²

First Seal - John sees a white horse; its rider has a bow and crown (*stephanos*) and goes out conquering. A worthy point is made by Isbon T. Beckwith:

It is hardly conceivable that Christ should be represented here as the Lamb in the court of heaven breaking the seal and at the same time by that act revealing himself as a figure coming into view from another quarter and in another form in response to a summons from an archangel. . . . The first rider, like the three others, is a personification of a judgment to be sent upon the earth.³

Commentators have differed greatly on the rider of the white horse. It seems likely to me that the rider is not Christ but Antichrist. Frost takes this view, stating that "The Man of Sin comes on a white horse, for first, he is at the beginning a man of peace, and second, he is the

1 Frost, *Matthew Twenty-Four the the Revelation*, pp.181-182.

2 Johnson, *Revelation*, pg. 472.

3 Cited by Walvoord in *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pg. 127.

hypocritical anticipator and imitator of the true white horse warrior of the nineteenth chapter (19:11). But he soon reveals himself in his real character, for the white horse is followed by the red . . ."⁴ The Antichrist, then, is pictured on a white horse because he goes out and conquers with peace. The first 3 1/2 years of the tribulation period (Daniel's seventieth week) is one of peace and security. This rider ushers it in. It is only after the 3 1/2 years of peace have expired that the next three horses make their appearance (as least so it seems to me at this point in our study). Frost puts all the horses in the first 3 1/2 years.

Johnson states, "The white horse is released to conquer. As he goes forth, judgment falls on the unbelief of Israel (Luke 21:22-23), while at the same time there is a testing of believers to separate the chaff from the wheat (cf. Luke 21:12-19)."⁵

McClain makes an interesting observation concerning this 3 1/2 year period ushered in by the rider on the white horse and its relevance to Daniel's 70th week:

It is a fact, open to all who read, that the Book of Revelation presents a definite chronology of the period of pre-Kingdom judgments; and this is based on a single unit of measurement stated variously as 1260 days (11:3; 12:6), 42 months (11:2; 13:5), and 3 1/2 times (12:14), i.e., *years* . . . While it is true that certain numbers in the Book of Revelation may sometimes be employed in a symbolic sense (cf. the "seven Spirits" of 4:5), it would be hard to find any such meaning in the number 1260. That the figures here are intended to be understood literally seems clear from the fact that evidently the *same* period of persecution in Revelation has been designated in terms of days (12:6), months (13:5), and years (12:14). This one fact completely nullifies the year-day theory of prophetic interpretation. For the 1260 days here equal 42 months or 3 1/2 years, and therefore certainly not *1260* years.

Furthermore, if we examine the context of chapters 11-13, we shall find not only one, but *two* periods to which this same unit of measure is applied. The first is the period of the two witnesses in conflict with the beast, stated as 1260 days, ending with their death at his hands (11:3,7). A second period follows in which the beast, having now put down all opposition and reached the place of world power, is given "forty and two months" to continue his reign (13:4-8). Adding together these two periods of the same length respectively, obviously the total time equals exactly *seven* prophetic years of 360 days each.

The terminus of this total period of seven years is marked beyond dispute in the Book of Revelation. Since the last half of the seven-year period measures the career of the beast as an absolute world ruler, the end must be found in his defeat and doom at the glorious coming of Christ as described in Revelation 19:11-21. The *beginning* of the seven-year period is not so clearly marked. But since in the Apocalypse this seven-year period is prominently concerned with the total public career of the beast (as also in Daniel 9:27), it is a reasonable assumption that the beginning is marked by the going forth of the rider on the white horse under the first seal (6:1-2).

4 Frost, *Matthew Twenty-Four and the Revelation*, pg. 173.

5 Johnson, *Revelation*, pg. 473.

Thus the chronological picture of pre-Kingdom judgment presents a well-articulated and appropriate whole. Upon a world which has rejected the true Messianic King at His first coming, God will loose a false messianic ruler (the "strong delusion" of II Thess. 2:9-11), who rises to world power in the space of three and a half years and who will wield his terrible power during a subsequent period of the same length. At the end of the total period of seven years, the false messiah will be defeated and destroyed by the second coming of the true Messianic King.

