

the twenty-four heavenly princes fall down to worship Him who liveth forever and ever.

Truly we have been listening through the open door to the oratorio of the Choir Invisible!

This instrumented Heavenly choir has prepared us for the opening of the seals. How fitting this should be:

The prophets of old prophesied to the tune of instrumental music:

“Thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, and a harp before them; and they shall prophesy.”  
(I Samuel 10:5)

The hand of the Lord came upon Elisha when the minstrel played.

“But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him.” (II Kings 3:15)

The sons of Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun prophesied with harp, psalteries and cymbals (I Chron. 25:3-6)

And Habakkuk closed his prophesies with instructions “to the chief singer on my stringed instruments.” (Habakkuk 3:19)

As the prophets of old spoke to the accompaniment of instrumental music so the opening of the seals was preceded by the massed choirs of heaven and earth singing this wondrously soul-inspiring oratorio.

No wonder Christ in the model prayer taught them to pray, “Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:10) It is His Divine will that singing, and with instruments shall be done by choirs on both sides of the veil—heaven and earth.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE OPENING OF THE SEALS

*Text (6:1-17)*

#### INTRODUCTION

**1** And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, Come. **2** And I saw, and behold, a white horse, and he that sat

thereon had a bow; and there was given unto him a crown: and he came forth conquering, and to conquer.

3 And when he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, Come. 4 And another horse came forth, a red horse: and to him that sat thereon it was given to take peace from the earth, and that they should slay one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.

5 And when he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, Come. And I saw, and behold, a black horse; and he that sat thereon had a balance in his hand. 6 And I heard as it were a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, A measure of wheat for a shilling, and three measures of barley for a shilling; and the oil and the wine hurt thou not.

7 And when he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, Come. 8 And I saw, and behold, a pale horse: and he that sat upon him, his name was Death; and Hades followed with him. And there was given unto them authority over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with famine, and with death, and by the wild beasts of the earth.

9 And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of them that had been slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: 10 and they cried with a great voice, saying, How long, O Master, the holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? 11 And there was given them to each one a white robe; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little time, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, who should be killed even as they were, should have fulfilled their course.

12 And I saw when he opened the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the whole moon became as blood; 13 and the stars of the heaven fell unto the earth, as a fig tree casteth her unripe figs when she is shaken of a great wind. 14 And the heaven was removed as a scroll when it is rolled up; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. 15 And the kings of the earth, and the princes, and the chief captains, and the rich, and the strong, and every bondman and freeman, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains; 16 and they say to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: 17 for the great day of their wrath is come; and who is able to stand?

In this chapter it is given to us to see how the Redeemer proceeds to exercise the power or authority bestowed upon Him. He opens six seals in succession, after which the dramatic action is interrupted by a separate vision of the four angels standing on the four corners of the earth (Rev. 7:1). The seventh seal is not described until the eighth chapter is reached.

Since this book was in scroll form, which was a long strip of parchment rolled up and sealed with seven seals, our understanding is that Christ breaks the first seal, thus revealing the words written in the scroll as far as the second seal. He then opens the second seal

and further unrolls the scroll. This He continues until the scroll is completely unrolled.

The unrolling of the scroll has these effects: First, it uncovers to view the hidden purposes of God, and second, it reveals the successive events whereby His purposes are accomplished.

We must constantly keep in mind the scope of Revelation, that it is limited. It does not attempt to reveal the future history of all nations, but deals with future history of the church and those opposing powers that affected the fortunes of the Bride of Christ.

Since the church, at the starting point of this vision—the enthronement of Christ at the right hand of God—is wholly within the confines of the vast persecuting empire of pagan Rome, we logically and rightfully understand the events of these seals begin in the Roman empire nearest to the starting point of time and continue through the seventh seal where the remotest events are chronicled.

We must ever remember there was being revealed “things which shortly must come to pass.” Therefore, the events of this vision do not refer to things somewhere in the distant future. Also John was to “write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.”

And these things are recorded in the Book of Revelation—a book which is written in the language of signs. He sent and “signified” it—Sign-i-fied it, that is communicated it by *signs* to His servant John.

Thus we must move slowly in the “uncovering” of the symbols contained in the seven seals. In determining the meaning of this series of prophetic symbols, portraying events which follow successively, it is of supreme importance to correctly interpret the first seal. A wrong start will lead us astray throughout the unrolling of this scroll.

Certainly we are not to spiritualize these visions because John, as we have seen already, was to write the things he had seen, the things which are and the things which shall be hereafter. If language means any thing, then these are *actual, historical events*.

These seals uncover a series of events affecting the fortunes of the church, but also immediately connected with the vast Roman empire in whose confines the church lived and moved and had her being.

These are visions of peace and war, of famine and death, of the persecution of the church and the judgments with which this age will end.

### *The First Seal*

vs. 1, 2 As this first seal is broken, John heard the voice of one of the four living creatures saying with a voice of thunder, "Come and see."

Beginning with the breaking of this first seal we note that the first living creature speaks, and with the opening of each succeeding seal another one of the four living creatures speak.

