

# ***The Book of Revelation***

## ***The Seven Seals***

Lesson #5 for February 2, 2019

Scriptures: Revelation 5:9-10; 6:1-17; Leviticus 26:21-26; Ezekiel 4:16; Deuteronomy 32:43; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10.

1. Revelation 4 opens before us the throne room in heaven with the Father, the Lamb, the 4 living creatures, the 24 elders, and millions of angels. Revelation 5 introduces the fact that there is a crisis in that very throne room. No one seems to be available who can deal with the crisis until the Lamb, slain from the foundation of the world, is able to unseal the scroll. It is important to notice that the seven seals are **not** what is inside the scroll; the seven seals are what releases the scroll so it can be opened.
2. We will discover that there are two very different but complementary ways to understand the seals. In the interlude between the opening of the sixth seal and the seventh seal, we have Revelation 7:14-8:1, describing the 144,000 who have survived through the terrible persecution at the end of this world's history. And what happens next? There is silence in heaven! Revelation 4 opened with a busy and noisy rejoicing in the throne room in heaven and ends with silence in that same throne room. What happened?
3. Read Revelation 6:1-8; compare Leviticus 26:21-26 and Matthew 24:1-14. In our last lesson, we discussed the fact that **the scroll contains the history of the great controversy and the history of our world from the beginning of the rebellion in heaven presumably until the restoration of peace and harmony at the third coming.**
4. In Revelation 6 we see four horses bursting onto the scene: (1) Conquering (1<sup>st</sup> seal), (2) bringing war (2<sup>nd</sup> seal), (3) bringing famine (3<sup>rd</sup> seal), and (4) bringing death (4<sup>th</sup> seal). "They were given authority over a quarter of the earth, to kill by means of war, famine, disease, and wild animals." Revelation 6:8—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*</sup> Disasters like these have come on our world repeatedly through the generations and seem to be an expansion of the curses that fell on Israel as described in Leviticus 26:21-26 and the prophecies that Jesus Himself gave about the events at the end of our world's history as recorded in Matthew 24:1-14.
5. The question is: How does God bring the great controversy to a conclusion? Are these disasters the disciplinary judgments from God? How does God wake us up to our deteriorated spiritual condition? We know that the worst times in the history of our world are still before us. How can God warn us and prepare us?
6. Compare Revelation 6:1-2 with Revelation 19:11-16. Revelation 19 is speaking clearly about Jesus and His followers in their final battle over evil in this world. Is Revelation 6 parallel to that? It is interesting to notice that the crowns worn in Revelation 6 are the *stephanoi* or garland crowns of victory such as after winning a race or contest of some kind. The crowns worn in Revelation 19 are *diademata*, the crowns worn by royalty.
7. Compare Habakkuk 3:8-13 and Psalm 45:4-5. These passages seem to suggest that when God's anger/wrath is poured out, weapons are used and victories are won.
8. One possible interpretation of the first horse described in Revelation 6:1-2 is that it represents the progress of the gospel during the times of the Ephesian church from A.D. 31-100. But, whereas the white horse in Revelation 6 rides forth to conquer, the Ephesian church describes a group of people who have lost their first love. Are these two passages parallel? Since Jesus was kind and nice at the first coming, will He come to wipe out His enemies when He comes the second time?
9. Read Revelation 6:3-4. It seems clear that the red horse suggests the color of blood; the rider

had a great sword, and war was the result. This may represent the consequences of rejecting and opposing the gospel beginning in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. While faithful Christians struggled against persecution, the rider on this horse takes peace away from the earth; persecution follows. (See Matthew 10:34.)