The facts stated above are in perfect harmony with Daniel's great prophecy of the Seventy Weeks. In chapter 9 a future "prince" out of the Roman Empire (vs. 26b) makes a "firm covenant" with Daniel's people for a period of "one week", i.e., one period of seven years (vs. 27, ASV). In the midst of this period he breaks with the people of Israel, stops their sacrificial system, and inaugurates a time of persecution lasting to the end of the week, obviously three and a half years. The same persecutor, the same persecuted people, and the same period of persecution, are referred to in Daniel 7:25 and Revelation 13:5-7; with which compare Daniel 12:1,7.

The literality of these time-measures is now grounded in history. It is generally agreed by devout students of Biblical prophecy that the first sixty-nine "weeks" of Daniel's prophecy are "sevens" of *years*, and that they have been literally fulfilled by the first coming of Christ (9:25). But if the first sixty-nine sevens of years are literal years, then so also must be the last seven of years. That this last seven lies prophetically in the future has been established by the testimony of Christ Himself. The argument is as follows: both Daniel and our Lord spoke of something called "the abomination of desolation." Whatever this thing may be, it is certain that Daniel located it within the last "week" of his great prophecy (Dan. 9:27 with 12:11). It is equally certain that Christ placed it at "the end" of the present age in connection with the terrible "tribulation" immediately preceding His second coming in glory (cf. verses 15, 21, 29, and 30, in Matt. 24). Therefore, since our Lord has not yet come in glory, Daniel's final "week" of years must lie in the future. This is Christ's own interpretation, and should settle the matter.⁶

With a quarter of the earth's entire population being destroyed, one would think, contrary to Frost, that John is seeing the last 3 1/2 years of the great tribulation. For now, we shall leave this thought on the back burner.

Second Seal - John sees a red horse; its rider takes peace from the earth by means of people killing each other. Milligan sees two things in this vision particularly worthy of notice.

In the first place, the war spoken of is not between the righteous and wicked, but among the wicked alone. The wicked *slaughter one another*. . . . In the second place, the original word translated "slay" both in the Authorised and Revised Versions deserves attention. It is a sacrificial term, the same as that found in

6 McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, pp. 459-460.

chap. v. 6, where we read of the "slaughtered Lamb;" and here therefore, as there, it ought to be rendered, not "slay," but "slaughter." The instant we so translate, the whole picture rises before our view in a light entirely different from that in which we commonly regard it. What judgment, nay what irony of judgment, is there in the ways of God when He visits sinners with the terrors of His wrath! The very fate which men shrink from accepting in the form of a blessing overtakes them in the form of a curse. They think to save their life, and they lose it. They seek to avoid that sacrifice of themselves which, made in Christ, lies at the root of the true accomplishment of human destiny; and they are constrained to substitute for it a sacrifice of an altogether different kind: they sacrifice, they slaughter, one another.⁷

Third Seal - John sees a black horse; its rider has a pair of scales. Famine and scarcity follow. The last part of verse 6 in the NKJV is as follows: "*A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine.*" What is the significance of not harming the oil and wine?

The words are generally regarded as a limitation of the severity of the famine previously described, and as a promise that even in judging God will not execute all His wrath. The interpretation can hardly be accepted. Not only does it weaken the force of the threatening, but the meaning thus given to the figure is entirely out of place. Oil and wine were for the mansions of the rich, not for the habitations of the poor, for the feast and not for the supply of the common wants of life. Nor would a sufferer from famine have found in them a substitute for bread. The meaning of the words therefore must be looked for in a wholly different direction. "Thou preparest a table before me," says the Psalmist, "in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over." This is the table the supply of which is now alluded to. It is prepared for the righteous in the midst of the struggles of the world, and in the presence of their enemies. . . . they are a figure of the care with which God watches over His own people and supplies all their wants.⁸

Fourth Seal - John sees a pale (green) horse; its rider's name is Death, and Hades follows after. One-quarter of the earth is smitten.