With the opening of this first seal, as well as the next three seals, the contents of the book are not read, but its messages are translated into action.

In response to the invitation to come and see, immediately John beholds "a white horse and he that sat thereon had a bow, and a crown was given him and he went forth conquering and to conquer.

There are a number of features to this vision.

*First*, our attention is called to a horse. We are to remember that this is a symbol and the Bible must be consulted to interpret its meaning. The horse is a symbol of war. He was never used by either the Jews or the orientals as a beast of burden; the ox and the ass were used for that purpose. The horse was always reserved for war.

Shall we turn to the Old Testament for our interpretation of this symbol, for the horse is not mentioned in the New Testament, except in Revelation. We discover that the horse is first of all the symbol of strength of a certain kind; not strength for labor like the ox, or for the mastery of enemies, like the lion, but a symbol of might or conquest. Especially does it typify strength and courage for conflict.

In (Job 39:19-23) the description of a horse pertains to qualities that have to do with war. God in addressing Job said, "Hast thou given the horse strength? Hast thou clothed his neck with thunder? Canst thou make him *afraid* as a grasshopper? The glory of his nostrils is terrible. He paweth in the valley and rejoiceth in his *strength*. He goeth on to meet the *armed* men . . . neither turneth he back from the sword."

In the 25th verse of this same chapter we read, "He saith among the trumpets Ha, Ha; and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of his captains, and the shouting."

In the song of Moses on the far side of the Red Sea, we read, "I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea." (Ex. 15:1)

From this we learn that the horse represents the progress of some great force or cause backed by strong military power.

Bearing in mind the significance of the horse as a Bible symbol, this first horse, as well as the remaining three are prophetic pictures of mighty military forces and campaigns beginning with the time of the enthroning of Christ on the right hand of God and continuing one after the other.

*Second*, "A white horse." Since there are three more horses in the three remaining seals, each of different colors, each color must hold some very significant meaning.

The white horse here must have an altogether different signification from the red, black or pale colorations. White was, then in the arena of war a symbol of victory, prosperity and joy. It was a symbol of triumphant war.

When a Roman general returned from victorious campaigns in the far-flung frontiers of the empire he halted without the city walls of Rome until the senate voted the manner of his entry. If that body voted that the general was entitled to a triumphal entry, snowy white horses were hitched to his chariot and drawn through the streets of the imperial city, followed by a long line of captive generals, slaves and spoils of war.

*Third*, the armed warrior. We know this was a military figure because he carried a bow, a weapon of war. The symbolism here points to a period of triumphant war.

*Fourth*, the bow. There were bowmen in all ancient armies, but the prominence given the bow here would seem to point to a particular race of people.

*Fifth*, "A crown was given Him." The crown upon this rider indicates that he shall be a crowned monarch. And note carefully that he is not crowned *because* of his *conquests*, but it was given him before these victories.

*Sixth*, His mission. "He went forth conquering and to conquer."

Having now determined the meaning of these symbols it now is our task to discover if "shortly" after John wrote, history records events which correspond to these symbols.

At the time John penned this "uncovering" of things he had seen, which are, and which are to come to pass shortly, a great Roman general was successfully extending the borders of the empire to its greatest bounds. He truly "went forth conquering, and to conquer. Hear Myers on this:

“To Trajan belongs the distinction of having extended the boundaries to the most distant points to which Roman ambition and prowess were ever able to push them.”—Myers Ancient History—Page 506.

A grateful emperor erected a memorial to Trajan’s achievements in what came to be known as Trajan’s Forum, a splendid marble shaft called Trajan’s Column. The stately pillar is almost as perfect today as when reared nineteen centuries ago.

Trajan’s reign marked not only an age of conquest and victory, symbolized by the white horse and his rider, but also an age of internal peace and prosperity. I have before me Volume I of Gibbon’s Rome edited by Milman. On Pages 95, 96 we read:

“If a man were called to fix the period in the history of the world, during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus. The vast extent of the Roman empire was governed by absolute power, under the guidance of virtue and wisdom. The armies were restrained by the firm but gentle hand of four successive emperors, whose characters and authority commanded involuntary respect. The forms of civil administration were carefully preserved by Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, and the Antonines, who delighted in the image of liberty.”

Of these four, Trajan, who ascended the throne four years after the death of Domitian, is the most outstanding. The symbols of this first seal are strikingly fulfilled in this epoch of Roman history. It furnished one of the greatest conquerors of the Roman Empire, and, at a time which fits into this vision on Patmos. Trajan was a crowned conqueror, as revealed in this vision and went forth conquering and to conquer. Since the scope of John’s prophecy falls within the Roman empire, all events of this epoch correspond to the divine revelation.

Particularly, one feature of this vision is significantly fitting. The rider of this white horse—the symbol of military conquest—was armed with a *BOW*! At first this would seem contradictory evidence, for the bow was not a Roman weapon. Rome ever conquered with the sword, carrying into battle the javelin for longer range fighting, but the sword to be used in close quarters. There were bowmen in the Roman legions, but they were not Romans. The use of the bow as a symbol is quite enlightening.

