

# THE SEVEN SEALS.

“AND I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within, and on the back side, sealed with seven seals. Rev. v, 1.

A sealed book is one whose contents are hidden. It was said to Daniel, “Shut up the words, and seal the book, till the time of the end.” Dan. xii, 4. See Isa. xxix, 11.

The book with seven seals symbolizes God’s purposes, to be unfolded during the Christian age on loosing its several seals.

The entire fifth chapter of Revelation seems to be a grand introduction to the subject of the seven seals which is given in the sixth chapter as follows:

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

This armed warrior, riding forth conquering and to conquer, symbolizes the victories of the gospel as preached in its purity and power by Christ’s first ministers. The white horse denotes the purity of faith and life of the primitive church.

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

The red horse denotes blood and carnage, and has reference to those times of persecution of the followers of Jesus Christ, covering much of the period called the ten persecutions. JAMES WHITE LIBRARY

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

The black horse denotes darkness and error, the opposite of the gospel in its purity symbolized by the white horse. The events under this seal cover the period of apostasy, from Constantine, A. D. 313, to the unlimited rule of the Papacy, A. D. 538. On this seal Wm. Miller, Lectures, p. 181, remarks as follows:

“When the church became connected with worldly power and wisdom, she lost her purity of doctrine and practice, and adopted in her creed maxims and principles congenial with the natural heart, and forms and ceremonies for show and parade, rather than the humbling and cross-bearing life of the followers of Jesus. The balances denoted that religion and civil power would be united in the person who would administer the executive power in the government, and that he would claim the judicial authority both in church and state. This was true among the Roman emperors, from the days of Constantine until the reign of Justinian, when he gave the same judicial power to the bishop of Rome. The measures of wheat and barley for a penny, denote that the members of the church would be eagerly engaged after worldly goods, and the love of money would be the prevailing spirit of the times.”

Verses 7, 8. And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast 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 the beasts of the earth.

The rider upon the pale horse is named Death. Hell, the grave, followed with him. The symbols under this seal denote great persecution, and martyrdom of the church. The period of this seal cannot be mistaken. It must have been during the unlimited, unrebuked,

unrestrained, persecuting reign of the Papacy, from about A. D. 538, to the commencement of the sixteenth century, when the reformers began their work of exposing the corruptions of the Papal system.

Verses 9-11. 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 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.

It seems proper that a period of time should be given to the events under the fifth seal, the same as to those under the other seals, which time, it may appear from the following remarks, was from the rise of the reformation to the time when civil power was taken from the Papacy.

1. The souls under the altar were not in Heaven when John had this vision, from the fact that they had not been born. Neither can we suppose that this scene takes place in Heaven. A. Barnes says:

“We are not to suppose that this *literally* occurred, and that John actually saw the souls of the martyrs beneath the altars—for the whole representation is symbolical; nor are we to suppose that the injured and the wronged in Heaven actually pray for vengeance on those who wronged them, or that the redeemed in Heaven will continue to pray with reference to things on the earth; but it may be fairly inferred from this that there will be *as real* a remembrance of the wrongs of the persecuted, the injured and the oppressed, *as if* such prayer were offered there.”

Dr. Clarke says:

“The altar is upon earth, not in Heaven.”

2. The scenes which John was viewing were upon the earth, hence, in the absence of proof that any other

altar is meant, it seems a necessary conclusion that John saw the place of slaughter of the church of God by Papal Rome, where the earth has drunk up the blood of martyrs, under the figure of an altar of sacrifice.

3. These slain are represented as crying to God to have their blood avenged on them that dwell on the earth, the same as the voice of Abel's blood from the ground, Gen. iv, 9, 10; or the cry of the stone from the wall, and the answer of the beam out of the timber, Hab. ii, 11; or the cry of the hire of the laborer, James v, 4. If it be said that these souls must be in conscious being in Heaven in order to cry, then we reply, that Abel's blood, the stone and the beam, and money, are also conscious, as they are all represented as crying. But, really, if these souls are in Heaven in the participation of fullness of joy, and pleasures forevermore, why are they represented as crying for vengeance on those who cut short their mortal life with all its woes, and hastened them to the enjoyment of the perfect bliss of Heaven?

Dr. Clarke, himself a believer in the conscious state of the dead, makes the following frank admission, in his notes on this chapter:

“*And they cried with a loud voice*]. That is, their *blood*, like that of Abel, cried for vengeance; for we are not to suppose that there was anything like a vindictive spirit in those happy and holy souls who had shed their blood for the testimony of Jesus. We sometimes say, *Blood cries for blood*; that is, in the order of Divine justice, every murderer, and every murdering persecutor, shall be punished.

