

Unsealed - Graves and Grace

Revelation 6

Many people like to call the entire Tribulation period the wrath of God and though that's a fair appraisal of the tone and tenor of the times, a more accurate characterization concerning the forthcoming seals in this chapter would be the wages of sin. They will be followed by trumpet warnings from the Lord and finally the bowls of God's wrath. I think you'll see why.

As we progress, you'll note that it is the four living creatures that are associated with the going forth of the four horsemen. This is important, for the living creatures, as we've pointed out before, represent the expression of God's nature in and through Christ. Now the tribulation time, though it afflicts a sin-filled, Christ-rejecting world, is targeted specifically at the Hebrew people. They rejected their own Savior and as Jesus foretold, during the Tribulation, many of them will buy into the idea that the antichrist is their messiah.

So as these four horsemen go forth, they represent the antitheses of the living creatures or the opposite of Christ. The Hebrew people and the unbelieving world, having rejected Christ's payment for sin -- which we saw in the previous chapter made Him worthy to open these seals -- have only one recourse

and that is to 'pay' for their sins themselves; and it won't be pretty. When I say pay for their sins, I don't mean atone for them but rather reap their wages or consequences. You know the Bible says, *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.* (Rom 6:23) It's simply one or the other. Either you accept that Christ paid the debt for your sins or you will pay the penalty yourself. What God is doing in the Tribulation is helping both Jew and gentile to discern exactly that. Let's begin:

Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, "Come and see." And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.

As we can tell from the way the other living creatures are mentioned in the following verses, this creature is indeed the first one and is mentioned as such in chapter four -- that is, he is the Lion. His thundering or roaring (both words are related) command can mean either "come" or "go forth" and is augmented with the word "see" or literally to discern.

Though the "going forth" aspect of the words can be applied to the rider, I believe the command as a whole is spoken to both John and the 'target' people on earth, the

Hebrews. It is they who need to discern who is going forth. Now, this rider is NOT Jesus Christ. He's riding a white horse, yes, but that is simply because he is imitating Christ; he is the antichrist. When Jesus does come to conquer, see chapter 19:11-16, He is clearly identified as the One who is "Faithful and True" as opposed to being nameless and is called the "Word of God" as well as the "King of Kings and Lord of Lords". In addition, He comes with the saints, and He conquers with the sword not the bow.

Now this word for bow in the Greek is interesting for it comes from a root meaning to "bring forth" as when a tree brings forth fruit or a pregnant woman brings forth a baby. I believe this is implying that the power of the antichrist to conquer is rooted in his authority to bring forth what is naturally in man -- that is, the sinful human nature. By deceptions, lies, signs and wonders, he will exalt that nature and himself as its epitome. We will see shortly how that turns out.

Jesus is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. The sword He conquers with is the truth of His word. *For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.* (Heb 4:12) On the other hand, this aper or imitator who goes forth here will conquer, as we said, with lies and

deception. Of him, the scriptures say:

Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

(2 Thes 2:3,4,9-12)

You could say, the antichrist will 'bring forth' the natural man which is dead in sin, but to the contrary, Jesus, the true and only Christ, implants His Spirit in us to give us life. Thus, the first living creature and the first rider are polar opposites.

When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come and see." Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill

one another; and there was given to him a great sword.

The second living creature is the calf or bullock. This is the animal we find in the law as being used for the peace offering. As such, he typifies the gentle submitted nature of Christ who said, *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.* (Mat 11:29) It is Jesus who has made peace between God and us as believers through His own blood.

Completely contrary to this, the second rider takes peace from the earth so that people start killing, or more literally butchering, each other. Additionally, it is fascinating that a “great sword” was given to him. The word for this sword in the original language, machaira, is a large curved knife which we would call a scimitar. It is significant that the scimitar has been the symbol of Islam for many centuries. Many Islamic traditions adopted scimitars as attested by their symbolic occurrence such as on the coat of arms of Saudi Arabia. According to legend, Muhammad’s sword was a scimitar that came from his share of the spoils after the Battle of Bakr. Muhammad’s scimitar was named Dhu ‘l-Fiqar which means “cutter”. The curved scimitar was the battle standard for the Muslim armies. It later changed into the crescent and has been the universal symbol of Islam.

For this and other reasons, I’m convinced that Islam will play a

very important role in the time of Tribulation.

When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, “Come and see.” So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine.”