An interesting view of the four horsemen, in particular he who rides the white horse, is given by J. H. McIlvaine. While commenting on verse 8, "*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,*" he finds it surprising

that no one seems ever to have thought of reading this closing statement as a paragraph by itself, and consequently as referring, not exclusively to the last, but to all of these four seals: for thus it would have been seen at a glance that special pains are here taken to explain the first of them, the only one that has hitherto been left in any obscurity . . . Here, then, after the first four seals have been

7 Milligan, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 90-91.

8 *Ibid.*, pp. 93-94.

opened, and in view of the entirely different character of those that are to follow, in which the living creatures will have no ministry, the Apocalyptist comes to a place where he may fitly pause, and add whatever may be necessary to a clear and certain understanding of the symbols he has just described. Accordingly he adds the following words, "And authority was given unto them," i.e. to these four ministers of the divine judgments, "to kill (1) with the sword," which self-evidently refers to that one of them who is armed with a great sword, and whose mission is to take peace from the earth, that men should slay one another: (2) "with famine," which no less plainly refers to him who makes food so scarce that great multitudes perish by starvation: (3) "with Death," i.e. pestilence, Hades following to lay hold upon the dead; (4) "and with the wild beasts of the earth," which consequently must refer to the only remaining one of these four ministers, i.e. to him of the first seal. Here, then, according to the Seer's own interpretation, this rider upon a white horse, with a crown and bow, and called forth by the lion-like living creature, is the symbol of the plague of wild beasts. . . . For the minister of this scourge rides upon a white horse, which is always the symbol of triumphant progress, as in the Roman pomps; a crown is given him, and he comes forth conquering and to conquer, literally, "that he may conquer," to signify that this plague shall extensively prevail; and he is armed with a bow, the most effective weapon then in use for hunting, to suggest the general significance of the symbol, perhaps, also, to denote that, instead of men hunting beasts, beasts should hunt men.⁹

Fifth Seal - John sees the souls of the martyrs under the altar. They had been killed for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. According to Seiss it is a particular testimony, "that" testimony, which they held during the tribulation period. They cry to have their blood avenged on "*those who dwell on the earth.*" Seiss suggests that they are referring to the actual men who killed them.¹⁰ However, to me this does not seem likely, for they are told that their blood will not be avenged until "*both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.*" This would seem to imply that these "souls" were not killed during the final 3 1/2 years of the tribulation, but before. John sees them in the fifth seal looking forward in time, like himself, into the tribulation period. Perhaps they are martyrs since the time of Abel up to the beginning of the terrors under the tribulation period; that is, they are not included among the martyrs of the last 3 1/2 years of the tribulation. When they say, "*How long . . . until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth,*" they are speaking of the enemies of Christ in general. Those enemies of Christ have been killing the prophets since the beginning of time, and they continue to do so through the tribulation period. After the final faithful are martyred for Christ, then and only then will the blood of all the martyrs of all ages be avenged.

Another view is that of Milligan: "The souls under the altar of the fifth Seal are the saints, not of Christianity, but of Judaism."¹¹

Perhaps the best view may be Frost's:

⁹ J. H. McIlvaine, *The Wisdom of the Apocalypse*, pp. 134-135.

¹⁰ Seiss, *Lectures on the Apocalypse*, Vol. I, pg. 367.

¹¹ Milligan, *The Book of Revelation*, pg. 102.

