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### A Comparative Study of Hermeneutical Approaches to the Seven Seals

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ABSTRACT

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF HERMENEUTICAL  
APPROACHES TO THE SEVEN SEALS

by

Harold Novac

Adviser: Kim Papaioannou

## ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE RESEARCH

Thesis

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF HERMENEUTICAL APPROACHES TO  
THE SEVEN SEALS

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### Problem

From the beginnings God had a purpose with His prophetic messages to the world and we can see in the Bible clearly, that God always presented His prophetic messages in a certain order. A chronological method was favored by God. That is why from the beginnings, as Seventh-Day Adventists we believed that the best way to interpret the secrets of Revelation is through the historicist approach. Unfortunately this view is fading among scholars, even among SDA researchers.

### Purpose

We are going to investigate why this is happening and we will show that historicism has a lot to say, even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This view has to be protected and we have to give back its purpose and function. This is the only way we can really see

what God has shown us through the book and this is what people need in the last days in order to be able to understand to book of Revelation appropriately.

### Method

In order to be able to see that the historical approach is appropriate, we have to see and compare what the other interpretation schools have to say about the book of Revelation. That is what we are going to use in this paper. Seal by seal we will investigate each interpretation school (Preterism, Futurism, Idealism, Historicism), and what they have to say about the seals. This way we are going to have a clearer view of all these methods.

### Conclusion

After a careful study, it will be presented that Preterism and Futurism have been developed way after historicism, by two different Spanish Jesuits. The reason is very simple. The time, when they came into existence was exactly the period when reformation started to occur within the church. That was the time when the reformers identified Babylon as the Roman Catholic Church. Of course this was not pleasant for the leaders so they needed to do something in the level of interpretation. This is the time when these two interpretation schools arose. Another important find is how God always had prophetic messages to his people. If we study the book of Daniel, we can realize that all the predictions about the futuristic kingdoms are in a chronological order, covering the whole period until Jesus' birth. The Bible says about God that He is not changing. God inspired Daniel to write his book, and the same God inspired John to write the book of Revelation, therefore the predictions in the book should have the same chronological order, which is absent from Idealism and Futurism. Some other findings are also in our favor which will be presented further in the paper.

Andrews University  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF HERMENEUTICAL  
APPROACHES TO THE SEVEN SEALS

A Thesis  
Presented In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

by  
Harold Novac

2018

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APPROACHES TO THE SEVEN SEALS

A thesis  
presented in partial fulfillment  
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Harold Novac

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NKJV	New King James Version
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
SDA	Seventh-day Adventist

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Purpose and Significance of the Study**

Living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century we are overdosed with information. We can hear, see and read about anything. There are no exceptions. If we would like to hear the latest news about the president of a certain country, we are one click away. If we would like to listen to what people say about climate change, we just have to switch on the TV and we will hear all kinds of theories. From this super accumulated information era nothing seems to escape. The Bible is under scrutiny as well. We are able to hear and read all kinds of interpretations about the Bible.

I chose to write about one of the most controversial books of the Bible because I believe its message is still relevant. The book of Revelation has elicited different approaches and interpretations. One of the most controversial parts of the book is the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter which talks about the Seven Seals. There are schools of interpretations about Revelation which have their own hermeneutics to understand the writings of the book. The question is what they would like to say? Where are they coming from? What is their direction? All of these questions are important. The interpretation schools we are talking about are the following: Preterism, Futurism, Idealism and Historicism.

I believe, the most accurate interpretation, which stays closer to reality, is the Historicist approach. In this study I will share information about each interpretation school and we will be able to see why the historicist approach is preferable. In the

following part we are going to have a short look to each interpretation school and we will observe how the book is explained according to their understanding.