The third living creature has the face of a man. Of course, this is also Jesus Who came to us as “the Son of Man”. The invisible God gave Himself a human face so to speak through Jesus. Remember when Jesus said to His disciples, *“If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.”* Philip said to Him, *“Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.”* Jesus said to him, *“Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father;”*

In Jesus, we witnessed the giving nature of God. Throughout His entire ministry, we read of Him giving out, healing, helping, serving, teaching, loving. Yet, contrary to this, the third rider has the opposite nature which is to take, take, take. He charges effectively a whole day’s wage for a loaf of bread and hoards the delicacies. As a merchant, he

oppresses people and reminds us of the other scriptures that tell us the antichrist and his false prophet will use economic control to force people to accept their mark or number thus damning them to hell.

When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, “Come and see.” So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth.

The fourth living creature is he who appears as a flying eagle. It is he who is associated with the going forth of the fourth rider. When God’s people were delivered from destruction, it was Christ who bore them up on eagle’s wings. *And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. (Ex 19:3,4)* For the LORD’s portion is His people;

*Jacob is the place of His inheritance....
As an eagle stirs up its nest,
Hovers over its young,
Spreading out its wings, taking them up,
Carrying them on its wings,*

So the LORD alone led him,... (Deut 32:9,11,12a)

Thus, while the Lord, as a flying eagle, delivered His people from eternal slavery and death, this fourth rider delivers his people to eternal slavery and death. And so, we have the last in this series of opposites which go forth unto the earth.

In short, the judgment seems to play out like this -- the antichrist, the rider of the white horse, will go forth deceiving and corrupting men’s souls. He will conquer by playing upon men’s sin nature. Following him, wide spread war will break out as men butcher and destroy each other insanely. Following that, those remaining on earth will experience terrible economic oppression and starvation. Finally, additional massive death will sweep the planet via violence, disease and nature itself. Consequently, earth will be like hell, the antithesis of heaven.

Many people though will discern the dreadful difference and come to faith in Christ because of it – including, specific to this prophecy, many Hebrew people.

When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” Then a white robe was given to

each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.

For several reasons, I'm inclined to regard these souls as being faithful children of Israel. First, there is an altar involved. This speaks to the altar of incense or the altar of sacrifice both of which are distinctly Hebrew. Secondly, these souls want vengeance which contrasts with the command of Jesus to His church to "love your enemies" and to forgive. Thirdly, these souls are told to wait on their fellow servants (gentile believers) and on their brethren (fellow Hebrew believers). All of them are martyrs for there will be no 'secret saints' during the terrible days of Tribulation.

I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place.

You can't help but get the impression that large scale nuclear war will take place. Earthquakes, the skies being darkened with nuclear fall-out and fire raining down on earth – the atmosphere itself recedes or

literally separates somehow while geologic cataclysms level mountains and islands. Here, man reaps what he has sown, so to speak, in his fetish for weapons of warfare and the environmental damage he's brought on the earth. Clearly, this all comes about in the midst of, or as a result of, the four horsemen and their powers.

And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

Consequently, everyone is freaked out! The judgments coming upon a rebellious mankind are so severe and so wide spread that people seem to prefer being buried alive rather than face what they perceive to be the wrath of the Lamb. However, recall that these are people who have held on to their stubborn willful hatred of Christ throughout all these disasters. They refuse to accept their own accountability for what they are experiencing and thus blame all of it on the Lamb – it's His wrath they say. As a consequence, I don't accept their perception of these events as being accurate any more than I'd accept their perception of the Lamb. I wouldn't be surprised if

later we learn that this attitude was fostered by the antichrist himself in order to alienate people from Christ.

As a matter of fact, all ten mentions of such wrath specify it as the "wrath of God", never the Lamb. (See Jn 3:36, Rom 1:18, Col 3:6, Rev 11:18; 14:10,19; 15:1,7; 16:1 and 19:15.) The work and nature of the Lamb are to deliver from God's wrath (See Rom 5:9 and 1 Thes 5:9). The only time we see Jesus wrathful is in Rev 19:15 where He is treading out the winepress of His Father's wrath in going to Armageddon.

The irony is that God has given man, up to this point, exactly what he wanted. Rebellious man has always craved a sin filled world. In rejecting the grace of God in Jesus Christ, mankind opted for the continuing burden of sin and death. The wages of sin that man is receiving in the release of these seals is simply a law of creation – you sow, you reap. But additionally, because of the mercy of God, this time is also a wake-up call for man to discern the 180 degree difference between the true expression of the nature of God in Christ and the false expression of Satan and his lies. With the rapture of the church God could simply have wrapped things up, but His love and compassion are actually a part of the unsealing of the scroll. We'll see later that, as always, God knows what He's doing – many, many people will turn to Him during this terrible time.