

Better Way Apostolic Church- Bible Class

Subject: Payback is required for every deed: Revelation 6:1-8

The worship described in Revelation 4-5 is preparation for the wrath described in Revelation 6-19. It seems strange to us that worship and judgment should go together, but this is because we do not fully understand either the holiness of God or the sinfulness of man. Nor do we grasp the total picture of what God wants to accomplish and how the forces of evil have opposed Him. God is long-suffering, but eventually He must judge sin and vindicate His servants.

According to Daniel 9:27, seven years are assigned to Israel in God's prophetic calendar, beginning with the signing of an agreement with the world dictator (the Antichrist), and ending with Christ's return to earth to judge evil and establish His kingdom. It is this period that is described in Revelation 6-19.

- **Daniel 9:27 And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate. KJV**

By referring to John's outline (Revelation 1), you will see that his description is in three parts: the first three and a half years (Revelation 6-9), the events at the middle of the period (Revelation 10-14), and the last three and a half years (Revelation 15-19).

What is so significant about the middle of the Tribulation? That is when the Antichrist breaks his covenant with Israel and becomes their persecutor instead of their protector (Daniel 9:27).

As you study these fourteen action-filled chapters, keep in mind that John wrote to encourage God's people in every age of history. He was not only writing prophecy that would be fulfilled in the end times; but he was also writing great theology and dramatically revealing the character of God and the principles of His kingdom. These chapters describe the cosmic conflict between God and Satan, the New Jerusalem and Babylon; and no matter what "key" a student may use to unlock Revelation, he cannot help but see the exalted King of kings as He vindicates His people and gives victory to His overcomers.

Live like He is coming today!

Since the church never knows when Christ will return, each generation must live in expectancy of His coming. Therefore the Book of Revelation must be able to communicate truth to each generation, not just to the people who will be alive when these events occur. Verses like Revelation 13:9; 16:15; and 22:7,18-20 all indicate the timelessness of John's message. This also explains why the apostle used so much symbolism, for symbols never lose their meaning. In every era of its history, the church has had to contend with Babylon (compare

Revelation 18:4 with Jeremiah 50-51) and Antichrist (1 John 2:18). Revelation 6-19 is merely the climax of this conflict.

In Revelation 6-7, John characterized the opening days of the Tribulation as a time of **retribution, response, and redemption.**

Retribution:

Hebrews 2:3 How shall we escape [appropriate retribution] if we neglect and refuse to pay attention to such a great salvation [as is now offered to us, letting it drift past us forever]? For it was declared at first by the Lord [Himself], and it was confirmed to us and proved to be real and genuine by those who personally heard [Him speak]. AMP

Romans 1:27 And the men also turned from natural relations with women and were set ablaze (burning out, consumed) with lust for one another — men committing shameful acts with men and suffering in their own bodies and personalities the inevitable consequences and penalty of their wrong-doing and going astray, which was [their] fitting retribution. AMP

Romans 1:18

From idolatry to immorality is just one short step. If man is his own god, then he can do whatever he pleases and fulfill his desires without fear of judgment. We reach the climax of man's battle with God's truth when man exchanges the truth of God for "the he" and abandons truth completely. "The he" is that man is his own god, and he should worship and serve himself and not the Creator. It was "the he" Satan used in the Garden to lead Eve into sin: "Ye shall be as God!" Satan has always wanted the sonship that belongs only to God (Isaiah 14:12-15; Matthew 4:8-10); and in idolatry, he receives that worship (1 Corinthians 10:19-21).

The result of this self-deification was self-indulgence; and here Paul mentions a vile sin that was rampant in that day and has become increasingly prevalent in our own day, homosexuality. This sin is repeatedly condemned in Scripture (Genesis 18:20 ff; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Jude 7). Paul characterizes it as "vile" and "unnatural," as well as "against nature." Not only were the men guilty, but "even the women."

The Seals:

6:1-2 First seal: A man on a white horse. When Christ opened the first seal on the scroll of Tribulation judgment, John saw a man on a white horse who will conquer, apparently without bloodshed — a picture of the Antichrist (see exposition on 13:1-10) as he subdues the world through peaceful deception (see 1 Thessalonians 5:3).

6:3-4 Second seal: Bloodshed and rebellion. When the second seal was opened, John saw a rider on a red horse, who will bring war upon the earth. The peace of the Antichrist will prove counterfeit and temporary.

6:5-6 Third seal: Worldwide famine. The opening of the third seal brought a rider on a black horse and scenes of worldwide famine, so bad that a loaf of bread will cost a full day's wages.