The first to be examined is the *Preterist School* which holds that the events of Revelation were fulfilled in the first century. Preterit in English means something that is past, or bygone. This is the view held by a majority of modern scholars, not a few of whom are identified with the liberal interpretation of Christianity. Preterism did not appear until 1614, when a Spanish Jesuit named Alcasar established its main lines.<sup>1</sup>

The *Futurist School*, by contrast, says that everything after Revelation 4 is yet to happen in the future. Under this view, the book of Revelation is mostly a book of future prophecy that has yet to be fulfilled. While John no doubt uses first century imagery to explain his future predictions, this does not indicate that the entire book should be seen as fulfilled in the first century. For example, John writes, “Just as you heard that Antichrist is coming, even now many Antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour” (1 Jn 2:18). While many of the images of the Antichrist can be seen throughout history, there is still a future Antichrist that will come at the end of human history.

Futurists like to believe that the church fathers were holding this interpretation as well, but more likely they were historians than futurists. It is believed that the futurist view was first developed in the late sixteenth century by Franciscus Ribeira, a Spanish Jesuit.”<sup>2</sup>

The *Idealist School* holds that the book of Revelation should be taken as a purely symbolic explanation of our battle between good and evil. Osborne says that

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<sup>1</sup> Johnson, A. F. (1981). Revelation. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 12: Hebrews through Revelation* (F. E. Gaebelin, Ed.) (409). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.408

the seals, trumpets, and bowls illustrate God's judgments on sinners at all times, and the beast refers to all the anti-Christian empires and rulers throughout history. Therefore the book describes the victory of Christ and his people down through history.<sup>3</sup>

Idealism in the book of Revelation additionally also called the non-literal approach, the metaphorical approach, the spiritual approach, and numerous different names in Christian eschatology is an understanding of the Book of Revelation that sees the greater part of the images of the book as symbols.<sup>4</sup>

The *Historicist School*, similarly to Futurism, holds that the book of Revelation predicts the future. But the prophecies do not refer to a very limited time-frame just before the second coming of Jesus, as Futurism believes, but they have been progressively fulfilled throughout church history. This view was common among Jews at the turn of the era in interpreting the book of Daniel, and also among early Christians. This was the view of Martin Luther and the Reformers, who believed that the Antichrist was the Roman papacy and Babylon was the Roman church. This view generally has few followers today. Important information has to be mentioned here and that is the order of appearances of the interpretation schools. The first one was historicism, and was held way before the other interpretation schools appeared centuries later.

Historicism, is a method of interpretation in Christian eschatology which associates biblical prophecies with actual historicist events and identifies symbolic beings with historicist persons or societies. This has been applied to the Book of

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<sup>3</sup> Osborne, Grant. *Revelation*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic. 2002. 20.

<sup>4</sup> Stan Campbell and James S. Bell (2001). *The Complete Idiot's Guide to the Book of Revelation*. Alpha Books. pp. 212–213

Revelation by many writers. The Historicist view follows a straight line of continuous fulfillment of prophecy which starts in Daniel's time and goes through John's writing of the Book of Revelation all the way to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

One thing is certain. Satan is trying to hide what has happened in the past and he is trying to influence people in a way so that the truth is going to be foggier. We might put the question appropriately, why would Satan do this? Why would he want us to interpret the Bible not according to the historicist approach, but other interpretations? The answer is very simple. If we look at the seven seals, we see a lot of suffering, and mass murder which points towards Satan. History it is a good proof to show to people who Satan really is and what he is capable of.

If he will be able to change people's mind to a more theoretical futuristic approach of the seven seals, people will wait for something really bad, which has never occurred so far, but if we look behind the scenes and read a little bit of history, we will see what has happened, and we will recognize that those events somehow expose Satan's real face, his real identity. The goal is not to blame those people who believe in Preterism, Futurism or Idealism. It is far away from the intention. What should be achieved through this study, is to show to people that the historicist approach has something to say even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

When we look into the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church, we will see that the church derives its unique witness to Jesus Christ from a historicist reading of the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. Historicism understands these prophecies to describe a persistent march of God-ordained history leading from the prophet's time up to a critical climax at the end of earth's history.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Reimar Vetne, "A Definition and Short History of Historicism as a Method for Interpreting Daniel and Revelation," JATS 14/2 (Fall, 2003), 1–14.