4. The Scriptures sometimes attribute life, action, intelligence, and personality, to inanimate objects, to show how God regards those connected with those objects; hence the unconscious slain are represented as crying from beneath the altar of Papal sacrifice. Justice, long trampled in the dust, now cries for judgment and vengeance on the Papacy, which had spilled the blood

of the church of Jesus Christ. Luther and his associates were imbued with the spirit of this cry which went up from the earth that had drunk the blood of millions of the martyrs of Jesus, and they exposed the corruptions of the Papacy, which trembled before the reformers, and in A. D. 1798 was stripped of its civil authority. Thus the blood of the martyrs was avenged on those that dwelt on the earth. This has no reference to the final judgment and punishment of the wicked, but refers to the change in the condition of the Papacy. “He that killeth into captivity shall go into captivity; he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword.” Chap. xiii, 10.

5. White robes were given to every one of them. They had been denounced by the Papacy as vile heretics, and executed as such, and thus their characters had been robed in darkness. But the Reformation exposed the crimes of the Papacy, turned the scale, vindicated the cause of the holy martyrs of Jesus, and clothed them with white robes. Hence, the sermons, the prayers, and the songs of praise of the Christian church, since the great Reformation, have held these millions of the slain for Jesus' name forth to the world in spotless purity.

6. They were to rest yet a little season, until their fellow-servants and brethren should be killed as they had been. Let it be particularly noticed that it is the same that cried, that rests. If it be justice that cried, as has been shown, then it is justice that rests, or is stayed for a little season. We stated that the opening of this seal commenced when the reformers began to expose the Papacy, and vindicate the cause of the martyrs. But the cry of justice was not answered at once. Time must be given to bring about these grand events. Their cause must rest yet for a little season. For notwithstanding the influence of the Reformation, the Papacy, clothed with authority to punish heretics, did put to death more of the followers of Jesus. This done, the *little* season, or the period of the fifth seal, closed. •

Verses 12-17. And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig-tree casteth her untimely figs when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bond man, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand.

The events of the first five seals have been described in a style highly figurative; but with the sixth seal there seems to be a complete change to the narration of literal facts. The events under this seal are,

1. A great earthquake, which, probably, was the great earthquake at Lisbon, in 1775, in which 30,000 persons were killed. The Encyclopedia Americana states: "It extended from Greenland to Africa and America."

2. The sun became black as sackcloth of hair, which was the same as the darkening of the sun, Matt. xxiv, and was fulfilled in the wonderful dark day of May 19, 1780. See exposition of Matt. xxiv, to be had at the Review Office, Battle Creek, Mich.

3. The moon became as blood. The night following the dark day, the moon, when visible at all, looked like blood.

4. The stars of heaven fell unto the earth, which is the same as the falling stars of Matt. xxiv, and had a wonderful fulfillment Nov. 13, 1833, as described by John, of which thousands now living were eye-witnesses.

5. The heavens will depart as a scroll when it is rolled together. This is in the future, to be fulfilled when the voice of God shakes the earth, also the atmospheric heavens. Heb. xii, 22-27; Joel iii, 16; Jer. xxv, 30, 31; Rev. xvi, 17.

6. Mountains and islands will be moved out of their places. The voice of God that shakes the heavens will

also shake the earth. Mountains will be thrown down, and islands sunk. The earth's surface will be so broken up as to prepare the way for

7. All classes of the lost to hide in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains from the burning glory then being manifested of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. They have witnessed the shaking of the earth, the casting out of the rocks of the mountains; all hope of mercy is gone, and they desire and pray that some rock or mountain may cover them from the awful glory of God and the Lamb. They are still looking forward with dreadful fear to the coming of the Son of man, and inquire, "Who shall be able to stand?"

We have followed the events under six of the seals from the first advent of Christ down past the three great signs of his second advent, namely, in the sun, moon, and stars. Here the sixth chapter of the Revelation closes, and the prophetic chain is broken off by the introduction of the sealing of the 144,000, the subject of chapter vii, which locates the sealing in our time. Hence we find the declaration in reference to the seventh seal, the last link of this prophetic chain, in

Chap. viii, 1. And when he had opened the seventh seal there was silence in Heaven about the space of half an hour.

In prophetic time, a day for a year, about half an hour would be a week's duration. This probably applies to the second advent of Christ, and marks the period from the time that he leaves Heaven with *all the holy angels with him*, Matt. xxv, 31, till he returns with all the saints resurrected and changed. All the heavenly harpers being absent, there is said to be silence in Heaven.

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