10. Read Revelation 6:5-6. This black horse and its rider describe a very serious situation. A man could work hard for an entire day and only earn enough money to buy a quart of wheat which is enough only to sustain himself. Or, he could buy three quarts of barley, perhaps enough to barely meet the needs of a very small family. At the same time, the living creature said: "Do not damage the olive trees and the vineyards!" (*GNB\**) What is being described is a serious time of famine. Grain, oil, and wine—the fresh juice of the grape—were considered basic necessities in the land of Palestine in ancient times.
11. One possible interpretation of this horse is that it represents the corruption of the gospel by the introduction of pagan ideas into the church as the church gained political power under Constantine and his successors. This led to a famine in the knowledge of God. (See Amos 8:11-13 and Daniel 12:4.) This represents the time period from A.D. 323 to 528.
12. Read Revelation 6:7-8. This 4<sup>th</sup> horse is ashen-gray in color, suggesting death; he is followed by Hades, the place of the dead. Millions of people were destroyed by sword, hunger, death, and wild beasts. Fortunately, we know that none of those deaths were/are permanent. Jesus Christ will raise everyone at either the second coming or the third coming.
13. Do you see obvious parallels between these four horses under the four seals and the stories of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, and Thyatira recorded in Revelation 2? Are there some similarities?
14. Revelation 6:6 talks about the oil and the wine. In Scripture, *oil* repeatedly symbolizes the Holy Spirit, (1 Samuel 16:13, Acts 10:38) and the *new wine* symbolizes salvation in Jesus Christ. (Mark 2:22) Fortunately, this suggests that even in the worst of times, the Holy Spirit is still working for His faithful people; salvation is still available through Jesus Christ.
15. One of the challenges of interpreting the seals is to figure out what the relationship is between the first four seals represented by those four horsemen and their horses and the last three seals which seem to be talking about things completely different.
16. Read Revelation 6:9-10. Suddenly, we see people beneath the altar, representing martyrs who have been killed down through the ages because they were faithful in their witnessing. They are shouting with a loud voice, "Almighty Lord, holy and true! How long will it be until you judge the people on earth and punish them for killing us?"—Revelation 6:10, *Good News Bible*.<sup>\*</sup> There are several important points to be made. The word *souls* is talking about people not just some ethereal spirits. (Genesis 2:7) In Exodus 29:12 and Leviticus 4:7, we recognize that the blood of sacrificial animals was poured out at the base of the altar. Just as Abel's blood cried out from the earth as stated in Genesis 4:10, the experiences of these martyrs is crying out for justice. And what is God going to do? Unfortunately, it appears that His initial response seemed to be totally inadequate. He gave them white robes and told them to rest while even more fellow Christians are martyred! Is that the kind of answer they were looking for?
17. Read Deuteronomy 32:43 and Psalm 79:10. These verses clearly talk about a God who appears to be ready to pour revenge on His enemies. Is that what God did in dealing with the rebellion in the great controversy?
18. What is it that those martyrs were wearing? See Revelation 3:5; 19:8; 7:9-10; 20:4. The *white robes* represent the good deeds of God's people.
19. One possible explanation of this fifth seal is that it represents the martyrs who were killed

during the times leading up to, during, and following the Protestant Reformation. But, we have already noticed that there were many other times throughout history when the righteous have suffered and been martyred. In every age, there must have been those who struggled with a lack of justice. Why doesn't God do something more?

20. Read Revelation 6:12-14; compare Matthew 24:29-30 and 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10. These verses present a challenge for interpreters. Seventh-day Adventists have jumped to the conclusion that (1) the violent earthquake, (2) the sun becoming black like coarse black cloth, (3) the moon turning completely red like blood, and (4) the stars falling down to the earth clearly must apply respectively to the events of: (1) the Lisbon earthquake of 1755; (2&3) the darkened sun and the moon turned to blood as seen in eastern New York and southern New England on May 19, 1780; and (4) the stars or meteorites falling on November 13, 1833. But, then we read verse 14 saying the sky disappears like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island are moved out of their places! That has not happened yet! Does that mean that there are hundreds of years of separation between verses 13 and 14?
21. Read Revelation 6:15-17. Those who believe in the second coming of Jesus Christ have almost universally applied these verses to His appearing at the second coming. All of God's enemies—whatever their rank, file, financial status, or position—are calling for the rocks and mountains to fall on them. See parallel passages in Isaiah 2:19; Hosea 10:8; and Luke 23:30. It is hard to imagine how these passages could apply to any time other than the second coming. Could those "rocks" refer to the ideas of evolution with people trying to hide from God?
22. Read Revelation 19:17-21; compare Nahum 1:6 and Malachi 3:2. These verses clearly portray a time when millions and millions of people will die and when birds of prey and scavengers will eat the flesh of God's enemies.
23. Then, suddenly, we come to Revelation 7:1-4, the interlude between the sixth seal and the seventh seal. We will talk more about these verses later; however, we see an enormous crowd, first of all, being protected by God while they are being sealed and, then, praising God for their salvation. They had come through terrible persecution, and they have kept their robes white by remaining loyal to God.
24. So, where do we fit in this picture? None of us has been martyred for the cause of God in recent days. How do you feel about the response to the challenge given to God under the fifth seal? Has God's response been appropriate and adequate? If we are to take passages from the Old Testament such as Leviticus 26:21-26; Deuteronomy 32:23-25,41-43; and Ezekiel 14:12-21 as examples of how God is supposed to respond, this seems like terrible retribution or revenge on the part of God. Considering what we know about God, His character, and His love, do these responses seem appropriate?
25. Read Zechariah 1:8-17 and 6:1-8. In these passages we have horses—not exactly of the same colors—and chariots talking about God's revenge upon His Old Testament enemies.
26. It has been suggested that the judgment of the seven trumpets, coming up next, falls on the wicked; (Revelation 9:4, 20-21) whereas, the judgments we have been talking about under the seven seals fall more specifically on those who become unfaithful among the people of God.
27. Without going into a lot of detail, there is evidence in the book of Revelation itself to suggest that the earthquake mentioned in Revelation 6:12 is different from the events recorded in verse 14. So, what have we learned so far in our covering of the first six seals? They seem to be directly following the presentation of the heavenly throne room in Revelation 4 and the challenge to God in Revelation 5. How has the life and death of Jesus answered the questions raised by the martyrs under the altar?