Kai Arasola, a Swedish theologian points out that before the time of William Miller (1782–1849), the founder of the movement that started the SDA Church, among others, many Protestant commentators on apocalyptic, used the historicist method of interpreting the book of Daniel and Revelation. He wrote a book in which he discusses the excesses of Miller’s historicist hermeneutic that might have been one of the causes that led historicism to be generally discredited among scholars.<sup>6</sup> This does not mean that I agree with this particular view. One person cannot be the reason for the fading of historicism. This is just one hint among the many other findings, that historicism is not that famous as it used to be earlier.

If we are going to dig more and more deeply into the topic, we will see more reasons why the historicist approach started to fade. As it was mentioned earlier, *there is a cosmic reason*, why historicism is fading, Satan wants to hide what he has done, but that is not it. There is an earthly reason as well, but this reason we are going to see a little bit later in this study.

There is something unclear with the historicist approach. One of the greatest problems comes from those who believe they are historicists. What is the problem? One word, speculation. Historicists have been trying to identify certain pictures of the seals in a specific moment of history. This alone might not be a problem, but when we try to fit certain events into the timeline and then some other event into another part of the timeline and they are not having a specific fluidity between them, that is where the problem occurs.

Historicism doesn’t just mean that we have to find a certain part of the puzzle. That is what some historicists have done with the seven seals and because of this they

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<sup>6</sup> Kai Arasola, *The End of Historicism: Millerite Hermeneutic of Time Prophecies in the Old Testament*, University of Uppsala Faculty of Theology (Sigtuna: Datem, 1990)

went out from that specific frame which gives historicism identity. If we solve a certain puzzle according to our understanding, without following the rules, we will not be able to see the whole picture. We will just see mess, nothing else! That is why puzzles have to be solved piece by piece.

Adventists today are paying less and less attention to the historicist approach in Revelation as well as Daniel. This shift is a very serious issue because whether we like it or not, it brings a radical change in the core message of the Adventist Church. The prophetic teaching and preaching is left to the evangelists, which means that these messages are spreading only in those places where there is a certain evangelistic event, but there are less and less pastors and preachers who prepare sermons on these basic, pure Adventist messages from these prophetic books, Daniel and Revelation. If this situation continues it is going to result in a crisis within the church because those people who sit in the congregation, waiting for a pure message, will get a nice story, or something they would like to hear, but they will not hear about the core messages of Adventism. This way, less and less young people will know about the prophetic messages and as the generation changes, the interest within the church will change as well. If the interest of the people changes so radically, there is not going to be a need for this kind of sermons which explains the future according to a pure Adventist understanding, because everyone will want to hear a fairytale instead of this powerful message which we have in our possession right now.

## CHAPTER 2

### UNDERSTANDING OF THE SEVEN SEALS

#### **The First Seal**

“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.”

(Rev 6:1-2 NKJV)

#### **Preterism (1<sup>st</sup> Seal)**

As we stated it previously, we are going to look at each seal one by one and we will see what each interpretation school has to say about that certain seal.

The first four seals present four different horses. Since the first horse is white in color, and white represents purity, many scholars suggest that the rider of this horse is Jesus Christ. Others say that this horseman cannot be Christ because the other three are bringing pain and death; therefore this horseman has to be the same so the rider on the white horse is the Antichrist.

Lawrence O. Richards notes: “Because the horse is “white” some take this rider to be Christ. Others see the rider as the Antichrist, whose instruments are war, plague, and famine.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence O. Richards, *The Bible Readers Companion*, electronic ed. (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1991; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996), 913.

