

Sabbath School Lesson #5 – The Seven Seals – 26 January-1 February 2019

Christ is the only divine Being who could open the seals. The heavenly inhabitants acknowledged this fact. “And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:9-10). In commenting on the seven seals, we mainly quote from the book *Daniel and the Revelation*.

Sunday: The Opening of the First Seal – On the opening of the first seal, John says, “I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer” (Revelation 6:2). Of this seal, Uriah Smith said: “a white horse, and the rider who bears a bow and to whom a crown is given, and who goes forth conquering and to conquer, is a fit emblem of the triumphs of the gospel in the first century of this dispensation. The whiteness of the horse denotes the purity of faith in that age; and the crown which was given to the rider, and his going forth conquering and to make still further conquests, the zeal and success with which the truth was promulgated by its earliest ministers. To this it is objected that the ministers of Christ and the progress of the gospel could not be properly represented by such warlike symbols. But we ask, By what symbols could the work of Christianity better be represented when it went forth as an aggressive principle against the huge systems of error with which it had at first to contend? The rider upon this horse went forth - where? His commission was unlimited. The gospel was to all the world” (Uriah Smith, *Daniel and the Revelation*, 1882 edition, p 532).

Monday: The Second and Third Seals – When the second seal was opened, “there went out another horse *that was red*: and *power* was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword” (Revelation 6:4). What does this seal signify? “If the whiteness of the first horse denoted the purity of the gospel in the period which that symbol covers, the redness of the second horse would signify that in this period that original purity began to be corrupted. The mystery of iniquity already worked in Paul's day; and the professed church of Christ, it would seem, was now so far corrupted by it as to require this change in the color of this symbol. Errors began to arise. Worldliness came in. The ecclesiastical power sought the alliance of the secular. Troubles and commotions were the result. The spirit of this period perhaps reached its climax as we come down to the days of Constantine” (ibid, p 533). For third seal, John says, “I looked, and there before me was a black horse! Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand” (Revelation 6:5). “How rapidly the work of corruption progresses! What a contrast in color between this symbol and the first one: A black horse - the very opposite of white! A period of great darkness and moral corruption in the church must be denoted by this symbol. By the events of the second seal the way was fully opened for that state of things to be brought about which is here presented. The time that intervened between the reign of Constantine and the establishment of the papacy in A.D. 538 may be justly noted as the time when the darkest errors and grossest superstitions sprang up in the church” (ibid, 534).

Tuesday: The Scene of the Fourth Seal – The fourth seal opens and John says, “I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth” (Revelation 6:8). On this seal, Uriah Smith comments: “The color of this horse is remarkable. The colors of the white, red, and black horses, mentioned in the preceding verses, are natural; but a pale color is unnatural. The original word denotes the ‘pale of yellowish color’ that is seen in blighted or sickly plants. A strange state of things in the professed church must be denoted by this symbol. The rider on this horse is named Death; and Hell (hades, the grave) follows with him. The mortality is so great during this period that it would seem as if ‘the pale nations of the dead’ had come upon the earth, and were following in the wake of this desolating power. The period during which this seal applies can hardly be mistaken. It must refer to the time in which the papacy bore its unrebuked, unrestrained, and persecuting rule, commencing about A.D. 538, and extending to the time when the Reformers commenced their work of exposing the

corruptions of the papal systems. 'And power was given unto them' – him says the margin; that is, the power personified by Death on the pale horse; namely, the papacy. By the fourth part of the earth is doubtless meant the territory over which this power had jurisdiction; while the words sword, hunger, death (that is, some infliction which causes death, as exposure, torture, etc.), and beasts of the earth, are figures denoting the means by which it has put to death its martyrs, fifty millions of whom, according to the lowest estimate, call for vengeance from beneath its bloody altar" (Uriah Smith, *Daniel and the Revelation*, 1882 edition, p 539).

Wednesday: The Opening of the Fifth Seal – John says, "And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were 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, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled" (Revelation 6:9-11). Space will not permit to fully quote the commentary by Uriah Smith (*ibid*, pp 540-546). Suffice to summarise.

Following the period of the papal persecution, the time covered by the fifth seal would commence when the Reformation began to undermine the antichristian papal fabric, and restrain the persecuting power of the Romish Church. The souls under the altar, crying for their blood to be avenged, this is not teaching conscious state of the dead. But it is urged that these souls must be conscious; for they cry to God. This argument would be of weight, were there no such figure of speech as personification. But while there is, it will be proper, on certain conditions, to attribute life, action, and intelligence to inanimate objects. Thus the blood of Abel is said to have cried to God from the ground (Gen. 4:9-10). The stone cried out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber answered it (Hab. 2:11). The hire of the laborers kept back by fraud cried, and the cry entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth (James 5:4). So the souls in the fifth could cry, and not thereby be proved to be conscious. They were represented to John as having been slain upon the alter of papal sacrifice, on this earth, and lying dead beneath it. They certainly were not alive when John saw them under the fifth seal; for he again brings to view the same company, in almost the same language, and assures us that the first time they live after their martyrdom, is at the resurrection of the just (Rev. 20:4-6). Lying there, victims of papal bloodthirstiness and oppression, they cried to God in the same manner that Abel's blood cried to Him from the ground (Genesis 4:10).

Thursday: The Opening of the Sixth Seal – John says, "And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood. And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places" (Revelation 6:12-14). Space permits not for a detailed quote from Uriah Smith (*ibid*, pp 547-567). Suffice to summarise. "Between the fifth and sixth seals there seems to be a sudden and entire change in the language, from the highly figurative to the strictly literal. Whatever may be the cause of this change, the change itself cannot well be denied. By no principle of interpretation can the language of the preceding seals be made to be literal, nor can the language of this any more easily be made to be figurative. We must therefore accept the change, even though we should be unable to explain it. There is a great fact, however, to which we would here call attention. It was in the period covered by this seal, that the prophetic portions of God's word were to be unsealed, and many run to and fro, or 'give their sedulous attention to the understanding of these things,' and thereby knowledge on this part of God's word was to be greatly increased."

Reading the sixth seal literally, Smith goes on to list a number of historical events: the great earthquake of Lisbon of 1 Nov 1755; the darkening of the sun and the moon becoming as blood on 19 May 1780; the stars falling – the great meteoric shower of 13 Nov 1833.

"And the Heaven Departed as Scroll – In this event our minds are turned to the future. From looking at the past, and beholding the word of God fulfilled, we are now called to look at events in the future, which are no less sure to come. Here is our position, unmistakably defined. We stand between the 13th and 14th verses of this chapter." May we wait faithfully.