

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Lesson 14 - Chapters 5 & 6

We're nearing the end of Revelation chapter 5, all of which takes place in Heaven. I emphasize this because beginning in chapter 6 the scene will shift to planet Earth. One of the fundamental principles we need to keep upfront in our minds regards that of the sealed scroll itself. That is, the meaning of the scroll that is sealed with 7 seals is that what is written in it was long ago decided. By long ago I'm speaking temporally; I'm speaking in terms of the way we measure time in our Universe. By that standard what is going to be revealed in the sealed scroll was decided upon thousands if not millions of years ago, and then set on the cosmic shelf until the time is right. Of course by Heaven's standard, there is no such thing as time; past, present and future have no meaning. So it is not as though the spiritual creatures of Heaven, including God Himself, have been waiting in the sense we'd think of it. Therefore we must wrap our minds around the reality that everything that has happened in human history from Adam through today and beyond to the end, was known by God if not fully planned and orchestrated by God.

Another principle to remember is that while John is just learning of the contents of the sealed scroll by means of visions, the carrying out of what was written has yet to happen on Earth (although no doubt John expected it to occur shortly after his vision experience). Thus humanity has known since roughly 90 A.D. the skeletal blueprints of what is to come and so the human race has no excuse when all the horror that was written begins to take place; we cannot say: "but we didn't know".

When we read and study Revelation we must always admit to ourselves that what we take from it will be imperfect and incomplete because the bulk of it is unfulfilled prophecy. It is ever tempting for us as disciples, students, and teachers, or especially for Bible commentators, to fill in the blanks and make speculations that often become inalterable doctrine. I realize it can be frustrating as humans (and especially as **Christian** humans) to not be able to find ready, solid answers to questions about our faith and our Holy Book that we feel are important to us. But it is going to continue to be my position and approach to teaching this Apocalypse that when something cannot be reasonably and firmly answered and backed up by Holy Scripture, we'll discuss the various possibilities but not declare them as fact.

In chapter 5 as the Lamb that was slain but is now alive (Yeshua) took the scroll from His Father's right hand and began to open the seals on the scroll, we found that 3 songs or hymns were sung to Him with the first one beginning in verse 9.

Revelation 5:9-10 CJB ⁹ and they sang a new song, "You are worthy to take the scroll and break its seals; because you were slaughtered; at the cost of blood you ransomed for God persons from every tribe, language, people and nation. ¹⁰ You made them into a kingdom for God to rule, cohanim to serve him; and they will rule over the earth."

This was called a "new song" because what was occurring had never happened before; the 24

Elders singing this song had not done so in the past. This song reminds us of Exodus 19: 5 and 6 where we read:

⁵ Now if you will pay careful attention to what I say and keep my covenant, then you will be my own treasure from among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶ and you will be a kingdom of cohanim for me, a nation set apart.' These are the words you are to speak to the people of Isra'el."

And now, indeed, Believers have paid attention to what God told us and we have become a kingdom of priests for Him as He had always intended.

Let's move now to Revelation 5 verse 11 and continue our study.

RE-READ REVELATION CHAPTER 5:11 - end

Verses 11 and 12 form the second hymn. But this time instead of only the 24 Elders at God's throne signing to the Lord, they are joined by millions and millions of angels who agree with God that the Lamb is worthy of receiving power, riches, glory, honor and praise. Please note: God's very existence as God makes Him worthy of possessing all of these things because He is the Creator of everything. But the Lamb only receives these things from the One who by nature possesses them and so has the right to give them to whomever He chooses.

Next in verse 13 the third hymn is sung and in addition to the 24 Elders and the millions of angels, every living creature that God has ever created....those unspecified spirit beings in Heaven, those unspecified physical beings on the surface of the earth and under it (meaning the dead), and those in the sea....all add their voices to the chorus. So what we see is that with each successive hymn, a larger and larger number of creatures join in the praise of the Lamb so that everything that lives in Heaven and on Earth acknowledges the Lordship of Christ.

And finally to end the series of praise songs to the Lord Yeshua the 4 living beings shout "amen!" and the 24 Elders fall on their faces in worship to Him. Thus all creatures, living and dead, spiritual and physical, great and small, agree and acknowledge the magnitude of what has just happened and their allegiance to the Son of God. I can't even imagine the emotions of awe that John must have been experiencing as this scene unfolded in his vision.

Open your Bibles to Revelation chapter 6.