28. **There is another way to look at the events of Revelation 4-6.** It should be clear that the most obvious challenge that ever occurred in the throne room of heaven was when one of the very inhabitants of that throne room—Lucifer—rebelled against God. That was a serious problem, even for God. Most administrators would say that God should have dealt with that rebellion right on the spot and “nipped it in the bud.” But, He did not, and it seems from what we read in Revelation that even the people in God’s throne room were wondering why He has not done something more. So, what has Ellen White said about this crisis in the government of God?

A crisis had arrived in the government of God. The earth was filled with transgression. **The voices of those who had been sacrificed to human envy and hatred were crying beneath the altar for retribution** [the fifth seal in Revelation 6:9-11]. All heaven was prepared at the word of God to move to the help of his elect. One word from him, and the bolts of heaven would have fallen upon the earth, filling it with fire and flame. God had but to speak, and there would have been thunderings and lightnings and earthquakes and destruction. [This is more imagery from the book of Revelation.]

The heavenly intelligences were prepared for a fearful manifestation of Almighty power. Every move was watched with intense anxiety. The exercise of justice was expected. The angels looked for God to punish the inhabitants of the earth. But “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*,\* July 17, 1900, par. 5-6.

With intense interest the unfallen worlds had watched to see Jehovah arise, and sweep away the inhabitants of the earth. And if God should do this, Satan was ready to carry out his plan for securing to himself the allegiance of heavenly beings. **He had declared that the principles of God’s government make forgiveness impossible.** Had the world been destroyed, he would have claimed that his accusations were proved true. He was ready to cast blame upon God, and to spread his rebellion to the worlds above. But instead of destroying the world, God sent His Son to save it.—Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*\* 37.2. [Bold type and content in brackets are added.]

29. Is it possible that the same questions that the martyrs under the altar are asking were asked even earlier by the 4 living creatures, the 24 elders, and the millions of angels surrounding the throne of God in heaven? Look at the context of the paragraphs that we just read.

For centuries God looked with patience and forbearance upon the cruel treatment given to his ambassadors, at his holy law prostrate, despised, trampled underfoot. He swept away the inhabitants of the Noachian world with a flood. But when the earth was again peopled, men drew away from God, and renewed their hostility to him, manifesting bold defiance. Those whom God rescued from Egyptian bondage followed in the footsteps of those who had preceded them. Cause was followed by effect; the earth was being corrupted....

The heavenly universe was amazed at God’s patience and love. To save fallen humanity the Son of God took humanity upon himself, laying aside his kingly crown and royal robe. He became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich. One with God, he alone was capable of accomplishing the work of redemption, and he consented to an actual union with man. In his sinlessness, he would bear every transgression.—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*,\* July 17, 1900, par. 4,7.

30. These statements are all about images from the book of Revelation.
31. **Is it possible that even the angels looked for God “to punish the inhabitants of the earth”? What kind of response did they expect from God? Didn’t they expect a response similar to what had happened in the great flood?**
32. Consider the following passage.

Before Christ’s first advent, the sin of refusing to conform to God’s law had become widespread. Apparently Satan’s power was growing; his warfare against heaven was becoming more and more determined. A crisis had been reached. With an intense interest God’s movements were watched by the heavenly angels. Would He come forth from His place to punish the inhabitants of the world for their iniquity? Would He send fire [Sodom and Gomorrah?] or flood [Noah?] to destroy them? All heaven waited the bidding of their Commander to pour out the **vials of wrath [Revelation 15&16]** upon a rebellious world. One word from Him, one sign, and the world would have been destroyed. The worlds unfallen would have said, “Amen. Thou art righteous, O God, because Thou hast exterminated rebellion.”—Ellen G. White, “God’s Justice and Love,” *Signs of the Times*,\* August 27, 1902, par 4; *Reflecting Christ*\* 58.4. [Bold type and content in brackets are added.]