6:7-8 Fourth seal: Two pale horses. The fourth seal revealed two horsemen, named Death and Hades, who through various means will kill a fourth of all the world's population — destruction far greater than World War II, when an estimated 1 in 40 humans died.

Retribution (Rev. 6:1-8)

In this section, John recorded the opening of the first four seals; and as each sea] was opened, one of the four living creatures summoned a rider on a horse. ("Come and see" should read, "Come!") In other words, events take place on earth because of the sovereign direction of God in heaven.

The horse imagery is probably related to the vision described in Zechariah 1:7-17.

Horses represent God's activity on earth, the forces He uses to accomplish His divine purposes. The center of His program is Israel, particularly the city of Jerusalem. (Jerusalem is mentioned thirty-nine times in Zech.) God has a covenant purpose for Israel, and that purpose will be fulfilled just as He promised.

Now, let's try to identify these horses and their riders.

1. Antichrist (vv. 1-2). Daniel states that there is a "prince that shall come," who will make a covenant with Israel to protect her from her enemies (Daniel 9:26-27). In other words, the future world dictator begins his career as a peacemaker! He will go from victory to victory and finally control the whole world.

Some have suggested that the rider on the white horse is actually a symbol of the "conquering Christ" who today is defeating the forces of evil in the world. They point to Revelation 19:11 as proof, but the only similarity is the presence of a white horse. If this rider is indeed Jesus Christ, it seems strange that He should be named at the end of the book and not at the beginning!

We would expect the Antichrist to resemble the Christ, because Antichrist is Satan's great irritation! Even the Jews (who ought to know the Scriptures) will be deceived by him (John 5:43; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12). This great deceiver will come as a peaceful leader, holding a bow but no arrows! (Our Lord's weapon is a sword; Revelation 19:15.) Antichrist will solve the world's problems and be received as the Great liberator.

The word for crown in Revelation 6:2 is *stephanos*, which means "the victor's crown." The crown that Jesus Christ wears is *diadema*, "the kingly crown" (Revelation 19:12). Antichrist could never wear the diadem, because it belongs only to the Son of God.

Certainly, there is a sense in which Jesus Christ is conquering today, as He releases people from the bondage of sin and Satan (Acts 26:18; Colossians 1:13). But this conquest began with His victory on the cross and certainly did not have to wait for the opening of a seal! We shall note

later that the sequence of events in Revelation 6 closely parallels the sequence given by our Lord in His Olivet discourse; and the first item mentioned is the appearance of false Christs (Matthew 24:5).

2. War (vv. 3-4). Antichrist's conquest begins in peace, but soon he exchanges the empty bow for a sword. The color red is often associated with terror and death: the red dragon (Revelation 12:3), the red beast (Revelation 17:3). It is a picture of wanton bloodshed. War has been a part of man's experience since Cain killed Abel, so this image would speak to believers in every age, reminding them that God is ultimately in control, even though He is not responsible for the lawless deeds of men and nations.

3. Famine (vv. 5-6). The color black is often connected with famine (Jeremiah 14:1-2; Lamentations 5:10). Famine and war go together. A shortage of food will always drive up prices and force the government to ration what is available. "To eat bread by weight" is a Jewish phrase indicating that food is scarce (Leviticus 26:26). A penny (denarius) a day was a standard wage for laborers (Matthew 20:2) but, of course, it had much greater buying power than the common penny does today. A "measure" of wheat was about two pints, sufficient for the daily needs of one person. Ordinarily, a person could buy eight to twelve measures for a penny, and much more of barley, which was the cheaper grain.

However, during the Tribulation, a man will have to work all day just to secure food for himself. There will be nothing for his family! At the same time, the rich will be enjoying plenty of oil and wine. No wonder Antichrist will eventually be able to control the economy (Revelation 13:17) as he promises to feed the hungry masses.

4. Death (vv. 7-8). John saw two personages: Death riding a pale horse and hades (the realm of the dead) following him. Christ has the keys of death and hades (Revelation 1:18), and both will one day be cast into hell (Revelation 20:14). Death claims the body while hades claims the soul of the dead (Revelation 20:13). John saw these enemies going forth to claim their prey, armed with weapons of the sword, hunger, pestilence (death), and wild beasts. In ancient times, hunger, pestilence, and the ravages of beasts would be expected to accompany war (note also Jeremiah 15:2; 24:10; Ezekiel 14:21).

Conquering tyrants who bring the world war, famine, and pestilence are certainly nothing new. Suffering people from the days of the Roman Empire to the most recent war can easily recognize anticipations of these four dreaded horsemen. This is why the Book of Revelation has been a source of encouragement to suffering believers throughout history. As they see the Lamb opening the seals, they realize that God is in control and that His purposes will be accomplished.