READ REVELATION CHAPTER 6 all

From here on most of what we'll read takes place in the physical realm, on earth. And what we are reading about is often called the Day of the Lord or Judgment Day; that is, it is when God begins in earnest to carry out His judgment on the Earth and its inhabitants; and His judgment is that the world deserves His wrath.

In verse 1 the Lamb that was slain but is now alive breaks open the first of the seven seals. I want to pause here to say that especially at this point is when so much varying and opposing

Christian doctrines on the End Times plays a significant role in how one interprets the staggering and often confusing events being depicted in the Book of Revelation. Even the naming convention that the various doctrines employ to explain and define their beliefs play a role. For instance especially Pre-Tribulation Dispensationalists (perhaps representing the largest segment of mainstream Protestant Christianity) interpret the timing of these events in terms of three earth shattering phenomena called The Rapture, The Tribulation and The Great Tribulation. Setting aside discussion of the Rapture for now, their End Times doctrine revolves around the existence of two named time periods that can be identified and put on a timeline; one is called The Tribulation and the other is called The Great Tribulation. The Tribulation is the name of a specific period of trauma on earth that extends for precisely 7 years; and the Great Tribulation is the name of another period of trauma even greater than the first that essentially marks the 2nd half of the 7 years of The Tribulation. However the only way one can establish the actual existence of these two named events is by adding a key word to the Scriptures that isn't there in the oldest texts of the New Testament that we have: those that are written in Greek. The word is **ton** in Greek, which directly translates to "the" in English. In other words, while Revelation indeed speaks of times of tribulation and great tribulation, it never speaks of THE tribulation, or THE great tribulation except in one instance (and we'll discuss that thoroughly when we get there). This is not just semantics. By turning the biblical term **thlipsis** (tribulation) into a proper noun by putting the word "the" before it, and then attaching it to the so-called 70th week of Daniel, a quite detailed map of the End Times is created. Even though Revelation tells us that when the End Times arrive there will be troubles for mankind that increase into even greater troubles (tribulation increases and becomes greater tribulation) Revelation never speaks of them as identifiable named events.

Those who adhere to the Pre-Tribulation doctrine also claim that before the opening of the first seal by Christ the Church has already been raptured. Thus according to this doctrine Believers are already gone from the earth and living in Heaven before the beginning of the events of Revelation chapter 6. While I'll speak more on this in later lessons I think it is only proper that I should tell you where I come down on this, while acknowledging that in no way do I claim that my thoughts on the matter are infallible.

I believe that by the end of chapter 6 all Believers will have experienced the Rapture and that whatever Believers remain on earth can only be those who have accepted Christ since the moment the Rapture occurred (and probably many are now Believers *because* they witnessed the Rapture). That said, I do not agree with the typical Pre-Tribulation timeline that does two things: first, it calls the seal, trumpet and bowl judgments the time of tribulation (that is, the 21 judgments that God hurls upon the earth and its inhabitants beginning with the seal judgment in Revelation chapter 6). And second, that God therefore lifts all Believers to a safe place by means of an event called the Rapture to avoid a period of particularly difficult tribulation.

Let me be clear: I do not see these 21 Judgments as a period of time called The Tribulation. Rather I call these 21 judgments that begin in chapter 6 mostly as the time of God's wrath and so see them as quite separate and fundamentally different from a period of tribulation that is represented by the first 4 seals. God's wrath seems to consist of 17 of the 21 named supernaturally caused events heaped upon mankind and the earth starting in chapter 6 with the breaking of the 7 seals. Tribulation (perhaps including great tribulation) is not necessarily

supernaturally sent by God in the sense that we typically think of it; rather it is brought about by mankind's own evil inclination run wild (no doubt satanically provoked). An example of this would be Hitler's genocide against the Jews. As horrible as this was, it was not a supernatural act of God (it was not God's wrath); but it was tribulation. It was a nearly unparalleled act of evil inspired by one of the most wicked human beings the world has ever known. Thus while I see Believers being removed from harm's way prior to God raining down supernatural catastrophe from Heaven, I don't see Believers being delivered from oppression and tribulation that has always bedeviled mankind; that is, the suffering caused by the evil of human against human. The biblical pattern has always been that God's worshippers will suffer through persecution and tribulation as perhaps the greatest opportunities to witness to His glory and salvation. But what God does not do is to pour out his supernatural wrath indiscriminately upon both the guilty and those He had declared innocent.

