

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 27 February 2000

No. T099

Speaker: Mr. Jeffery Brett

Revelation 6:1 to 8:1 - The Seven Seals

We are about to consider one of the most awesome parts of God's word, which tells us what will happen in this world after the Church, consisting of every believer on the Lord Jesus Christ, has been caught up to be with the Lord. Following this event will begin a period lasting at least seven years, during which terrible events such as the world has never known will take place. The reading of the book of the Revelation should not cause any fear for a Christian if the separate divisions of the book are rightly understood.

We read in Revelation 1:19 that John was commanded to write three things: "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter". The things which John saw obviously refer to chapter 1. Then the things which are is the time that began in John's lifetime and will carry on right to the end of the present period of grace. When John wrote the Revelation, chapters 2 and 3 were prophetic, but we can see that most of the contents of those two chapters have either already happened, or are going on today. The last statement "the things which shall be hereafter", must refer to a time when the present period has come to an end. These, then, are still in the future. We read in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 how this present period will end: "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

The next event in God's calendar is the fulfilment of these words. We usually call this the rapture. It is the time when every living Christian, together with all those who have died in faith, who will be raised from the dead, will be taken away from this world, into heaven.

In chapter 4 John describes what he saw when a door was opened in heaven. Verse 4 says, "And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting". These twenty four elders represent the Old and New Testament saints. We must realise that John saw them in heaven because they had all been caught up away from the earth. So when we begin chapter 6 we read of events which will happen on earth after every believer has gone to heaven. Christians will not be here when these terrible events take place. So we understand that the judgements beginning in chapter 6, and going right through to the final judgement of the Great White Throne in chapter 20, are all in the future. But let us remember they could begin at any moment.

I said that these verses should not worry a Christian, but they should affect us in at least two ways. Firstly, we should be ambassadors for Christ, earnestly beseeching men to be reconciled to God, because we know the terror of the Lord. Secondly, we should live our lives in separation from all that is soon to come under God's judgement.

The sevens of scripture are usually divided into three and four. This is true here. The first four seals describe what is commonly referred to as the 'four horsemen of the Apocalypse'. The last three are noticeably different. Let us read about the very first seal.

Chapter 6 opens with these words, "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." Chapter 5 tells us about the Lamb, the One who has prevailed and is worthy to open the book and to loose the seals. That person is the Lord Jesus. He is the One who has prevailed over every enemy: death, Satan and the powers of darkness and men. John saw Him alive for ever more in heaven. How sad it is to realise that the very One who opens the seals of judgement on this world is the very same person who gave His life that men might be saved and live and there is no hope for any who do not believe on the Lord Jesus and trust Him as their Saviour and Lord. To refuse the offer of salvation through faith in Christ and to reject everything that God has done for man's blessing, will leave us in the place where He will execute judgement. The judgement of this world took place at the cross of Calvary when this world said, "We will not have this man". The judgement we are reading about in chapter 6 is about to be executed by that very same Man.

The various coloured horses of these first four seals represent the human powers employed by God to execute these judgements on earth. They are providential in character. We have here a picture of a conquering power: a white horse denotes a victorious power. We are not told from what country he will come, but he will have a career of unchecked, brilliant, yet almost bloodless victory. Like a Cyrus, or Alexander the Great, or even a Napoleon in triumphs and

www.truthfortoday.org.uk

conquests, but without bloodshed. The various weapons mentioned in Scripture clearly denote different forms of fighting. Hand to hand conflict uses the sword, whereas a spear indicates a more distant warfare, and a bow and arrow even more distant. Likewise we would assume a sword would inflict much bloodshed, a spear, less, and a bow and arrow even less.

The rider of this horse was given a crown by God before he went forth to conquer. Although he may not realise it, he is raised up by God and given power to execute the judgement that God sees fitting. We understand then that, soon after the rapture, a great royal power will emerge. Nothing will be able to stand in its way.

The second seal opens and this time we have a red horse. We read in verse 4, "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 to him a great sword". If the white horse represents a peaceful victory, the red horse depicts a period of slaughter and bloodshed. The rider of the horse is not named but the fact that the pronoun "him" is used tells us that this is a man raised up by God and given power to take peace from the earth. Mark again it is God who instigates this terrible event, but He uses a man to bring it about. It is unimportant what this person's motives may be: he is being used by God to accomplish His work. This rider strides through the earth on a mission of blood and the effect of his power will be that men will slay one another. Everywhere he will stir up men's anger and passions. It will not be nations and powers against each other, but civil war. Little do we realise that the dreadful progress and development of weapons of destruction that is so far advanced today will be used by this person, not in aggression or defence, but in civil conflicts and party wars. The authority of civil powers will be unable to stop this terrible bloodshed. In fact, it will probably be used to add to it. That he was given a great sword indicates that the devastation will be enormous. Men will be unchecked and let loose to inflict on one another the most awful destruction such as never has been seen before. The second seal describes this.

