

Article of the Month
August, 2019

***The Seven
Churches, Seals, and Trumpets
of Revelation***
(Part 3)

The previous two Articles-of-the-Month have dealt with an overview of the subject and with a more specific look at the Seven Churches. Reviewing those two articles will help as we progress in looking at the Seven Seals of Revelation.

FOUR PLUS THREE

When we quickly scan the Seven Seals (Revelation 6 through 8:1), we see immediately the curious fact that the first four Seals (6:1-8) are set apart from the final three in that they have a series of four horses of differing colors. The fact is, the Lord seems to indicate that the first four periods of Christianity's history decline spiritually. Then the final three periods have a spiritual "upswing." This is even indicated in Revelation 8:13 when the message is that the final three Trumpets are "woes" to the establishment.

As we have seen in the messages to the Seven Churches, it is with the Fifth "Angel" (John Wycliffe) that a significant spreading of the message causes great concern as a threat to the powers that have established themselves firmly. Even though Sardis is the very nadir of spirituality, the Lord during Sardis sows the seed which begins a "new crop" of Christian vitality. Sardis is a short Church epoch (150 years), but its "angel" began a hunger and a movement toward liberty as had never before been seen in Church history. For this cause, Wycliffe is known as "The Morning Star of the Reformation."

Consequently, the Churches, the Seals, and the Trumpets all substantiate that (at least from the Lord's point of view) Christianity deteriorates for four periods and then gains new strength for the final three epochs of its history.

THE SEVEN SEALS

As we have discussed previously, "seals" are protective devices. They lock out the ability to probe the contents of a document (in this case the histories of the Churches) until the Lord wishes the experiences of those Churches to be comprehended. Thus, as we probe the secrets of the Seven Seals, we must remember that in each case the Lord is saying,

Return to 2019 Index

“Alright. You have gone through experiences which you could not truly appreciate. But I now want you and the Churches that follow you to see how your experiences have contributed to the ultimate goals of My plans and to the ultimate benefit of the development of My Church. Therefore, I will OPEN the appropriate Seal at the appropriate time so that you can see what really happened and how it affected not only you, but also the world around you.”

In short, since the Seals are opened at the close of each period, they could well be characterized by the question, “What just happened?”

THE FIRST FOUR SEALS (Revelation 6:1 - 8:1)

The first four seals have a few things in common. We have mentioned the horses. Horses are a symbol of a power that takes us somewhere. The French author, Victor Hugo, once said, “Greater than the tread of mighty armies is an idea whose time has come.” Others have said, “The pen is mightier than the sword.” These quotations are accurate. Nothing moves men more than IDEAS. Horses, because they move us somewhere — they transport us — are symbols of doctrines (teachings or ideas). Their changing colors in the first four Seals will be of special significance.

The first four Seals also have in common, references to “living ones.” Translations vary. But these “living ones” are symbols of God’s attributes (Wisdom, Justice, Love, and Power). When they are translated “beasts” in the KJV, or “living creatures” in the NAS, we are misled. God is not created. Therefore, neither are His attributes! The “living ones” in Chapter 6 are a reference back to Chapter 4:6-8. Therefore, when they are numbered in Chapter 6, we can refer back to Chapter 4 to determine which “living one” is meant.

The attributes are symbolized by actual creatures. The LION represents POWER. Jesus and Satan are both called lions in Scripture because of their immense influence or power in the Divine Plan. The CALF represents JUSTICE. In Israel’s Atonement-Day sacrifices (“Yom Kippur” — Leviticus 16) it is the calf (or bullock) that represents the sacrifice of Jesus — the animal whose blood was put on the “Mercy Seat” in satisfaction of God’s demand for justice to offset the original transgression of man. The FACE, LIKE THAT OF A MAN represents LOVE. This is because all of God’s dealings with man have as their objective man’s redemption. (“God so LOVED the world [mankind] that He gave His only-begotten Son.”) The FLYING EAGLE represents WISDOM. This symbol is derived from the eagle’s keen far-sightedness. Wisdom can see perfectly into the eons of the future.

In the first four Seals, these attributes each say “Come!” Thus they each want us to see how the events of their particular Seal-period have an effect on one particular attribute.

Return to 2019 Index

THE FIRST SEAL
(Revelation 6:1, 2)

This Seal teaches us, in summary, what really happened during the “Ephesus” stage of Church history. “Thunder” represents the noises of controversy. Thunder comes from lightning — flashes of blinding light (truth). The symbolism is that the Lord and the Apostles presented such revolutionary and powerful light that it caused great “noises” in the religious and social worlds — upsetting controversies.