In Noah's day God made provision for the final 8 faithful God worshippers on earth before He purified the world through a destructive flood by having them build an ark and board it before the rains came. In Abraham's day God removed every remaining God worshipper from Sodom before He devastated the city with supernatural fire. In Moses' day the Lord protected the Israelites in Egypt from the ravages of the 10 supernatural plagues He sent to Egypt to force Pharaoh to let His people go. However in every case God's people suffered under the evil of other humans. So I see the End Times Rapture in the same light. As Believers we will not suffer God's wrath (if defined as the 21 or perhaps 17 judgments we're about to study); but we will suffer through many terrible humanly inspired evils such as war and genocide, and perhaps including the ruination of our precious environment that has provided a safe home for us for millennia. I label these humanly inspired evils as tribulation, and at some point even great tribulation; something that we are warned is coming. Why would Believers be warned tribulation is coming and that we must overcome and stay faithful until death if we won't be around to suffer it? Pre-Tribulation doctrine adherents say this is only speaking of those who become Believers after the Rapture happens. Perhaps; I cannot completely discount that as a possibility. But that would be out of character for Scripture and prophecy in general.

Back to verse 1. First let me say that a reasonable case could be made that the 4 horses of differing colors being sent out do not represent God's wrath, but rather is satanic wrath causing human evil to greatly increase. I lean that direction; it is undeniable that such is a possible understanding to keep in mind. Upon the first seal being broken one of the 4 living beings surrounding God's throne announces with a loud voice: "Go". This command to "go" brought forth a white horse and a rider who carried a bow, wore a crown, and together the horse and rider went out conquering. Following this 3 more horses with riders will be sent out, each one ordered, in turn, by 1 of the 4 living beings. These 4 horses and riders are known in literary and artistic circles as The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Quite interestingly the Bible scholar world is fairly equally divided on whether or not the rider on the white horse is to be identified as Christ, or as the anti-Christ. This was not always the case. In my research into what the early Church Fathers thought about this, to a man they believed the white horse to be the Gospel and the rider to be Jesus. As for the other 3 horses and riders, most of the early Church Fathers saw them as sowers of evil and hardship; a harbinger of the coming of God's harsh hand of punishment and judgment. Good cases can be made for both sides of the debate; however for me the weight of evidence leans more strongly in one direction. Since

John's visions are invariably about fulfilling the many Old Testament prophecies about the End Times and the Day of the Lord, then it is within the context of those prophecies that we should look for understanding. If the tone and context of those prophecies is entirely different than what we find in John's vision, then we have God using allegory to get His message across to John; something which I cannot accept. So in search of the most direct reference among the Prophets to the going out of 4 horses to wreak havoc on humanity, Bible scholars generally agree that it must be Zechariah 6.

Zechariah. 6:1-8 CJB *Again I raised my eyes, and I saw in front of me four chariots coming out from between two mountains, and the mountains were mountains of bronze.*

² *The first chariot had red horses; the second chariot, black horses;*

³ *the third chariot, white horses; and the fourth chariot, spotted gray horses.*

⁴ *I asked the angel speaking with me, "What are these, my Lord?"*

⁵ *The angel answered me, "These are the four winds of the sky that go out, after presenting themselves before the Lord of all the land.*

⁶ *The one with the black horses is going out toward the land in the north, the white [horses] have gone out after them, and the spotted have gone out toward the land in the south."*

⁷ *Then the gray ones went out and were seeking to go and wander throughout the whole earth, when he said, "Wander throughout the whole earth"; and they did wander throughout the whole earth.*

⁸ *Then he called out to me and said, "Look! The ones going to the land in the north have given my Spirit rest in the north country."*

In Zechariah God bids 4 horses of almost identically described colors as those John describes in Revelation to go out and patrol the earth and to punish those nations who have oppressed His people Israel. These horses are pulling chariots, which means they are for war. One thing that I think helps to even better connect this Zechariah passage with Revelation 6 is that in Zechariah chapter 6 Zechariah asks about who the horses and chariots are and he receives an answer. However I think the CJB translation unnecessarily muddies the waters by coming up with a decidedly different interpretation than practically all other reliable Bible translations. The CJB says that the angel answers Zechariah that the 4 horses are the 4 winds in the sky. However almost all other Bible versions say that the angel answers that the 4 horses are the 4 spirits of Heaven. The Hebrew word that is being translated as "wind" in the CJB is **ruach**; and **ruach** can indeed mean wind but more commonly it means "spirit". The Hebrew word that is being translated as "sky" by the CJB is **shamayim**; and **shamayim** can mean sky but more commonly means "heaven". The context helps to determine which way to take the meaning of these two words.