The black horse of the next seal is a power which brings about suffering and sorrow. We read in verses 5 and 6, "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". We can easily understand that after a period of civil war and the complete breakdown of all authority, then the necessities of life become scarce. Even today famine and starvation follow war and revolt. We have seen this in Ethiopia and in the Sudan. But the picture here seems to represent a condition that will be mainly felt by the ordinary working class. The penny here was the daily wage of the soldier or the working class. The amount that could be purchased was about 15% of what could normally be bought at the time John was writing. Wheat and barley represent the essentials for life. If those in work could only buy a fraction of normal, what happens to the aged and the very young, or the infirm and those unable to work? There will be no National Health Service then because all human resources will have gone, no one to help, no government to lean on, no pensions to draw on. The whole system of welfare will have been broken up. Only those who have riches laid by will be less affected by this judgement, but they shall not escape.

The judgement under the sixth seal is completely impartial; none shall escape. Oil and wine were luxuries which only the rich could afford, but no one can survive on these alone. This judgement is a very timely consideration because we live in a day of socialism. The gospel of equality among the nations of Europe and elsewhere is very prevalent. Distinctions that God set up are being set aside and the result of this is the disregard of authority. The seeds of insubordination are being sown all around us and the harvest will surely follow.

In the fourth seal an even worse time follows. These seals seem to increase in intensity as they follow one after the other. "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 of this horse is named. What a terrible name it is, Death He has a companion, Hades, for this is the true meaning. These two are the respective custodians of the bodies and souls of men who have died. At the end of the thousand year reign of Christ, they will give up their prisoners, and are themselves destroyed, and are cast into the lake of fire. Hades follows immediately after death and ends at the resurrection, although the term here is used in relation to the wicked dead. It is the condition of all those who have died without Christ.

We read about it in the parable the Lord Jesus told in Luke 15, concerning the rich man who died, and lifted up his eyes in Hades. The parable makes it clear that he was conscious of his surroundings, could feel pain, was aware of what he had lost through not believing, and could see Lazarus in a place of blessing. People, and even religious leaders, have tried to obscure the reality of this state, treating it as a myth, or a fantasy. But the Word of God, the very words of the Lord Jesus, would warn us of the terrible fate of those who have died without faith in Christ and are waiting the final resurrection, and then to be cast eternally into Hell. Awful eternal doom! Dear listener, be warned! If you have not trusted Christ as your Saviour, you are in terrible danger of eternal condemnation.

Four things are brought together here, which will afflict a quarter of the world's population. The sword we have already considered. Hunger we saw in the third seal. And now pestilence - this is the true meaning of the word. It is easily

understood if under the preceding seals most agricultural work will have ceased. This will bring about starvation, which is a much more painful, and slower death than being killed with the sword. Even if some crops are produced, these will be destroyed by pestilence. No crop spraying will have any effect; a quarter of the world will be without food. The shortage of vegetation will then cause the wild beasts to turn upon man, thus completing the terrible picture of death and destruction. The very fact that the area of judgement here is limited shows us that God is controlling it. The Judge of all the earth will indeed do right, and He alone knows the suitability of the judgement.

In the fifth seal we see a change. In the first four seals there are living creatures and horsemen, these symbols are not used now. Living creatures are connected with God's government of the world, the unseen powers behind the human actors and instruments. But now the public intervention of God is more apparent. This seal shows that after the Church has been called away, God will raise up faithful men, probably Jews to begin with, who will go forth and preach the gospel of the kingdom. We read about this in Matthew 24:14, "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come". We must not confuse this gospel with that which we preach today. Let us read 6:9. "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". This testimony is not to the grace of God put forth to save precious souls, but to the righteous claims of God in regard to His kingdom on earth. This preaching had cost them their lives, so we see their souls under the altar. They had sacrificed themselves for the testimony which they preached to a world that was already coming under God's judgement. And so they cry for vengeance. We do not do this today; we pray for men to believe and be forgiven. But the day of grace has ended, the day of judgement has come. Many of the psalms contain these sentiments, such as Psalm 94, "O LORD God, to whom vengeance belongeth; O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself".

The sixth seal seems to begin the answer to their cry. The symbols here are the powers of nature but used in a figurative way. There will be a total break-up of all civil and governmental power. A vast civil, social, and political chaos will be created. We read in verse 12, "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". "A great earthquake" denotes a violent disruption of the organised state of things, a complete breakdown of all existing authority. "The sun becoming black" would speak of the darkening power of Satan taking over. "The moon became as blood" indicates that if all supreme authorities fall, then surely all subordinate ones will come down as well as will all lesser authorities and individual rulers under the figure of the stars of heaven falling. The very heaven being removed would indicate the total ruin of all greater and lesser powers so that the whole system of control disappears. The mountains and islands being removed would suggest that all centres of trade and commerce will collapse. We have here the most inclusive detail of a world given over to chaos. It will all be on account of the fact that they have rejected God's beloved Son. This brings about universal terror, from the rulers down to the servants, high and low, rich and poor, cry 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 seventh and last seal begins a fresh series of judgements, all increasing in severity. So terrible are they to contemplate that there will be silence in heaven for about the space of half an hour. Then the seven angels with their trumpets will begin to sound. God willing this will be the subject of another broadcast.

We have today considered some very serious, and possibly frightening, matters foretold in God's word. But let us finish by reminding ourselves that judgement is God's strange work. He does not desire the death of a sinner, but gave His Son that men might be saved through faith in Him. The Lord Jesus died so that we might be delivered from this awful judgement to come.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.