

Lesson Eight

Seals Five–Seven (6:9-17)

The seven seals of Revelation begin with four horsemen. The apocalyptic animal code associates horses with swift movement. One must not think of the four horsemen as representing four distinct periods of time. The best interpretation of all the seals is to conceive them occurring throughout one period of time. As has been suggested previously, the historical time of the seals is best understood as events that occur from the time of John until the End.

- Seals one and five suggest this interpretation.
- The phrases “must soon take place” (1:1; 22:6) and “time is near” (1:3; 22:10) are discredited if Revelation does not describe events that occur soon after the time of John.
- Revelation would have no relevance to the majority of Christians throughout history if Revelation is silent between the time of John and the 3 ½ years of Great Tribulation (10:11; cp. I John 2:18).

While there appears to be a progression in the opening of the seven seals, the swiftness and interconnection of these events cannot occur in isolation.

Seal Five: Martyrs Under the Altar (6:9-11)

6:9. John saw the souls of martyrs under the heavenly altar. Christian martyrs have paid the greatest sacrifice for two reasons:

1. They maintained the true faith – “the word of God”
2. They maintained their witnesses – “because of the testimony which they had maintained”

No particular martyrdom is described here. This seal pictures Christian martyrs throughout the ages.

6:10. Christ is Lord, true, and holy despite the existence of persecution against His people. These martyrs cry out for the Lord to avenge their blood. It causes them pain to know that evil man continues to inflict evil on righteousness and righteous people on the earth. They cry out for it to end! This passage strikes against the belief that the seals describe the Great Tribulation. If so, they would have known how long – 3 ½ years (cp. Daniel 7:25; Revelation 11:2, 3, 12:6, 14; 13:5).

6:11. The white robe symbolizes victory and worthiness. The souls are to rest and wait for the ultimate Victor to arrive. They were not to wait indefinitely; there are other martyrs yet to be added to the number. Further martyrdoms are yet to occur.

Seal Six: Natural Calamities (6:12-17)

6:12-14. Natural calamities are one of the most common signs that the End is near. Earthquakes and heavenly bodies becoming black and red and falling from the sky is a prolific theme among OT prophets, Jesus and NT

writers (Joel 2:30-31; Isaiah 13:9-10; 34:1-4; Jeremiah 4:23-28; Matthew 24:29).

Seal Six may describe the natural effects of man's sin against nature – the results of pollution. Yet one cannot escape the fact that God is behind the judgments. Some suggest this is the natural effects of nuclear war – the sky splits apart like a scroll and mountains and islands are removed. Verses 14-16 appear to suggest a sudden phenomenon. Natural calamity is a clear sign that the End is near. While Revelation does not clearly identify nuclear war, neither does it disallow it.

6:15-17. Rich and poor people alike hide from this terror. They prefer to die rather than to live amidst such calamity. The rich and poor unredeemed appear to know that God is behind what they are experiencing. It is not uncommon for lost people to pray and cry out to God in the face of calamity; this does not suggest they repent. In fact, they hide from God and the savior Lamb.