So considering that these 4 horses are sent out after standing before the Lord in Heaven and that they are, of course, symbolic and spiritual in nature (and not actual horses), I agree with the bulk of translations that say that these horses represent something called the 4 spirits of Heaven, and that fits nicely with the 4 horses of Revelation 6.

In both Revelation 6 and Zechariah 6, the 4 horses are dealt with as a group having a common purpose: to create havoc and death on earth. It is true that in the Bible white usually signifies purity. Further the rider is said to be wearing a crown. Together these two characteristics sound pretty Christ-like. However the black, red, and grayish-green or spotted horses are sent out to do evil things that cause terrible woes, so it is difficult to find a good cause to separate the white horse out from the group and have its symbolism interpreted as indicating good when the symbolism of the other 3 is to be seen as that of evil. The issue of the crown is also a challenging one as Christ is said to be king in Revelation and elsewhere in the New Testament. Yet the word used in this verse for the crown upon the rider of the white horse is **stephanos** and it is used in reference to the laurel wreath given to victors in athletic competition, while a crown for a king in Greek is typically **diadema**. We also have the rider of the white horse using a bow, which is a weapon of war. In Israel horses were not used for transportation; they were used for chariots or to be ridden by soldiers. So symbolically these horses are war horses. Then we have the matter of how the scene in Heaven unfolds. If we take the rider of the white horse to be Christ, then we have Christ opening the first seal of the scroll with the result that one of the 4 living beings then orders Him to mount a white horse, take a bow in His hand, and go to create war and chaos on earth.

Therefore with all these considerations it seems more likely than not that the white horse and its rider are satanic in nature; that is, this is symbolic of the anti-Christ. And the reason that we find so many characteristics that one could easily see as Christ-like is because the anti-Christ tries to achieve his victory through deception. To help us sort this out Charles Lee Feinberg makes the salient point that we should not be so much concerned with the individuals on the horses but rather with the purpose of the horse and rider together, and the 4 horses and riders as a group. Thus we should probably not make the unwarranted assumption that the white horse is being sent out for an entirely opposite purpose of the other 3 horses because otherwise we have the first one more or less counteracting the purpose of other three. So whether or not the white horse and its rider is meant to symbolize the anti-Christ specifically, or as an inciter of war and violence in general, I do think the purpose is evil.

If you are paying close attention then an obvious question must be: would our God actually order evil to be sent upon the world especially since the 4 horsemen of the Apocalypse seem to be going out from Heaven? This presents a theological challenge of some proportions as it is common in Christianity to declare that the Lord only deals in good and it is against His nature to deal in evil. However the Holy Scriptures tell us something a little different.

^{CJB} **Isaiah 45:7** *I form light, I create darkness; I make well-being, I create woe; I, ADONAI, do all these things.*

The KJV puts this slightly differently.

^{KJV} **Isaiah 45:7** *I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.*

The word that the CJB translates as woe, and the KJV translates as evil, is **rah**. Both English translations are correct and really mean about the same thing. Woe is usually the result of evil. And when we understand this and understand that with the 21 judgments of Revelation God is indeed sending 21 woes to the world, to say He is sending evil is merely semantics. So, yes, God does send evil things to the world in order to bring about His will and to execute His judgment upon humans (and at times to test the faith of His worshippers). Therefore it makes sense that the white horse and its rider are being sent to cause the specter of evil to erupt globally.

Then in verse 3 the second seal is broken and a 2nd horse, a red one, is sent out with its rider holding a great sword. Red is usually the biblical symbol for blood. And as with so many biblical symbols, blood can be used for good or for evil. Thus blood can be a symbol of life and atonement for redemption; or it can be a symbol of murder and destruction. This duo's mission was to remove peace from the world and to promote men killing men on a massive scale. While this can be taken primarily to speak of wars of nation against nation, it can also speak to all modes of humans intentionally, unjustly and maliciously flaunting God's laws by killing humans by means of government oppression, criminal activity, terrorism, and even abortion.

In verse 5 the 3rd seal is broken and the 3rd of the 4 living beings calls forth a black horse bearing a rider carrying a balance scale. Notice how there are 4 living beings and 4 horses, with each living being calling forth a specific horse and rider as though there is some association or connection between them. We aren't given enough information to know for certain what that connection might be. However remember that Zechariah 6 said that the 4 horses were the 4 spirits of Heaven, and the 4 unique and powerful living beings are also 4 spirits in Heaven so this may well be the connection; but that is only my speculation.