33. And these are not the only passages reflecting that idea.

For centuries God bore with the inhabitants of the old world. But at last guilt reached its limit. “God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart.” [Genesis 6:5-6] He came out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth, and by a flood cleansed the earth of its iniquity.

Notwithstanding this terrible lesson, men had no sooner begun to multiply once more, than rebellion and vice became widespread. Satan seemed to have taken control of the world. **The time came that a change must be made, or the image of God would be wholly obliterated from the hearts of [570] the beings He had created.** All heaven watched the movements of God with intense interest. Would He once more manifest His wrath? Would He destroy the world by fire? The angels thought that the time had come to strike the blow of justice, when, lo, to their wondering vision was unveiled the plan of salvation. Wonder, O heavens, and be astonished, O earth! God sent His only begotten Son into the world to save the world! Amazing grace! “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” [1 John 4:10, *KJV*]—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript 22*,\* January 10, 1890 from Ellen White’s Diary at Battle Creek, Michigan; *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*\* 569.2-570.0. [Bible references in brackets and bold type are added.]

34. It is important to notice that the *vials of wrath* mentioned in this passage are taken from the seven last plagues in Revelation 15&16. Incredibly, the heavenly council standing around the throne of God apparently expected revenge from God! Is the following really possible?

The world’s unfallen would have said, “Amen. Thou art righteous, O God, because thou hast exterminated rebellion.”—Ellen G. White, “God’s Justice and Love,” *The Signs of the Times*,\* August 27, 1902, par 4; *RC*\* 58.4.

35. There is another important point that needs to be made about Revelation 5:6 which is in the  
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midst of our study for this week.

**Revelation 5:6:** <sup>6</sup> Then I saw a Lamb standing in the centre of the throne, surrounded by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb appeared to have been killed. [This Greek word implies a violent death, a slaughter, mutilation, or murder—not just a sacrificial death on an altar. See item #39 below.] It had seven horns [This means having all power.] and seven eyes, [This means having all wisdom.] which are the seven spirits of God that have been sent throughout the whole earth.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation\** (2nd ed., Revelation 5:6). New York: American Bible Society. [Content in brackets is added.]

36. So, let us summarize. What is it that makes it possible for the Lamb to unseal these seals? Wasn't God the Father capable of unsealing them? Or, what about the Holy Spirit? **What we are seeing is that because of His life and His death, Jesus Christ, the Lamb, was able to open up the history of our world and to show the correct interpretation of all that has happened. Thus, He is not just a sacrifice offered to pay a debt, but also He is a Revealer of the truth about God and about Satan.**
37. Jesus has conquered Satan who is the liar by revealing the truth! God could easily have eliminated Satan and all of his evil followers with the snap of His fingers and by the use of His omnipotent power. But, God does not work that way; **He will win the great controversy not by the use of force but by the revelation of truth.**
38. And where is this truth revealed? It comes from the very midst of the throne—from God Himself, the Lamb. God does not ask anyone else to reveal the truth about Himself because they could not. **The questions were about God and His government and His character. Those questions could only be answered by God Himself.**
39. The word for *killed* (Greek: *sphazo*) in the New Testament is used in places like 1 John 3:12; Revelation 5:6,9,12; 6:4,9; 13:3,8; and 18:24. In these places, it is clear that this word refers not to just a sacrifice offered on an altar but to murder, violence, slaughter as in war.
- Although “slay,” Gr. *sphazo*, may be used in the sense of an animal sacrifice ritual, the more usual meaning is “to kill a person with violence.”—Josephine Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation* (Anchor Bible; New York: Doubleday, 1975), 90.
40. So, what does this tell us? Incredible as it may seem, God wins the great controversy by dying! And the answers are given by God Himself who is the Victor in the great controversy. He died a violent death at the hands of His enemies. But, ultimately, He died of sin, proving His original statement in the Garden of Eden that sin leads to death.
41. And what is the response from the holy ones, the 4 living creatures, the 24 elders, and the millions of angels around the throne? There is rejoicing and, then, a period of silence! God has won the war not by the use of power but by revelation, by revealing the truth.
42. What an incredible story. God's answers to these questions initially seem unbelievable. But, when the truth is fully understood, God wins. Are we ready to see the truth spelled out like that?

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