The horse is, at this time, “white.” This represents purity. All of the doctrine which Jesus and the Apostles taught was unmixed with any error. The strength of these truths “conquered” the hearts and minds of those sincere souls who were truly seeking God. Christianity quickly grew from a band of 13 to the point where 5000 believed in one day! (Acts 4:4)

THE SECOND SEAL
(Revelation 6:3, 4)

As the persecution era dawned (“Smyrna”), Christians began to lose their Christianity! In order to avoid the *terrible* tortures inflicted on believers, some turned their brethren in to the authorities. “Justice” was appalled! Christians were “slaying one another.”

As we have seen, this period was laden with the growth of anti-Christian doctrines within the Church. Gnosticism and other doctrines were emerging. This horse (body of doctrine) was turning “red” — stained with the sin of human thinking which was denying the very nature of Jesus. The horse was now under the control of the rising influences of the “tare” class and of the “Nicolaitans.” And, worst of all, these apostates began to corrupt Scripture! The Church finally had the entire New Testament in its hands. The “sword” was complete. But instead of using it for edification, the rising apostate influences used it against their fellow disciples. Excommunication became rampant.

THE THIRD SEAL
(Revelation 6:5, 6)

“Pergamos” is here summarized. By the time the apostate church is exalted to being the Roman state church, it found it expedient to corrupt as much doctrine as possible in order to maintain its appeal to the masses and its influence with the government. The horse has turned “black!” It no longer reflects light. And, while we might think that nothing can be darker than black, we will soon see that the ensuing “Dark Ages” find a way to make doctrines even worse!

Return to 2019 Index

The third Seal informs us that the “rider” (the force which directs doctrine — in this case the apostate state-church) measures out what you can have in the way of “spiritual food.” This aptly symbolizes that the “church” (the Roman church) no longer was willing to have ANYONE free to discuss, study, or spread Scripture. It wanted ALL doctrine to be dictated by itself — so that it (like black) would not reflect the true light.

But the Lord assures the saints that the work of the “oil” (the Holy Spirit) and the “wine” (the ability to participate with Jesus in the true sacrificing) WILL NOT BE STOPPED!

THE FOURTH SEAL
(Revelation 6:7, 8)

While things became quite intolerable during “Pergamos,” they became even worse once the power and authority of the Roman church became totally in control. “Thyatira” was a time when serving the Lord in spirit and in truth cost a person dearly.

The horse is now green! This fact seems hidden in most translations. But the Greek word is “chloros” — and it means green, as in chlorophyl. None of us has seen a naturally green horse! And green usually symbolizes “life!” But that is the case only in PLANTS! When a mammal turns green, IT IS DEAD! The Lord has thus symbolized that established “Christianity” now has absolutely no life-giving properties in its doctrines — it is gangrenous. The symbol may even go further. It might well suggest that the imbibing of what the Roman church taught could result only in spiritual death. The ONLY way to be fed was to have someone (like Peter Waldo and his followers) slip a piece of Scripture to you in secret.

The “rider” was the now-well-established Papacy. His name (from a spiritual standpoint) was “Dead and Buried.” But he did exercise the “authority” over the entire religious world — the Roman Empire. And he “used” (improperly) the “sword” (Scripture) to excommunicate (“kill”) any who might disagree with his dictates. He also used “famine” (spiritual starvation). After all, if only he could use the “sword,” and if it was forbidden even to be seen by others, absolutely NO ONE could have the ammunition to controvert what he claimed. But he also “killed” with death. He quite literally took away the lives of any who disputed his authority. And, of course, he didn’t do it with his own hands! He used the civil authorities (the “wild beasts of the earth”) to do his dirty work. So great was his power, that civil leaders dared not to carry out his every whim.

The first four Seals have taken us through almost fourteen centuries of Church history. When we now look back at the actual record of the period, we can see how these “Seals” have most accurately (and with few words) summarized both the events and the effects

Return to 2019 Index

of those events. It is a frightening testimony to the terrible decline of the Christianity which Jesus and the Apostles founded. But the next three Seals will show how the Lord begins to right the wrongs. It takes another five to six centuries to do so, but the Lord knew well in advance what was necessary to provide for the secret and successful development of the 144,000 saints who will reign with Jesus to bless “all the families of the earth.”

THE LAST THREE SEALS

(Revelation 6:9 - 8:1)

One thing is immediately obvious. The first four Seals have their descriptions completed in only eight verses. The remaining three require twenty-seven more verses — three-and-a-half times as much space. Because the events of extricating the true Church from so much error is a complicated process, the descriptions of the process require more detail. When we examine the Seven Trumpets, we will see that the final three epochs of Church history are called “woes.” (Revelation 8:13) These “woes” are NOT against the true Church, but against the false church and its paramours — the civil governments.