There were two nations on the earth at the time of this revelation who were renowned as users of the bow. The bow was the military weapon of the Parthians beyond the Euphrates, and of the Cretans, dwellers of the island of Crete. Cretan bowmen were constantly featured in Grecian history.

So the bow, the weapon carried by this first rider, must signify some one whose ancestry was rooted in Crete. How amazingly accurate this symbol is to history! If a Roman had been symbolized in this rider, he would not be represented armed with a bow. The bow points us to some one of another nation rather than that of Rome. And history supplies us with the answer.

Beginning with Julius Caesar, the twelve Caesars who reigned over the Roman empire were all of pure Roman blood. Domitian, the one who exiled John to Patmos, was the last of the twelve Caesars. He was followed on the throne by Nerva, the founder of a line that supplied five Caesars in succession.

The five "good emperors" as they came to be known, were Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian and the two Antonines—Aurelius Antoninus and Marcus Aurelius. They reigned from A.D. 96 to A.D. 180.

Nerva, the first of this new line of emperors was not of Roman blood. Cassius, a historian of that day declares that Nerva was a Greek and Aurelius Victor, another Roman Historian says that Nerva's family came from the Grecian island of Crete.

Already we know that *the national weapon of the Cretans was the bow*. The Cretans were as famous for their skill with the bow as the Rhodians were for their use of the sling, or the Romans with the javelin and short sword.

We cannot note to carefully that the founder of this new family of emperors, was an alien—the first to ever rule Rome. His family was of Cretan blood and the national weapon of the islanders of Crete was the *bow!*

### *The Second Seal*

vs. 3, 4 "And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "come and see" The second cherubim repeats the command of the first living creature, "Come and see."

vs. 4 At once the first vision makes way for a second, "And there went out another horse that was *red*." This horse, also representing some great military force, naturally symbolizes, chronologically, the next series of events following those of the first seal.

But the horse is no longer white, but red. The horse is the symbol

of war, but the changed color points to the fact that the conditions of war are entirely changed. It would seem to indicate that now the stage of the conflict has brought blood shed within the empire. Whereas the white horse symbolized peace, prosperity and victory within the Roman empire, now blood shed invades her borders.

It is a fact in history that during the period of the first seal—through the reigns of “the five good emperors”—the Roman Empire never saw the forces of an invading army. All conquests were waged in the countries of her enemies, for Rome was *going forth conquering and to conquer*.

Under the strong but mild rule of Trajan, Hadrian and the Antonines, every man dwelled safely under his own vine and fig tree. No hostile invasion or internal upheavals ever troubled the tiller of the soil or the artisan of trade. The first seal was a period of triumphant war, but of internal peace.

The second seal indicates from its very opening the continued existence of war. Internal peace has vanished. The first and second horsemen are strikingly contrasted. The first horseman represents peace though there was outside war, but the second horse symbolizes civil war and bloodshed.

This is all the more emphasized because this is a blood-red horse.

“And power was given unto him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth.” The earth spoken of by John would be the Roman Empire, for the empire was the last great world empire as seen by Daniel, and the scope of Revelation always contemplates this world power.

In this epoch, peace is taken from the empire and we know this peace has been lost through civil war by the phrase, “That they should kill one another.” This is in as plain language as symbolism can speak.

As the first seal of peace was substantiated by corroborating history, so we may expect to find further events of history corresponding to the symbolism of this second seal. This we find to be abundantly true.

At the close of the reign of Commodus we find the end of peace in the Roman empire. Commodus was slain. As son of Marcus Aurelius, the last of the Antonines, he proved to be a most unworthy successor of his illustrious father. For three years he reigned well, but an unsuccessful attempt against his life, three years after his ascension to the throne seemed suddenly to kindle all the dormant



passions of a Nero. The remaining ten years of his reign were marked by the perpetration of all manner of cruelties and the staining of the imperial purple with the most detestable debaucheries and crimes.

The empire was finally relieved of this insane tyrant by some members of the royal household who put him to death. This began a reign of civil war. Hear Myers on this:

“For nearly a century after the death of Commodus (192 to 284 A.D.) the emperors were elected by the army, and hence the rulers of this period have been called, “The Barrack Emperors.” Upon the death of Commodus, Pertinax, a distinguished senator, was placed on the throne; but his efforts to enforce discipline among the praetorians aroused their anger, and he was slain by them after a short reign of only three months. The soldiers then gave out notice that they would sell the empire to the highest bidder. It was accordingly set up for sale at the praetorian camp and struck off to Didius Julianus, a wealthy senator, who promised twenty-five thousand sesterces to each of the twelve thousand soldiers at this time composing the guard. So the price of the empire was three hundred million sesterces (about \$12,000,000).—Myers Ancient history P. 515.

This gives us a preview of what lay in store for the empire. During this period of the national history thirty-two emperors, and twenty-seven pretenders alternately hurled each other from the throne. Hear Sismondi:

“With Commodus commenced the third and most calamitous period. It lasted ninety-two years, from 192 to 284. During that period thirty-two emperors, and twenty-seven pretenders alternately hurled each other from the throne by *incessant civil warfare*. Ninety-two years of almost incessant civil warfare taught the world on what a frail foundation the virtue of the Antonines had placed the felicity of the empire.”—Sismondi’s Fall of the Roman Empire Vol. 1, P. 36.

