

THE OPENING OF THE FIRST FOUR SEALS

Introduction

1. In chapter 5, John learned of a scroll that was sealed with seven seals.
2. He was saddened to learn that no one was worthy to open the book and reveal its contents.
3. However, One was found who was worthy – Jesus, the Lamb who is a Lion.
4. Thus, chapter 6 begins with the opening of the first seal.
5. The opening of the first four seals, which comprise a united group, reveal imagery often referred to as the “four horsemen of the Apocalypse.”
 - a. There is much confusion in the world about this symbolism.
 - b. The word “apocalypse” is from the Greek word *apokalupsis* (αποκαλυψις) which simply means “revelation.”
 - c. They are the “four horsemen” of the revelation of God – the book of Revelation – not four horsemen bring about the apocalypse, supposed to be the destructive end of the world.

- I. The Opening of the First Seal (6:1-2)
 - A. Jesus, the Lamb who is worthy, opens the seals of the book.
 - B. When the first is opened, John heard one of the living creatures with a voice like thunder calling him to come and see.
 1. Some versions do not include the phrase, “and see.”
 2. Instead, they record the creatures as simply saying, “Come.”
 3. Thus, they may be speaking to John or to the riders of the horses.
 - C. As John looked, he saw a white horse ridden by a man carrying a bow and wearing a crown of victory.
 - D. This rider came forth “conquering and to conquer.”
 - E. The symbolism of the white horse
 1. The horse is a symbol of battle, conflict, and strength (cf. Job 39:19-25; Zechariah 1:8-11; 6:1-8; 10:3).
 2. The color white usually represents holiness or things heavenly.
 3. Thus, this horse is sent out on a mission from God to conquer.
 - F. The symbolism of the rider
 1. The bow was a weapon of war and symbolized victory (cf. Genesis 48:22; Psalm 7:12; Habakkuk 3:8-13).
 2. The crown was also representative of victory (cf. 2:10).
 3. Thus, this rider is victorious in conquering in harmony with the purpose of God.
 - G. This seems to symbolize the victory of God’s cause through the preaching of the Gospel (cf. Psalm 45:3-7; Matthew 10:34; John 16:33).
 - H. Another view
 1. If the first rider represents the victory of the Gospel over sin in the lives of men, then the trouble for Christians does not begin until the second seal is opened.
 2. Some suggest this first horse represents military conflict in general and the struggle Christians had with the Roman military in particular.
 3. If this is correct, then the first four seals all deal with persecution against the church.

The Book of Revelation

Lesson Thirteen

Revelation 6:1-8

- II. The Opening of the Second Seal (6:3-4)
- A. When the second seal was opened, John heard the second living creature repeat the command of the first, "Come and see."
 - B. Then, John saw a red horse with a rider who carried a great sword and had authority to remove peace from the earth.
 - C. The symbolism of the red horse
 - 1. Red, the color of blood, symbolizes bloodshed – usually brought about by warfare.
 - 2. Thus, it symbolizes the suffering that accompanies conflict among people and nations.
 - 3. Wherever the Gospel goes, Satan is certain to attack, and persecution will follow (cf. John 15:19-20).
 - D. The symbolism of the rider
 - 1. The rider had the ability to take peace from the earth; thus, he brought conflict and not peace.
 - 2. As he rode out, men would slay one another.
 - 3. His great sword was the Roman short sword used in battle for the slaughter of many.
 - 4. However, this word was also used for the large knife that was utilized in animal sacrifices.
 - 5. The word for "kill" means, "To slay, slaughter, or butcher; to put to death by violence."
 - 6. Thus, there is a connection to persecuted Christians being sacrificed as martyrs for the Lord (cf. 2:13; 6:9; 18:24; Acts 22:20).
 - E. Thus, the red horse represents bloodshed and warfare.
 - 1. As persecution against the church (cf. Matthew 10:34-39)
 - 2. Or as a consequence of militarism
- III. The Opening of the Third Seal (6:5-6)
- A. When the third seal was opened, John heard the third living creature say, "Come and see."
 - B. John saw a black horse with a rider who carried a pair of balances.
 - C. The symbolism of the black horse
 - 1. The color black is associated with sorrow and mourning (Isaiah 50:3; Jeremiah 4:28; etc.).
 - 2. Sometimes it was associated with famine (Jeremiah 14:1-2).
 - D. The symbolism of the rider
 - 1. The rider carries a set of scales, for weighing and measuring food.
 - 2. Specifically, wheat and barley must be measured so they can be rationed to the population (cf. Ezekiel 4:16-17).
 - 3. One could purchase a quart of wheat for a penny – daily bread for a worker at the cost of one day's wage.
 - 4. However, barley was cheaper – 3 quarts for one day's labor.
 - 5. Thus, inflation and famine bring grief and sorrow upon the people.
 - 6. The oil and wine would not be hurt because few could afford such luxuries.
 - 7. Remember that the Christian's income was affected by the guilds.
 - E. Thus, the black horse represents famine
 - 1. As persecution against the church (cf. 2:10, 13, 20)
 - 2. Or as a consequence of militarism and bloodshed

- IV. The Opening of the Fourth Seal (6:7-8)
- A. When the fourth seal was opened, John heard the fourth living creature say, "Come and see."
 - B. John saw a pale horse ridden by Death and followed by Hades.
 - C. The symbolism of the pale horse
 - 1. The word for pale can be translated as "greenish," and seems to indicate the color of one who is sickly.
 - 2. Thus, this horse seems to represent that which brings death – especially pestilence that follows war and famine.
 - D. The symbolism of the rider
 - 1. The rider is identified as Death – who takes the body.
 - 2. He is followed by Hades – who takes the soul.
 - 3. They have power over a significant part of the world, but not the whole.
 - 4. They kill by any means necessary – sword, hunger, death (pestilence, disease) or wild animals (cf. Ezekiel 5:15-17; 14:13-21).
 - E. Thus, the pale horse represents death.

Summary:

- 1. These may represent judgments against the enemies of God's people (but, unlikely).
- 2. These may represent the troubles that are in the world in which Christians become entangled and which they must overcome.
- 3. Ultimately, they seem to represent persecutions against the church – especially by the Roman Empire – but possible at any time in history.