Johann Jakob Wettstein (18th century) identified the first Horseman as Artabanus, king of the Parthians who slaughtered the Jews in Babylon.<sup>2</sup>

The very image of an archer on a white horse would strike terror into the heart of a pro-Roman reader. The only mounted archers of antiquity were the Parthians – says another Bible Commentary – whose tactics and skills had made them Rome’s most feared enemies; Old Persian armies, whose heirs the Parthians were, always included sacred white horses. Although the Old Testament [OT] uses the “bow” as a symbol of judgment by battle more generally, Roman readers would think of this eastern nation that had defeated them in some recent wars; Parthians’ skill as archers was common knowledge. Other contemporary apocalyptic writers also suggested a dreaded Parthian invasion; hence ancient readers would have readily understood that this horseman meant conquest and war.<sup>3</sup>

Ralph E. Bess in his study on the book of Revelation says that the white horse is symbolic of both leadership and victory. Leaders of armies frequently rode on horses of this color. Particularly victors used them in a triumphal procession. The bow, a weapon that is used from a distance, is indicative of his role in pursuing the battle at a distance, steadily destroying the Jews in their various cities and forcing the survivors even closer to Jerusalem. The fact that the triumphant rider had a bow proposes that in the first stages of this bitter and decisive war the fighting was at a distance, not a close hand-to-hand fight, such as a use of the sword suggests.

The war began by capturing the distant towns of Palestine, preparatory to the siege of the great central city, Jerusalem. It should also be noted here, that the conqueror in this case is not the Lamb himself, but the general of the invading army. The Lamb clearly remains in his antecedent position, in order to break the rest of the seals.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Frederick Charles Cook, ed. *The holy Bible, Authorized Version*, (comm. and a revision of the tr. by bishops and other clergy of the Anglican Church ed.). Oxford University. p. 583.

<sup>3</sup> Craig S. Keener and InterVarsity Press, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Re 6:2.

<sup>4</sup> Ralph E. Bass, *Back to the Future : A Study in the Book of Revelation* (Greenville, SC: Living Hope Press, 2004), 176.

Ernest Renan, a 19th-century modern rationalist Preterist, interpreted the First Horseman to be symbolic of the Roman Empire, with Nero as the Antichrist. This rider who "went forth conquering" was Rome's march toward Jerusalem in the year 67, to suppress The Great Jewish Revolt.<sup>5</sup>

As should be obvious, preterists believe that the first horseman is a political leader of that time, possibly the Antichrist, a great political suppressor.

### **Futurism (1<sup>st</sup> Seal)**

According to futurism, the events described in the first seal are yet to happen. The white horse and its horseman is going to be a futuristic person, most likely a political or another kind of leader, whom people will listen to with great interest because he will present himself in such a way so that they will believe him. He is going to be the Antichrist himself.

Warren W. Wiersbe says that the world ruler (Antichrist) begins his conquest of the nations by peacefully taking control. He has a weapon but no ammunition; and men are saying, "Peace and safety!" (1 Thess 5:1–3). Satan usually declares peace before he declares war, so beware of his offers. Soon the world is at war, and suffering results from famine and plagues and cosmic instabilities.<sup>6</sup> Willmington Bible's Handbook says that John saw a man on a white horse who will conquer, apparently without bloodshed.<sup>7</sup>

Vernon McGee agrees that the rider is most likely the Antichrist, an imitation of Christ, who pretends to be Christ, but who in reality is not the one he claims to be.

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<sup>5</sup> Pate, C. Marvin (2009-05-31). *Reading Revelation : a comparison of four interpretive translations of the Apocalypse* (null ed.). Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional. pp. 19–32

<sup>6</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *With the Word Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1991), Re 6:1.

<sup>7</sup> H. L. Willmington, *Willmington's Bible Handbook* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1997), 799.

We are going onward today in the direction of a world ruler. All the countries of our planet are distressed. No one knows what is going to take place in the future. Chaos increases, and governments are not ready to control as they should to. This is all preparing the route for the one who will run the upcoming events.

Wernon also adds:

The Antichrist does not show up as a lowlife. All things considered, Satan's angels were heavenly attendants of light. Sometimes before they held a position in Heaven so He is not going to have horns or cloven feet. Rather, he will be the most alluring man the world has ever observed. They will pick him, and the world will respect him since he has come in his own particular name. Be that as it may, when he assumes control, beyond any doubt it will be awful for the world.<sup>8</sup>

For Futurists the crown given to the Antichrist is not a symbol of legitimate sovereignty (for then the word for crown would be diadēma), but a crown procured by success (stephanos). Who "gives" the Antichrist these triumphs and this power? It is the winged serpent Satan. Satan once revealed to Christ that every one of the kingdoms of the world were his to give to whomever he wished (Luke 4:6). Here we see the one to whom Satan at long last gives these kingdoms.