Gibbon in the first volume of his Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire devotes two hundred pages to the description of this “Red Horse” period of civil strife and rapine.

Of these thirty-two emperors, besides the pretenders only two died natural deaths; Severus, who died 211 A.D. and Volusion who died 253 A.D. All others died violent deaths.

What could more fittingly represent a period of fratricidal bloodshed and rapine, of constant civil war, than a *red* horse and its rider "to whom was given a great sword, and the power to take away peace, that men should kill one another?"

We wish to further consider the giving of that "great sword." The bow is gone now, which was the emblem of an alien, and a sword, the national weapon of Rome, replaces it.

This sword marks some special feature of the fulfillment of the events of the seal. It points to an epoch when the jealous ambitions of men of the sword drove them to brutality and murder.

There were stationed at Rome an army corps which outranked all others. We have already referred to them as the Praetorian guards and recounted their sale of the empire to Didius Julianus. It was an order in which the Praetorian Perfect was inducted into office by the public investment *with a sword*. It was the Praetorian Perfect and his guard that inaugurated this century of bloodshed.

What could more fittingly describe such a period, as portrayed under the second seal, than the giving of a great sword, the military emblem, to the *figure that rides the red* horse of John's prophecy?

### *The Third Seal*

*vs. 5, 6* Famine always follows war, and particularly civil war with its internal devastation of men, materials, industry and food production.

Therefore, it is only natural that we should read when the third seal was opened: "I heard the third living creature 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 living creatures say, a measure of wheat for a penny: and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine."

How natural that the period of civil war, indicated by the *red horse*, a period of bloodshed and anarchy should produce events symbolized by a *black horse*.

The horse, whatever his color, is a symbol of war, the change in color only signifies a changed aspect of that war. Black would indicate that the empire is still torn by calamitous war, but war that brought mourning and despair. Black has ever been the color of mourning in Scriptural usage. Jeremiah said: "Because of the

drought Judah mourneth, and the gate thereof languish; they are in deep mourning (literally black) for the land." (Jer. 14:2)

After noting the color of the horse, recognition is given to the fact that "he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand." If the balances were presented alone, we might see in them a symbol of justice, but in the hands of the rider of the black horse, and in connection with the weighing of grain that follows, they undoubtedly indicate a period characterized by scarcity of food.

The significance of balances in relation to food is made clear in the Scriptures. "And when I have broken the staff of your bread, the women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall deliver your bread again by *weights* and ye shall eat and not be satisfied" (Lev. 26:26)

"Moreover he said unto me, son of man, behold, I will break the staff of bread in Jerusalem: and they shall eat bread by *weight*, and with care; and they shall drink water by *measure* and with astonishment: That they may want bread and water and be astonished with one another, and consume away for their iniquity." (Ezek. 4:16, 17)

The prices quoted here for wheat and barley are famine prices. The "measure" spoken of here was, roughly speaking, the equivalent of our quart, and the word rendered "penny" is the Greek "denarius," which equals about fourteen cents in our money. A bushel of wheat, at the price designated would be nearly five dollars, and a bushel of barley one dollar and fifty cents.

A denarius was the usual rate for one day's labor. In our money, considering the rate of exchange, that would mean a bushel of wheat cost about twenty dollars and a bushel of barley shows that rich and poor alike were affected, because wheat was the grain of the rich and barley the staff of the poor.

Since oil and wine were common articles of food for the people, the prohibition of their use, taken in connection with the context would seem to imply that at this time these items were no longer used by the common people.

But balances were also, in that day, employed in taxation. A portion of the production of the land was a part of the taxes extorted by the Roman empire. The balances then would symbolize a period of excessive taxation, as well as scarcity.

This heavy taxation began even in the days of the second seal period when Caracalla granted Roman citizenship to multitudes in his empire in order to tax the more persons.

“Caracalla’s sole political act of real importance was the bestowal of citizenship upon all the free inhabitants of the empire; and this he did, not to give them a just privilege, but that he might collect from them certain special taxes which only Roman citizens had to pay.”—Myers Ancient History P. 517

But with the death of the last emperor of the third seal period, Carinus in 284, a new type of government was inaugurated by Diocletian. The change was marked by Diocletian’s assumption of the titles of Asiatic royalty and court ceremonials. Ostentation and extravagance marked all the appointments of the palace. He also inaugurated a new administrative system.