The scale symbolizes commerce as its purpose is to measure money and commodities; in this case it is to weigh out scarce food. Thus famine is being sent upon the world by God, no doubt caused in large part by the war and strife instigated by the first 2 horses and their riders, so that fields cannot be planted and harvested. As the scarcity sets in the expense of food rises to more than an average person can pay. In the ancient world a Denarius was the wage a man would earn for a day's labor. A quart of wheat costing a Denarius, or 3 quarts of barley for the same, is about 10 times the normal cost. Here it is meant as a metaphor indicating that everything a man could earn in a day would be needed to buy good quality food sufficient only for one day for one person, or (in regards to the barley) a less desirable food sufficient for 3 persons for one day. And yet the oil and the wine were not to be harmed; this means the well off could continue to enjoy the finer things of life (oil and wine) even as the poor struggled for basic survival. What would be the result one might expect from this situation? How about civil strife and class warfare on a global scale as the poor rebel in fury and desperation against the rich and the ruling elite who always seem insulated from the troubles that affect everyone else.

In verse 7 the Lamb breaks the 4th seal and in response the 4th horseman is sent out by the 4th living being. The fourth horse is variously described as pale, ashen and pallid, often

equated with dappled, greenish, grayish, even an off-white. The Greek word being translated is **chloros**; literally it means the light green color of plants but it is also used to describe the color of a person who is very ill. The point being that the horse looks sickly because it represents pestilence and disease. Interestingly the final horse and rider are given a name: Death and Hades. We need to grasp that Hades was the imagined underworld of the Greeks along with all of its mythology. The idea that it is trying to convey is of course a Hebrew one, and so a better translation would be Death and **Sheol**, since **Sheol** is the place of the dead we read of in the Bible and that John would have been familiar with. The 4 horsemen bring death through one means or another to the inhabitants of the earth. I want to state at this point that my best understanding of Revelation is that this will occur shortly before the Rapture of Believers. If I am correct the recipients of the woes and evil that the 4 Horsemen of the Apocalypse bring is upon non-Believers and Believers.

It is always important that death is seen by Believers as outside the perfect will of God and (generally speaking) as satanic in origin. This is not to say that Yehoveh doesn't use death for His purposes just as He can turn many things intended for evil into a greater good. Our God is not a God of death, but rather of life. I cannot bypass this without mentioning that any religion that glorifies death above life, and killing as a good (even joyful) thing, is worthy only of scorn for it is not of God; rather such a religion has the Devil as its father. It is no coincidence that in the 6th century as Christianity was overtaking the world by preaching Messiah's message of love, peace and restoration that Satan would rise in opposition by creating its opposite, Islam, which preaches hate, war, death and subjugation. And today, as Believers, we cannot be deceived into following the modern virtue of tolerance to find a way to give any credence, respect or validity whatsoever to this pagan religion nor to somehow equate the god of Islam with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I cannot know for sure; but unless there is a significant change on earth, when the 4 Horsemen of the Apocalypse finally begin to ravage humanity one of their primary weapons may well be Islamic terrorism and the Muslim hope to rule the planet.

Even so death is not our eternal nemesis because when the Lord finally defeats Satan (which in the largest sense is what the Book of Revelation is about) He also defeats death; in fact eventually God gets rid of death and the grave entirely. We read this in Revelation 20 as the redemptive work of God nears its completion. It is one of the greatest statements of hope in the entire Word of God for those who trust Yeshua, and one of the greatest warnings for those who reject Him.

Revelation 20:11-15 CJB ¹¹ *Next I saw a great white throne and the One sitting on it. Earth and heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them.* ¹² *And I saw the dead, both great and small, standing in front of the throne. Books were opened; and another book was opened, the Book of Life; and the dead were judged from what was written in the books, according to what they had done.*

¹³ *The sea gave up the dead in it; and Death and Sh'ol gave up the dead in them; and they were judged, each according to what he had done.* ¹⁴ *Then Death and Sh'ol were hurled into the lake of fire. This is the second death- the lake of fire.*

¹⁵ ***Anyone whose name was not found written in the Book of Life was hurled into the lake of fire.***

The final half of **verse 8** says that: ***"They were given authority to kill one-quarter of the world by war, by famine, by plagues and with the wild animals of the earth."*** The "they" is the 4 horsemen. So the 4 horsemen were sent out together to work together as a team; they each served a role to punish the Earth's inhabitants. Satan thought this indicated he was winning. God was going to use it to bring about a nearly unimaginable level of redemption and restoration.

We'll continue in chapter 6 next week.