Gaebelein says the following:

The rider here is a great counterfeit leader, not the personal Antichrist, but the little horn which Daniel saw coming out of the ten-horned beast (Daniel vii). We are now in the most solemn and ominous times the world has ever known. Many are the voices calling for a European confederacy and for some great leader, another Napoleon. ... And the Lord will permit such a one to come, deceiving the world so that they will say "peace and safety" (1 Thessalonians v:1-3). This coming leader of the revived Roman Empire will go forth to conquer and become its political head.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible Commentary*, Based on the Thru the Bible Radio Program., electronic ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1981), 5:941.

<sup>9</sup>Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four View: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Re 6:1-2.

## **Idealism (1<sup>st</sup> Seal)**

For Idealists, the Lamb opens the seals consistently, so that the occasions depicted pictorially in the parchment may be satisfied. By breaking the seals and opening the look over, the Lamb initiates God's arrangement and uncovers what must happen in the circumstances before and at his coming. By breaking the seals one by one, the Lamb is over and again appeared to be the initiator of the events in this chapter.<sup>10</sup>

As per Biederwolf, almost all commentators down to A.D. 150 took the picture as an image of the preached gospel and its prosperity. This is as yet the perspective of numerous present day analysts, including Alford, Hendriksen, and Hailey. Hendriksen suggests that our Lord is riding forward triumphantly, conquering and to win. That, more likely than not, is the importance of the rider on the white horse. However, Wilson expresses doubt about this identification and he claims that the rider on the white horse is commonly related to Christ or the advance of the gospel on the planet, yet the Lamb who opens the seal can't be the one who returns as the rider.<sup>11</sup>

We can see that not all Idealist commentators agree. We can observe objections between different parties, because Hendriksen answers to Wilson's doubt about this theory and he says that this issue should not be considered as something impossible. Jesus could appear at the same time as the one who opens the seal and also the one actually in the seal. By the same process of reasoning should we not

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<sup>10</sup>Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, vol. 20, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, Accompanying Biblical Text Is Author's Translation., New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1953-2001), 220.

<sup>11</sup> Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Re 6:1-2.

reach the conclusion that Christ cannot lay His right hand on John in chapter 1:17 for in that right hand He is holding seven stars one verse earlier (v.16)?

To numerous commentators, the four horsemen speak to the all-inclusive arrangement of triumph, war, starvation and demise, oft rehashed ever, however here uncovered as continuing from God's sovereign reason in judging a degenerate humankind. On this view, the white horse (v. 2) and its rider speak to the nonexclusive idea of military victory, at whatever time or place in history it might happen, and is viewed as God's method for raising up and expelling kings (Dan 2:21). The rhythmic movement of political realms are in the hand of God. He doesn't generally give such government as people would incline toward, however He may give them oppressors that will serve His judging an underhanded society.<sup>12</sup>

The opening of the seals infers that the holy people on earth suffer from anti-Christian forces until the day of Christ's return. It is no big surprise that the people who died for Christ "shout out" to God for equity. They are advised to exercise tolerance and realize that God's sovereignly controls world history. His fury and that of the Lamb are coordinated against the individuals who have communicated their hatred to God, his Word, and his kin. These adversaries must face the Judge. However at the judgment they need to abstain from meeting him by approaching the mountains and the stones to cover them.

Herschel Hobbs' Historicist background approach sees the horsemen in the way simply depicted aside from that, in addition to the general significance, they underscore the Historicist appearance of these standards in John's own particular day (which he takes to be the time of Domitian). That is, the horsemen, notwithstanding speaking to success, war, starvation, and demise by and large, additionally concentrate on these strengths as agents of the

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<sup>12</sup> Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Re 6:1-2.

coming defeat of the Roman mistreating power, in this manner empowering the abused and persecuted people of John's day.<sup>13</sup>

As we can see, the idealistic view of the first seal may have points of contact with other approaches. However, here we can see a perspective which spiritualizes the seals. We will see that the same applies to the other seals. The main idea is to bring everything to a spiritual level.