“The century of anarchy which preceded the ascension of Diocletian; had made manifest the need of a system which would discourage assassination and provide a regular mode of succession to the throne. Diocletian devised a system the aim of which was to compass both ends. First, he chose as a colleague a companion ruler, Maximian, who, like himself, bore the title of Augustus. Then each of the co-emperors associated with himself an assistant, who took the title of Caesar and was considered the son of the Emperor. There were thus two Augusti and two Caesars. (From the number of rulers, this government has received the name of Tetrarchy) . . . a most serious drawback to this system was the heavy expense involved in the maintenance of four courts with their endless retinue of officers and dependents. It was complained that the number of those who received the revenues of the state was greater than those that contributed to them. *The burden of taxation grew unendurable. Husbandry in some regions ceased* and great numbers were reduced to beggary or driven into brigandage . . . it was this vicious system of taxation which more than any other one cause, after slavery, contributed to the depopulation, improverishment and final downfall of the nation.” Myers’ Ancient History Pages 521, 522.

This feature of taxation is peculiar to the third seal. A quotation or two will suffice. This taxation began even in the second seal, but reached such ruinous proportions in the third seal as to render it an outstanding feature of that epoch. Gibbon speaks of the beginning of such taxation under Caracalla. (A.D. 211-217)

“Nor was the rapacious son of Severus (Caracalla) contented

with such a measure of taxation as had appeared sufficient to his moderate predecessors. Instead of a twentieth, he exacted a tenth of all legacies and inheritances, and during his reign he crushed alike every part of the empire under the weight of his iron scepter."—Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of Rome* Vol. , P. 95.

Lactantius, an historian of the fourth century recorded:

"Swarms of exactors sent into the provinces, filled them with agitation and terror, as though a conquering enemy were leading them into captivity. The fields were separately measured, the trees and vines, the flocks and herds were numbered, and an examination made of men . . . the sick and the weak were borne to the place of inscription, a reckoning was made of the age of each, years were added to the young and subtracted from the old, in order to subject them to the higher taxation the law imposed. The whole scene was filled with *wailing and sadness*."  
—Lactantius.

Surely, no more impressive or expressive symbol, than a black horse, indicating *mourning*, and its rider holding a pair of balances in his hand, indicative of famine, could have properly described the epoch covered by the third seal.

### *The Fourth Seal*

vs. 7, 8 "And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come and see." 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 beasts of the earth."

The conditions under the fourth seal reach the worst. The color of the fourth horse is pale. Remembering the horse is ever a symbol of war, whatever its color, we are by the continued use of the symbol of the horse reminded that it is still a time of war. The color of the horse now being "pale"—the bloodless color of death—pictures such conditions that the rider of this pale horse appropriately is called "Death."

Behind him Hades, the abode of the dead, follows close upon Death's heels, to swallow up the dead in his awful maws.

Death and Hades accomplish their task by the employment of four familiar and fearful instruments:

1. The sword, or war. 2. Hunger, or famine. 3. Death, or pestilence, for the word here used is often so translated, and such is its signification here, and 4. Finally, destruction caused by wild beasts.

The conditions described under the fourth seal are the logical result of the events which transpired under the three preceding seals.

When we recall that thirty-two military governors, and twenty-seven pretenders alternately hurled each other from the throne in a period of ninety-two years, and that of the thirty-two military governors all died violent deaths but two, we can better understand how Death and Hades took such a toll of human life by civil war, famine, pestilence and wild beasts which would increase as the provinces became depopulated.

Shall we turn to the most authentic Roman historian which we have, even Gibbon:

“But a long and general famine was a calamity of a more serious kind. It was the inevitable consequence of rapine and oppression, which extirpated the produce of the present, and the future harvests. Famine is almost always followed by epidemical diseases, the effect of scanty and unwholesome food. Other causes must, however, have contributed to the furious plague, which, from the years two-hundred fifty to the year two-hundred sixty-five, raged without interruption in every province, every city, and almost every family of the Roman Empire. During some time five thousand persons died daily in Rome; and many towns, that had escaped the hands of the barbarians, were entirely depopulated . . . about half the people of Alexandria perished.” Volume 1, pages 328, 329.

No wonder it was said that power was given Death and Hades to destroy one fourth part of the earth.

Summarizing, we have found that:

1. The first seal was the *seal of conquest*.
2. The second seal was the *seal of civil war*.
3. The third seal was the *seal of want or famine*.
4. The fourth seal was the *seal of Death*.

The seals on the one hand collectively, say, “Here is the future in symbolism.” History, on the other hand, says, “Here is the fulfillment.”

How faithfully they agree! At the mouth of two or three witnesses a thing is established.

### *The Fifth Seal*

vs. 9-11 With the opening of the fifth seal the scene changes completely. It is obvious, from the radical change of imagery, that the subject of the prophetic vision is completely different. No longer is the horse, the symbol of war, present. With the passing of the horses, the armed riders are gone. The fifth seal gives us a vision of the suffering saints.

The vision implies the peril and persecution of the church on earth. This is to be expected when we consider that Revelation is the "uncovering" of the future as it relates to the church, or the Israel of God under the Gospel Dispensation.

"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."

Since this calls our attention to something happening under the altar, which was a piece of furniture in the temple, it would indicate that this vision refers to the martyrs of the church. This is not an oratorio of praise, but a chant of suffering, coming from the souls of those who had been slain.

The fifth seal is the *Seal of Persecution* and it evidently refers to some period in the history of the church when a war of extermination was waged against the early Christians.