THE FIFTH SEAL

(Revelation 6:9-11)

We have finished with the deterioration of doctrine as pictured by the colors of horses. It could deteriorate no further!

When we examined the Seven Churches, we saw that Church #5 (Sardis) was in very poor condition — near death. It needed to have “the things (the saints) which remain” strengthened. The Fifth Seal echoes the frustrations of the brethren of that day and of previous periods. We see, symbolized, the brethren whose sacrifices were completed (“under the altar”) as having died wondering, “When will it ever end? Can it get any worse? Dear Lord, won’t you DO SOMETHING?” Certainly after the previous four epochs of things having become worse and worse, this is only of legitimate concern! After all, Wycliffe’s reforms during the Fifth Church had also been smashed into the ground (or so it *seemed*) by a yet-powerful Papacy. It is almost as if the saints of Sardis were unaware of the history-altering work having been done by their fifth “angel” — work which had actually begun the upward swing of spirituality for the Church. But God here comforts the hopes of the Church. He says, in essence, “You faithful ones have personally (despite what you have gone through) maintained your righteousness and the purity of your faith (the ‘white robe’). You have not lost it. Remember that! Rest in your graves. I must yet work on the completion of My Church before you will see and understand what I have been accomplishing. I have a set time for that. In a ‘little while’ (360 years) you will begin to experience the answers to your questioning.”

Return to 2019 Index

As Sardis was ending, the remedy for the restless and sincere desire for helpful truths had already been set in motion. Wycliffe's work had, almost invisibly, ignited a fire for reform which was to be fanned by Martin Luther as Sardis closed.

THE SIXTH SEAL (Revelation 6:12 - 7:17)

The Seal which was opened at the end of Philadelphia is very complex. But, as we shall see, the Sixth Church, the Sixth Seal, and the Sixth Trumpet are all just about the most-detailed in each series. It is a period during which enormously important things happened.

God DID, indeed, hear the prayer of the Fifth Seal saints! And He almost immediately sent the beginnings of a dramatic answer. He sent Martin Luther. We cannot exaggerate the effects which the Protestant Reformation had on Religion, Politics, Economics, and Society. These four elements of man's world are symbolized by the "four angels" of the Sixth Trumpet (Revelation 9:14).

As mentioned, the Seals focus on the CLOSE of each period. SO MUCH happened between the time of Luther's ministry (the early 1500's) and the late 19th Century when Philadelphia ended. Among these, and of nearly-incomprehensible importance, was the French Revolution (1789-1799) and its surrounding times — late in the Philadelphia period. It and its surrounding events changed the world as nothing had — perhaps since Noah's flood or Jesus' first advent. The Sixth Seal begins its descriptive symbolism with a reference to this major event.

Late in the Philadelphia Church "there was a great earthquake." THAT was the French Revolution. The Revelator continues to describe the contributing elements to that earth-shaking event. The "Sun" is a symbol of the Gospel light. But France actually for a period OUTLAWED religion as part of the Revolutionary "improvements!" Thus, the "Sun became black" — it was, as we say, "blacked out." When religion was outlawed in France, Catholic clergy and nuns fled the country en masse to avoid the guillotine. The same event affected the Jewish Law — Judaism, and the Old Testament Scriptures which upheld it. The "intellectual" French of "The Great Enlightenment" decided that the old Jewish sacrifices were nothing more than "bloody" nonsense. The result on "Christianity," once the anti-religion dictates subsided, was that the "stars" (the light-bearers — the ministers of "heaven" — of the religious world) fell from focusing on spiritual matters "to the earth" — to a social gospel (where most of Christianity continues to focus down to our day.)

At the same time (as the Revolution concluded), Napoleon suggested a restoration of Israel ("The Fig Tree" of Jesus' parables) to the Holy Land. God, of course, DID intend for that to happen — but not when Napoleon wanted it! Thus, this idea (which Napoleon couldn't succeed in accomplishing) was "untimely figs." Napoleon was in the

Return to 2019 Index

midst of his wars at the time. The Lord used this to frustrate the Israel-return plan. Thus the “great wind” (war) shook the idea into oblivion temporarily.

France, once it restored religion officially, INSISTED that the Roman church no longer be exclusive in France. Hence we see the “split apart” (Catholic and Protestant) nature of the “heavens” into the two-halves of a “scroll” — not unlikely the scroll which had its Seals removed by Jesus (Revelation 5:1-5). After all, was not the scroll of Church history now (in the Sixth Seal) divided into two parts — Roman and Protestant?