### **Historicism (1<sup>st</sup> Seal)**

A few historicists (Matthew Henry and Adam Clarke) explain the opening of the seven seals essentially as do the preterists. According to them, the whole vision applies to the conquering and falling of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. In the opening of the first seal, they are inclined to see the progress of the gospel. Matthew Henry said that Jesus Christ appears to be riding on a white horse. He had a bow in his hand. The convictions impressed by the word of God are sharp arrows.<sup>14</sup>

The people's Bible Commentary clarifies it extremely well and says that the main rider appeared to John on a white horse. He had a bow in his hand, was given a crown, and rode victoriously on his mission. All through Revelation white is the image of purity and holiness. The bow shows the capacity to overcome an adversary. The crown is a picture of triumph. In chapter 19 another rider on a white horse is plainly recognized as Jesus. In that vision the rider of the white horse is nearing his last triumph, yet this rider is going out into the earth "bent on conquest." We additionally see that in this vision, every one of the horses and horsemen are representing forces with great impact, not people. This rider on the white horse, then,

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<sup>13</sup>Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Re 6:1-2.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

is more probably the influence Jesus has on this planet, the power of his Word. Some people say that since this rider carried a bow in his hand, he is bringing with himself war and destruction. However, SDA Pinkoski<sup>15</sup> says that the fact that he has a bow, does not necessarily mean that this rider brings destruction. Bows and arrows were not used only for killing people from a distance, but to deliver an urgent message.

From the earliest starting point of the New Testament (NT) until the Lord comes back, the Word of God will be a sharp, infiltrating impact on earth. The book of Revelation effectively imagined the Word as a twofold edged sword leaving the mouth of Jesus (1:16; 2:12). Since the sword symbolizes war in the following vision, the bow may have been chosen to represent the quality of the Word.

God guarantees that his Word, like a conqueror bent on conquest, "will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11). The Word accomplishes a crown of triumph when it wins the hearts of people for the Lamb. In a universe of war, starvation, and death, the rider on the white horse represents the only hope for triumph. At the point when Jesus talked about the last times, he said that his Word would be an ever-present power all through the world: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come." (Mat 24:14 NKJV).<sup>16</sup>

Jacques B. Doukhan, a SDA scholar points out that Roman generals when celebrating a victory, would ride in front of their army on a white horse. John understood the vision in the same way: "and he went out conquering and to conquer" (v.2). It is also interesting to mention that the picture of the white horse it is introduced by the first living creature which looks like a lion (Rev 4:7). This picture

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<sup>15</sup>Wayne D. Mueller, *Revelation*, The People's Bible (Milwaukee, WI Northwestern Pub. House, 1996), 75.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

can help us to see another victory for Jesus. In the first seal, the rider gets a crown of victory (*stephanos*). In Revelation 19 the same picture is used again presenting the victory of Jesus. A white horse, whose rider also wears a crown, but at this time he wears a crown of the kings (*diadema*). The picture in chapter 6 is talking about Jesus the Messiah, but it does not apply necessarily to His coming kingdom. He won a battle, but the war did not end yet. In our text, which talks about the first seal, the horseman is not coming, but going. The text says that he went out.<sup>17</sup>

In this context we can find ourselves in the beginning of Christian history. This is most likely the 1<sup>st</sup> century when Christianity started blooming. In this period the church was relatively pure. The word of God was like a sharp sword and the mission, the message of the gospel was spreading with the speed of an arrow. The Christian church started to grow with an incredible speed.

As a secondary application I believe we can also state that we do not have to limit the mission of the first horseman to this period. I believe that the message, this horse is about to bring to the world, it has been and it will be going to conquer, because as Jesus said, the message of the gospel has to be preached to all the nations, to every language and to every tribe, and then the end will come. Then we will be able to see Jesus not with *stephanos* but with *diadema*.