Since the first four seals cover conditions through the terrible events from Pentecost to nearly the close of the third century, we naturally look to see if conditions following these seals correspond to the symbolism of the fifth seal.

At the death of Commodus, a very notable, but cruel ruler came to the throne of the Roman Empire. He was Diocletian, who reigned from 284 A.D., to 305 A.D. Myers says:

"The ascension of Diocletian marks an important era in the history of the Roman Empire. The two matters of chief importance connected with his reign are the changes he effected in the government and his persecution of the Christians."

Myers Ancient History P. 520.

While the church had suffered persecution before, beginning with that perpetrated by the Jews of the Apostles' day, and with the beginning of Gentile persecution under Nero, no persecution had ever before been so universal, so long continued and so brutal. Diocletian determined to wipe the name "Christian" from the earth. Says Myers:

"Toward the end of his reign, Diocletian inaugurated against the Christians a persecution which continued long after his abdication, and which was the severest, as it was the last, waged against the church by the pagan emperors.

The imperial decrees ordered that their churches be torn down; that the property of the new societies should be confiscated; that the writings of the sect should be burned; and that the Christians themselves, unless they should join in the sacrifices to the gods of the state, should be pursued to death as outlaw. For ten years, which, however were broken by short periods of respite, the Christians were subjected to the fierce flames of persecution. . . . It was during this and various other persecutions that vexed the church in the second and third centuries that the Christians sought refuge in the Catacombs, those vast subterranean galleries and chambers under the city of Rome."—Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of Rome*, pages 522, 523.

To Myers we add that of the ancient historian Gibbon. He writes of the persecution inaugurated by Diocletian as follows:

"The resentment, or the fears of Diocletian, at length transported him beyond all bounds of moderation, which he had hitherto preserved, and he declared, in a series of cruel edicts, *his intention* of abolishing the *Christian name*. By the first of these edicts, the governors of the provinces were directed to apprehend all persons of the ecclesiastical order; and the prisons, destined for the vilest criminals, were soon filled with a multitude of bishops, presbyters, deacons, readers and exhortists. By a second edict, the magistrates were commanded to employ every method of severity, which might reclaim them from their odious superstition, and oblige them to return to the established worship of gods. This rigorous order was extended, by a subsequent edict, to the whole body of Christians, who were exposed to a violent and general persecution."

—Gibbons *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Volume 11, page 69.



Diocletian's persecution certainly would inaugurate conditions as symbolized under the fifth seal.

Other persecutions had been local, this was general. Others were for a little season, Diocletian's persecution raged for ten years; others were designed to stay the progress of Christianity, the prime purpose of this was "to abolish the Christian name from the earth."

No wonder the bleeding, mangled church cried, 'O Lord, how long dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?'

These martyred Christians called for judgment and retribution. The answer to this cry is worthy of our notice. Three things are featured.

*First*, it is said that they must await the great judgment, which would not occur until another distinct group of martyrs should be slain. The group of the fifth seal had been slain by pagan Rome, the second group referred to evidently were to be those martyred by Papal Rome, which succeeded the pagan empire.

*Second*, they must wait "a little season." Of course such a season must be measured by God's standard of measurement, to whom "one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." (II Peter 3:8)

*Third*, they were to be given white robes. White robes are a symbol of justification and victory. In the marriage of the Lamb, to his wife is "to be granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." (Rev. 19:7-8)

Another startling factor in this promise to the martyrs is this: These souls were not in the Holy of Holies, a type of heaven itself (Heb. 9:24) but under the altar of the outer court—a type of the world.

These white robes—symbols of justification and victory—then imply the justification and triumph of the church on earth. And thus everything did come to pass.

*At the close of this persecution* symbolized in the fifth seal, Constantine, by a decree issued at Milan A.D. 313, the year of the Battle at the Milvian Bridge, declared, and here are the words of that decree:

"We grant to Christians and to all others full liberty of following that religion which each may choose."

## *The Sixth Seal*

vs. 12-17 The opening of the sixth seal is described in six verses of rare majesty and power. The scenes portrayed are calculated to fill the heart with awe and consternation.

The earth with mighty convulsions reels with a terrific earthquake that shakes mountains and islands from their places. There are also heavenly demonstrations. The sun becomes black as sackcloth; the moon turns red as blood, stars fall and the heavens themselves are rolled away as a scroll. The inhabitants of earth are so terror stricken at the sight they call for the mountains to fall upon them.

The imagery here is very striking, but we must remember that these are not literal earthquakes, falling stars, moving islands or mountains. These are symbols, so we look not for literal fulfillment of such *physical phenomenon*, but for *historical* events which correspond to these symbolical pictures.

Before, we search out the fulfillment in historical events, we must first ascertain the meaning of these symbols which are used. These symbols are borrowed from the mightiest agencies and powers in nature.

### *A Study of these Symbols*

*First*, we take up the meaning of an *earthquake* when used symbolically. As John's "earth" constantly refers to the Roman Empire, this earthquake refers to political and religious upheavals within its borders. The earthquake is used by the prophets of the old Testament as a symbol of political and religious agitation. In Haggai 2:6, 7, we read:

"Yet once, it is a little time, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land, and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come."

