

5. The Seven Seals (1Q 2019—Revelation)

Biblical material: Rev. 6:1–14, Lev. 26:21–26, Ezek. 4:16, Deut. 32:43, 2 Thess. 1:7–10; Rev. 5:9, 10.

Quotes

- As each seal is broken, it releases a new revelation about the identity and qualifications of Jesus throughout the Earth. Thus, the breaking of the seven seals is a progressive revelation of seven truths about Jesus. *Larry Wilson*
- The seven seals form the story flow of the book of Revelation. Here is the overview: The first seal reveals false prophets; the second, war; the third, famine; the fourth, pestilence; the fifth, tribulation; the sixth, heavenly signs; and the seventh, seven trumpets. *Gerald Flurry*
- David [Koresh] believed that the world was being offered a chance to listen to this last Christ/Koresh, who could open the Seals, and thus show the way of repentance to our society. *Phillip Arnold and James Tabor*
- Seven seals. The right hand of the Father holds the record of our lives, and unless one can approach within the inner circle of the majesty Margin of the Eternal One, he cannot look within this book. It is written both within and without. Within, is the life which is known only to God,-the secret, known only to the soul and its Creator. Without, is the reflection of that inner life, the outward part which is open to the gaze of others. *S.N. Haskell*
- The seven seals are a history of the transactions of the powers and kings of the earth over the church, and God's protection of his people during the same time. *William Miller*
- They [the seven seals] evidently cover events with which the church is connected from the opening of this dispensation to the coming of Christ. *Uriah Smith*

Questions

Why should we spend time considering the meaning of the seals and other images in Revelation? Why are there so many different interpretations and does it matter? What is prophecy really *for*? How can we make sure that when we talk about these matters that we are relevant to today's world? How does all this fit into the great controversy?

Bible summary

Rev. 6:1–14 details six of the seven seals. The first four are the four horsemen of the Apocalypse, the fifth the martyrs under the altar who cry out, “How long?” and the sixth is the massive earthquake, the falling of the stars and so on. Rev. 5:9, 10 is the song of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders that declare the worthiness of the Lamb. Lev. 26:21–26 recounts God's threats against his people if they remain hostile towards him. Ezek. 4:16 records God's warning against Jerusalem. Deut. 32:43 speaks of God's judgment on his enemies and how he will make atonement for his people. God's punishment is described in 2 Thess. 1:7–10.

Comment

The quotations listed above show the vast diversity of prophetic interpretation. The challenge is to separate the speculative ideas from true Biblical exegesis. The most important aspect is to stay with the text, and not let imagination run riot. The six seals are described in detail in Revelation 6, while the seventh seal is not opened until Revelation 8.

Interestingly, Ellen White only refers to the “seven seals” four times (and two are duplicates). Clearly for her speculation on the exact meaning was not as important as the overarching theme of God’s victory and salvation through Jesus. Other Adventists have indeed spent much time trying to explain what exactly the seals speak of. Generally speaking most see the seals as paralleling the church history as exemplified in the seven churches. However as the Adventist Bible Commentary makes clear, there are different opinions regarding the specifics.

The real message is one of impending judgment. After the alarming and tragic scenes of the first five seals, the sixth seal is one in which the apocalyptic Day of the Lord arrives. Those who have rejected God are called to account, and they are terrified of the Judge and the judgment.

The question then is: how does God look in all of this? There is little said that can initially be viewed as positive. The church suffers through the ages, and then comes the judgment. However, we need to remember that in Scripture judgment is not necessarily a negative term as it is today. It is a day of reckoning, for good or for bad. So while those who have lived wicked lives call for the mountains and rocks to fall on them, those who love the Lord say “This is our God, we have waited for him and he will save us.” Isaiah 25:9.

So in the end we need to balance these passages of Scripture with the descriptions of God as loving Father etc. Most of all, we need to see God’s judgment through the eyes of Jesus who weeps over those who refuse to come to him, as he wept over Jerusalem, recognizing the coming judgment on that obstinate city. While some may take a rather perverse delight in the final end of sinners, it should rather prompt us to do all we can to make sure we hold on to our loving Lord, and share the truly good news of our Savior with those around us.

Ellen White Comments

Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof" [verse 5].

John continues: [verses 6, 7, quoted]. As the book was unrolled, all who looked upon it were filled with awe. There were no blanks in the book. There was space for no more writing. [Revelation 5:8-14; 6:8-11; Revelation 8:1-4, quoted.] {12MR 297.1}

[Revelation 6:9-11]. Here were scenes presented to John that were not in reality but that which would be in a period of time in the future. {20MR 197.5}

It is the work of Satan to represent the Lord as lacking in compassion and pity. He misstates the truth in regard to Him. He fills the imagination with false ideas concerning God; and instead of dwelling upon the truth in regard to our heavenly Father, we too often fix our minds upon the misrepresentations of Satan and dishonor God by distrusting Him and murmuring against Him. Satan ever seeks to make the religious life one of gloom. He desires it to appear toilsome and difficult; and when the Christian presents in his own life this view of religion, he is, through his unbelief, seconding the falsehood of Satan. {SC 116.2}

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