Another historical occurrence is shown in this account. “Every mountain and island were moved out of their places.” These represent the kingdoms and lesser powers of earth’s political world. The French Revolution so frightened the rest of Europe that they had to suddenly build their own alliances and reforms to avoid the spread of the revolutionary tendencies that had been fostered by the French Revolution. They were “removed out of their places” (conditions) which they had enjoyed for centuries. There was actually a belief that the (unwanted) “day of (God’s) wrath” was coming upon them.

Chapter 7 *seems* to pose a challenge by its presence in the midst of the Sixth Seal description. But it doesn’t when understood. It *seems* to be (and actually *is*) talking about things that would happen in Laodicea — the time of the Seventh Church and Seal. But it is talking about those things as *future* events because it is connecting them to what the French Revolution had begun.

It is not simple to give a concise explanation of Chapter 7 and its connection to the Sixth Seal, but a synopsis of the matter is this:

In Revelation 6:12, it is clear that we are speaking of the Sixth Seal — until we get to 8:1 when the Seventh Seal is opened. That Sixth Seal graphically describes the destabilizing troubles caused by the period of the French Revolution. As Chapter 7 opens, the Revelator sees a conversation between “four angels” (likely the same as 9:14 mentions) and Jesus. Jesus informs these four forces that they MUST NOT allow the continuation of the French Revolution upheavals to spread all over the world BECAUSE JESUS HAD TO COMPLETE THE CHURCH before those forces could again resume and be let loose on all the world. He then affirms that he needed to find the total of 144,000 saints. These are symbolized as Jews (Israelites) in the spiritual sense — NOT literally. (Compare 2:9 where the symbolism of Jews equalling true Christians was first used.) This finishing of the selection of the 144,000 is described as being completed in 7:8.

Clearly this DOES take us through the 7th Church! But it does so ONLY AS A FUTURE REFERENCE. Chapter 7 is still talking about events under the Sixth Seal. The FOCUS of 7:1-8 is immediately after the French Revolution — a warning to the four angels that they must not allow the final “great time of trouble” until 144,000 saints are chosen — a task which will reach its fulfillment in Laodicea.

Then the Revelator is told of ANOTHER group which will be completed at about the same time as the 144,000. This group is called “The Great Multitude.” These are the

Return to 2019 Index

spirit-begotten Christians who DO NOT succeed in becoming members of the 144,000. But they have, at their consecrations, *given up* any hope of returning in the resurrection on earth as humans. Thus John deals with them here — as a natural follow-up to his discussion of the completion of the Church. This group will be completed AFTER the Church is gone. Thus they will be, at least for a while, subject to the tribulations of the “Great Time of Trouble such as never was.”

As we can thus see, Chapter 7 is a summary of why the “four winds of earth” (which had been elements in the French Revolution) must be *contained* — not continued from the French Revolution events. But when they ARE released, the true Church will have been selected, and the Great Multitude will be changed in the midst of the trouble.

It will be important to remember this sequence when we are looking at the brief symbolism of the 7th Seal.

THE SEVENTH SEAL
(Revelation 8:1)

This Seal, opened at the close of Laodicea, has the shortest description of them all:
“There was silence in heaven for about half an hour.”

It is always wise, if possible, to relate *obscure references* to other existing references which might aid us in our understanding. “Half an hour” is probably NOT a chronological reference. It is more likely a comparison to A WHOLE HOUR mentioned prophetically regarding the same time. Such an hour DOES exist in Revelation 17:12 — a prophecy regarding a period at the very close of the Gospel Age Harvest when earth’s establishment-forces TRY to preserve their hold on power. The “horns” (political powers) of Revelation 17 apparently have the “authority” they want for this “ONE HOUR” — this ONE VERY UNIQUE TIME as the age comes to its crashing end. According to verse 14, these forces will be overcome by the incoming force of Jesus.

Thus the “HALF HOUR” of the 8th Seal is likely one-half of this period. The Great Multitude (yet in the flesh after the Church is gone) keep their silence UNTIL they gain their power to “speak up.” Once these do speak, they will be glorified, and the old order will come to its noisy end. They are silent for half of the period. Then they speak loudly! (Compare Jeremiah 8:20 and Habakkuk 3:16-19.)

That is the story of the Seals. They, in their turn, show RETROSPECTIVE views of each of the Seven Churches. They quickly and accurately SUMMARIZE what happened in each of the seven periods — usually by showing us how things stand AT THE END of each period. As Luther’s Reformation ended in a time of great revolution, so also Laodicea’s blinding and revealing light ends with the great time of trouble and the final

Return to 2019 Index

deliverance of both the classes which will receive spiritual resurrections. As we meditate on the Seals for each of the periods, we see how this pattern marks the very object of the Seals — understanding of the objective and the events of each period.

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We have yet one more topic to examine, the Seven Trumpets. Their testimony will be harmonious with what we have witnessed in the Churches and Seals — but from a different perspective.