Now it is to be noted that a number of visions is given of the martyr saints, and that these, in spite of the fact that they occur at different places in the book and at different stages of the events described, seem to be repetitions of one another. When, however, it is remembered that martyrdoms occur at different times within the whole seven years, some in the first part of this period and some in the second, then it will be seen that the several visions are not of the same companies of persons, but rather, of different and separate ones. Thus, the first vision of the martyrs, given at the opening of the fifth seal, shows us saints who have suffered death in the earlier stage of the rule of the Antichrist, in the first half of the prophetic week, which explains why they are told that they must rest for a little until their fellow servants and brethren are killed as they were (6:9-11). Again, a second vision of the martyred ones, given in the introduction to the trumpet period (see the Analysis), shows us saints who have suffered death in the trumpet period, and hence in the first half of the prophetic "week" but at a still later stage of the Antichrist's career, at a time when persecutions have enlarged their sphere and taken in a multitude out of every nation and of all tribes and peoples and tongues (7:9, 10). Again, a third vision of martyrs, given in the introduction to the vial period (see the Analysis), shows us saints who have suffered death in that period, and, therefore, at a considerably later stage of the Antichrist's persecutions, this time in the latter half of the prophetic "week," for the image spoken of is erected at the middle of the "week" and this has already been set up (15:2, 3). And finally, a fourth vision of the martyr multitude, given in the judgment period (see the Analysis), shows us all of the saints who have been killed by the Antichrist gathered into the presence of the Lamb, which is after the prophetic "week" is over and the tribulation is fully and forever past (20:4-6). Thus we have vision after vision of the martyrs. But each time we see a new company of these saints, until at last we behold all of them brought safely and rejoicingly home.¹²

These souls are clothed in white robes and evidently appear in some bodily form to John, but they do not have actual physical bodies. They are still awaiting the redemption of their bodies, which is to take place at the Second Coming. The white robes are for John's benefit, for without them he probably would not have been able to describe invisible souls who can speak. Nevertheless, the white robes serve another greater purpose, that of symbolizing purity.

Sixth Seal - Revealed in the sixth seal are cosmic disturbances of unparalleled intensity. The wrath poured out under this seal is the wrath of God, not that of Satan against God's people as in the first five seals (although these too are ultimately in God's control). *"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 is come, and who shall be able to stand?'"* Can there be any doubt that we are here reading of the prelude to the Second Advent of Christ in power and glory?

We do not read of the seventh seal until the eighth chapter, and according to Frost,

¹² Frost, *Matthew Twenty-Four and the Revelation*, pg. 192.

The seventh seal is broken at the beginning of chapter eight (8:1), it being inserted at that place instead of in the seventh chapter because the latter is but the introduction to the former, the description of the period's earthly incidents beginning at 8:6 and all of its events falling under this seventh seal and being subsequent to it. It will be seen from the foregoing that the record of the seven years is making regular, chronological advancement, developing, in time and episode, in a well ordered and clearly defined fulfillment.¹³

Let us close this chapter with a word from C. J. Vaughan:

My brethren, shall that expectation of the Church be to you, to each one of us who are here this night assembled, a hope, or a fear?

I address doubtless some to-night whose prevailing spiritual condition is one of carelessness. I say not how it may be with them while they listen to the Word of God in this place: but mark their course through the week which follows; mark, as man cannot, but as God can and does, their secret walk before the Father of spirits; and we cannot say that it is Christian, we cannot say that it is vigilant, we cannot say that it is reverent, we cannot say that it is that of one who is really waiting for the return of the Son of God to judgment. I, my brethren, would to God that you would listen inwardly to the revelation of a day in which you must be an actor! Let the words of the text itself move you. *Hide us from the face of Him who sitteth upon the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!* The face of God; you must see it one day; O can you bear it? What will it be to you? Will it be to you the face of a Father? Will it be to you a face known long by faith, in the intercourse, through long months and years of earthly life, of a true, a spiritual communion? Will it be to you a face which has often shone upon you with benediction and peace, assuring you of pardon, and enlightening you with grace? Or will the other be your conception of it; that fearful thing which is expressed in words burning with their concentrated intensity, *the wrath of the Lamb?* the wrath, the displeasure, the indignation, the slowly and reluctantly gathered yet now unalterable and inevitable judgment, of Him who was once your Sacrifice for sin, your Propitiation, your *Advocate with the Father*, yea the very *Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world?* Nay, my brethren, if the very Lamb of God be angry, where shall we find a refuge? O while yet He is your Saviour, know Him, we beseech you, and flee to Him as such!¹⁴

13 Frost, *Matthew Twenty-Four and the Revelation*, pg. 185.

14 Vaughan, *Lectures*, pp. 171-172.