*Second*, the sun, moon and stars are used in the Scriptures to represent earthly potentates and dignitaries and great lights in political and religious realms. To illustrate: In the dream of Joseph which turned his brothers against him, these physical symbols were employed to represent people.

"And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it to his brothers, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold,

the sun and the moon, and the eleven stars made obeisance to me." "And he told it to his father, and to his brethren; and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, what is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?" (Gen. 37:9, 10)

Orientalists often referred to the king as a sun, and princes and lesser rulers to stars. In Daniel, as he describes the world kingdoms we read:

"And it (the little horn) waxed great, even to the host of heaven: and it cast down some of the host of the *stars to the ground* and stamped upon them." (Daniel 8:10)

Again in Ezekial 32:1-15 we have a prophecy which will help us in the imagery of divine symbolism of the sixth seal. The prophet is predicting the violent overthrow of Egypt at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. This national overthrow is described in the following symbols:

"And when I shall put thee out (or extinguish thee), I will cover the heaven, and make the *stars* thereof dark; I will cover the *sun* with a cloud, and the *moon* shall not give her light." (Ezekial 32:7)

Again in Joel 3:15, we read:

"The *sun* and *moon* shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining. The Lord also shall roar out of Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth *shall shake*."

In the above quoted passages we see that the overthrowing of a nation was described in the imagery of the sun being blackened, the stars becoming dark and the earth being shaken.

Isaiah, also, furnishes us with a passage which is closely related in thought and verbiage to that of the sixth seal. The prophet is speaking of the time when "the indignation of the Lord shall be upon the nations."

"And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be *rolled together* as a *scroll*; and their *host shall fall* down, as the leaf falleth off the vine, and as a *falling fig* from the *fig tree*." (Isa. 34:2-4)

How similar this language to Johns' who said, "The stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs."

We are not studying physical astronomy in the Book of Revelation. That is where so many folk have been in error. They have tried to associate these symbols with actual physical earthquakes, falling material stars and darkening of the sun.

We are studying spiritual astronomy here and these symbols portray human events in the which great dignitaries in the political arena are said to fall and governmental systems are shaken.

*Third*, the *mountain* and *island* are used to denote earthly kingdoms. *Mountains* in the scriptures stand for conspicuous nationalities. In Jeremiah's prophecy against Babylon, he says:

"Behold, I am against thee, O Destroying Mountain, saith the Lord, which destroyeth all the earth: and I will stretch out mine hand upon thee, and roll thee down from the rocks, and will make thee a *burnt mountain*." (Jeremiah 51:25)

The island symbolizes lesser powers. In his prophecy of Christ, he said, "He (that is Christ) shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law." (Isaiah 42:4)

This imagery is most appropriate to express a complete breaking up and removal of the whole system of human government.

With this clarification of the symbols, it is not difficult to discover that the sixth seal is a period of great and startling revolutions, not in the heavens, but upon the earth. All this symbolism foreshadows a violent, bloody upheaval of governmental systems, rulers and the establishment of a new order on the earth.

And since "earth" to the mind of John is the Roman Empire, it naturally is within its boundaries that we must search for the fulfillment.

We shall look for events in political, social and religious spheres, which are pictured here in terms of physical things.

There are some stirring convulsions in history immediately following the persecution under the fifth seal. As the fifth seal was the seal of *Persecution*, the sixth seal can be designated, "the seal of *Revolution*."

Having considered the meaning of the symbols, we are now ready to search out the time of this seal.

### *The Time of this Seal*

We found that the fifth seal closed with the Edict of Toleration issued by Constantine in A. D. 313, so then these events naturally follow that epoch.

We note that one of the characteristics of this sixth seal is that the time will be one of mourning. The mourners now are not the souls under the altar, but the falling stars, or great of earth, who opposed the One who sat on His Throne. They cry out and say to the mountains: "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." (Rev. 6:16)

Then taking a brief look forward to the next chapter—the seventh—we observe there follows a period of great joy and prosperity experienced by the people of God.

Holding this sixth seal and its symbolism in one hand and a book of history in the other, do we find a time in which the unbelieving world on the one hand is in mourning, and the church, on the other hand enjoying a time of victory and prosperity?

Hear Myers on this:

"Galerius and Constantine, who became Augusti on the abdication of Diocletian and Maximian, had reigned together only one year when the latter died at York, in Britain. His soldiers, disregarding the rule of succession is determined by the system of Diocletian, proclaimed his son Constantine emperor. Six competitors for the throne arose in different quarters. For eighteen years Constantine fought to gain the supremacy." —Myer's Ancient History, page 524.

Also hear Gibbon on this matter:

"The abdication of Diocletian and Maximian was succeeded by eighteen years of discord and confusion. The empire was afflicted by five civil wars; and the remainder of the time was not so much a state of tranquility as a suspension of arms between several hostile monarchs, who viewing each other with an eye of fear and hatred, strove to increase their respective forces at the expense of their subjects."—Gibbons Decline and Fall of Rome, page 451.

