

BITTER HONEY: THE REVELATION

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CHAPTER 6: OPENING THE SEVEN SEALS

Verses 1-8

When the Lamb broke the first four seals, four horses appeared. This part of the vision may have been based on the book of Zechariah. The four horses may have been the four empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. The colors of the horses may have been symbolic of war, famine and disease. However, the colors of the horses in Revelation did not match the colors of the horses in Zechariah. The same colors were present, but in a different order. If the colors were symbolic, they may have referred to all of the empires at the same time. The exception may have been Rome which was dapple colored in both books. Rome was given authority to kill a fourth of the earth. The fraction $\frac{1}{4}$ could possibly have meant that Rome was one of the four empires that brought death to the earth. The fraction $\frac{1}{3}$ may have been used this way in chapter 8.

Rome was a dapple, ashen, or pale horse. Rome was pale because it was called death. Rome would be one of the dominant symbols throughout the rest of Revelation. Rome would often be a beast with seven heads and ten horns. The seven heads could have been Rome's seven hills, and the ten horns could have been the mixed nations. Finally, Rome's ten horns would give way to one small horn, the Antichrist's empire. Revelation would also discuss Babylon, Persia and Greece. These empires would usually be used only as a background for Rome.

Verses 9-11

The second great theme of Revelation was introduced as Christ broke the fifth seal. Rome destroyed Jerusalem and scattered Jews throughout the world. The fifth seal described the New Testament Jewish exile that had occurred during the period of mixed nations. The Old Testament prophets promised that the "Babylonian exile would end when the first Babylon was captured by the nations. Revelation promised that the Jewish exile of the New Testament age would end when a second Babylon would be destroyed. Then the Jews would return to Palestine in repentance. When the fifth seal was opened, John saw martyrs waiting and praying for God to judge the earth. The period of mixed nations would be a long period of waiting for Christ's return and waiting for God's judgment.

Revelation described two returns from exile. In the first, Jews left the gentile nations and returned to Palestine. In the second return, the dead would rise and Christ would return to earth. This would be Israel's final return to the land. Christ would then rule on Mount Zion and would shepherd His people forever. The martyrs were waiting for this final return. They were beneath the altar in the presence of Christ. The Bible promised that those who died in Christ would be with Him until the resurrection. Jesus had promised the thief on the cross, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). Paul also promised that being absent from the body was being present with the Lord (II Corinthians 5:8).

The martyrs were given a white robe. This robe came from a broad Scriptural context. Isaiah used clothing as a symbol for righteousness and salvation (Isaiah 61:10). However, the white robe was more than a symbol. Scripture promised that when believers entered Christ's presence, they would receive white clothing. John Himself implied this in Revelation 3:4; 3:18, and 4:4. Moses commanded that priests must put on clean linen clothing when they came into God's presence (Leviticus 16:4). Ezekiel promised that this would be the custom in the New Jerusalem (Ezekiel 44:19). Zechariah also saw men standing in Christ's presence. Zechariah saw Joshua the high priest clothed in filthy garments standing before the Lord. Satan pointed at Joshua's sin and accused him before God. The Lord rebuked Satan and declared Joshua to be a brand plucked from the fires of judgment. Then Christ clothed Joshua in clean garments,

explaining that Joshua's uncleanness had been taken away. The martyrs in Revelation 6 were also given white robes because they stood in Christ's presence with their sins forgiven (Zechariah 3:1-8).

Christ told his children to rest a while longer until the church's suffering was completed. The prophet Daniel recorded a similar conversation. Daniel saw a vision about the history of God's people. As Christ spoke with Daniel, the Lord was asked how long it would be until the end of these wonders. The Lord said that history would end after 3½ periods, and as soon as unbelievers had finished shattering the power of God's people (Daniel 12:5-7; Isaiah 33:1). When the persecution was completed, God would judge the earth. Till then, the Lord told His people to wait and rest. Why were they resting? It is difficult to understand what the Bible said about the intermediate state between death and resurrection. Whatever it would be, this period would be a time of rest. The Old Testament usually described Sheol as a place of silence where men were only occasionally aroused from their sleep. The Old Testament euphemism for death was sleeping with the fathers (I Kings 2:10). Other Old Testament descriptions of death involved sleep and rest. Isaiah wrote that when a righteous man died, he entered peace and rested on his bed (Isaiah 57:1-2). Daniel was told nearly the same thing. Daniel was told that when he died, he would enter rest. Daniel's rest would last until his resurrection at the end of the age (Daniel 12:13).

The Bible did not claim that the dead would be unconscious until the judgment. Men would be aware of their surroundings whether they were with Christ or cut off from His presence. They would at least sometimes be awake, although they may have slept for long periods of time. So Christ told the martyrs in Revelation 6 to continue resting until God's judgment began. The scroll's fifth and sixth seal described their rest. This period was also the age of Israel's New Testament exile. During the New Testament age, the Old Testament believing community was resting with her Lord.

Verses 12-17

The martyrs' prayers for judgment were answered as Christ broke the 6th seal. As this seal was opened, Christ destroyed the earth in judgment and returned on the clouds of heaven. Verses 12 and 13 described the events around Armageddon. There was a great earthquake. The sun was darkened and the moon was turned to blood. Stars fell from the sky. The Bible promised that these things would happen as Armageddon unfolded and as Christ returned. Joel 3:14-15 noted that the sun and moon would grow dark and the stars would fade as the day of the Lord came in the valley of decision. Isaiah 13 combined a prophecy of Babylon's fall with a vision of Armageddon. Isaiah 13:10 predicted that the sun, moon, and stars would be darkened. Isaiah 13:13 added that the earth would be shaken from its place. Christ made almost the same prophecy in Matthew 24:29-30 which promised, "But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken, and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory." Christ was saying that as Armageddon happened, the whole earth would see Him coming on the clouds to claim His elect.

In Revelation 6:14-17, Christ made the same point that He had made in Matthew 24. Immediately after the sky was darkened and the stars fell, the sky would be split like a scroll. The mountains would be moved from their places. Then the kings of the earth would hid in caves, saying to the mountains, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come; and who is able to stand?" The earth's leaders had every reason to fear Christ. Matthew 25:31-46 said that after Christ returned, He would judge men. The Lord would say to those who have lived their lives away from God, "Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). Then the righteous would enter eternal life (Matthew 25:46). The Lord's return would be a transition between the sixth and the seventh seals. When the seventh seal was broken in Revelation 8:1, there would be silence in heaven for half an

hour. This silence would be the eternal state for God's people in Christ's presence, and the Father's promised rest.