In passing we may say that Gibbon devoted fifty pages (small print) to the description of the evils of this time. Surely, we have here a time of death and mourning when kings and pretenders fell like stars and great mourning resulted from one civil war fol-

lowing after a preceding one. This was a time when kingdoms, indicated by mountains and islands, were moved out of their places.

The forces of paganism had rolled around the enemies of Constantine. When he was crowned in triumph upon the wreck of six imperial thrones and their royal claimants, there was great mourning on the part of the enemies of the Lamb and the cross. For when Constantine, after the battle of Milvian Bridge, granted amnesty to all Christians, paganism went into deep mourning.

Shall we enumerate a few of the outstanding earth-shaking, heaven-removed-as-a-scroll, results of all this change. Not only was paganism shaken but Christianity waited with bated breath. The church watched Constantine progress with singular interest. While Constantine had not embraced Christianity before Milvian Bridge, yet his mother, Helena, was a Christian and it was generally believed he was friendly toward his mother's faith. After his embracing of the Christian faith these earthquake like results followed:

1. In 313 A.D. Constantine issued the decree at Milan placing Christianity on an equal footing with the other religions of the empire.
2. In 319 A.D. he decreed his mother's religion should be the acknowledged faith of the empire.
3. In 321 A.D. he decreed that Sunday, the day of worship of Christians, since Pentecost, should be observed in all the cities by a cessation of labor.
4. In 325 A.D. he abolished by royal decree the bloody gladiatorial combats, against which the Christians had objected. The far reaching impact of this can better be grasped when we remember this Roman institution had existed for one whole millennium.
5. In 325 A.D. he called the first general council of the church at Nicea, a town in Asia Minor, Arianism was denounced, and a formula of Christian faith adopted, which became known as the Nicene creed—the mother of all human creeds.
6. In 331 A.D. he decreed that the pagan religion should no longer exist and ordered the destruction of all heathen temples.
7. He completely reorganized the government by laying out the

empire into four divisions called prefectures, which were subdivided into thirteen dioceses, and there again into one hundred and sixteen provinces. Truly, the old heavens were being moved away as a school and the Roman earth was being shaken like a mighty earthquake.

8. But the greatest earth-shaking change is yet to be described. Constantine did not seem to be satisfied with the destroying pagan faith, changing Roman customs and laws, he aimed his greatest blow at the imperial city itself. For over one thousand years Rome had been the seat of the empire, growing from a tiny village to the capitol of the world. In 330 he determined to shake the Roman world from center to circumference, by removing the capitol from Italy to a new city on the banks of the Hellespont, and to call it after his own name—Constantine. Surely, the mighty mountain of the west was moved from its place.

Hear Myers on this:

“After the recognition of Chirstianity, the most important act of Constantine was the selection of Byzantium on the Bosphorus, as the new capitol of the empire. There were many and weighty reasons urging Constantine to establish a new capitol in the east.

First, there were urgent military reasons for making the change. The most dangerous enemies of the empire now were the barbarians behind the Danube and the kings of the recently restored Persian monarchy. This condition of things rendered almost necessary the establishment in the east of a new and permanent basis for military operations.

Second, there were also commercial reasons for the transfer of the capitol. Rome had long before this ceased to be in any sense the commercial center of the state, as it was in early times. Through the Roman conquest of Greece and Asia, the center of the population, wealth and commerce of the empire had shifted eastward. Now of all the cities in the east, Byzantium was the one most favorably situated to become the commercial metropolis of the enlarged state.

Third, there were religious motives. The priests of the pagan shrines particularly resented the action of Constantine in es-

prising the new and rated religion, and regarded him as an apostate. It was the existence of these sentiments and feelings among the inhabitants of Rome, which, for one thing, led Constantine to seek elsewhere a new center and seat of his court and government.

But far outweighing all other reasons for the removal of the capitol were the political motives. Constantine, like Diocletian, wished to establish a system of government modeled upon the despotic monarchy of the east . . .

In honor of the emperor the name was changed to Constantinople, the "city of Constantine."—Myers Ancient History, pages 527, 528.

These historical events, forming the most remarkable revolution that the world has ever seen, constitute an exact fulfilment of the symbolism of the sixth seal. Sun and moon are darkened and stars fall, mountains and islands are removed out of their places.

With the blasting of pagan hopes by the victories of Constantine and his subsequent embracing of Christianity, accompanied by his decree to destroy all heathen temples, more than one imperial champion of paganism called out in distress.

Some of the pagan writers almost used the very language of Revelation in their description of this particular period of history:

"As a dreadful and amazing prodigy, which covered the earth with darkness, and restored the ancient dominion of chaos and night."

We have styled the sixth seal as "the seal of Revolution," both in the political and religious realms.

## CHAPTER VII

### SEALING OF GOD'S SERVANTS

*Text (7:1-17)*

1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that no wind should blow on the earth, or on the sea, or upon any tree. 2 And I saw another angel ascend from the sunrising, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a great voice to the four angels to whom it was