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<sup>17</sup> Jacques B. Doukhan, *Enigmele Bibliei – Cartea Profetica Apocalipsa*, (Editura viață și sănătate, București, 2013), 63.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE SECOND SEAL

“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.” (Rev 6:3-4 NKJV)

#### **Preterism (2<sup>nd</sup> Seal)**

The preterist view on the second seal is placed within the first century A.D. Hugo Grotius (17<sup>th</sup> century), deciphers “the earth,” in verse 4, as the place that is known as Judea. Johann Jakob Wettstein (18<sup>th</sup> century), distinguished the Red horse as speaking to the professional killers and criminals of Judea in the times of Antonius Felix and Porcius Festus.<sup>1</sup>

According to another Preterist viewpoint the second horseman represents the loss of peace from the “land” of Israel. Other than the war which was fought between the Romans and the Jews, there were civil wars as well among the Jewish nation. J.

Stuart Russell clarifies:

The Jewish war, under Vespasian, commenced at the furthest distance from Jerusalem in Galilee, and gradually drew nearer and nearer to the doomed city. The Romans were not the only agents in the work of slaughter that depopulated the land; hostile factions among the Jews themselves turned their arms against one another, so that it might be said that “every man’s hand was against his brother.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Charles Cook, ed. *The holy Bible, authorized version*, (comm. and a revision of the tr. by bishops and other clergy of the Anglican Church ed.). Oxford University. p. 583.

<sup>2</sup>Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Re 6:3-4.

According to the Spirit Filled Life Study Bible the rider on the horse, fiery red, is the symbol of civil war and strife.<sup>3</sup> During the first century AD, there was a relative peace in the Roman Empire, the Pax Romana or Peace of Rome. However, this has come to an end in the land of Israel at this point when the Jewish revolt broke out in AD 66.<sup>4</sup> The sword in this seal suggests a hand to hand fight and the expression, that one man would slay one another suggests civil war. According to history there was a civil war between Jews even as they were fighting the Romans. This was the condition of Judah and Jerusalem at this time.

Josephus Flavius described the situation this way:

... every city was divided into two armies encamped one against another, and the preservation of the one party was in the destruction of the other; (463) so the daytime was spent in shedding of blood, and the night in fear, —which was of the two the more terrible; for when the Syrians thought they had ruined the Jews, they had the Judaizers in suspicion also; and as each side did not care to slay those whom they only suspected on the other, so did they greatly fear them when they were mingled with the other, as if they were certainly foreigners. (464) Moreover, greediness of gain was a provocation to kill the opposite party, even to such as had of old appeared very mild and gentle towards them; for they without fear plundered the effects of the slain and carried off the spoils of those whom they slew to their own houses, as if they had been gained in a set battle; and he was esteemed a man of honor who got the greatest share, as having prevailed over the greatest number of his enemies. (465) It was then common to see cities filled with dead bodies, still lying unburied, and those of old men, mixed with infants, all dead, and scattered about together; women also lay amongst them, without any covering for their nakedness: you might then see the whole province full of inexpressible calamities, while the dread of still more barbarous practices which were threatened, was everywhere greater than what had been already perpetrated.<sup>5</sup>

Overall, the preterists say that what they see in the second seal is nothing else but the bloodshed in the land of Judea and Jerusalem.

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<sup>3</sup>*Spirit Filled Life Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1991).

<sup>4</sup>Ralph E. Bass, *Back to the Future: A Study in the Book of Revelation* (Greenville, SC: Living Hope Press, 2004), 177.

<sup>5</sup> Flavius Josephus, *Wars*, 2:18:2. See also 4:3:2; 4:3:10; 4:6:2 for more information of the civil war of the Jews.

## Futurism (2<sup>nd</sup> seal)

According to the futurist view the blazing red shade of this horse recommends slaughter, and discusses a period of war that happens upon the earth as the tribulation advances. Walvoord writes the following:

The constant tension among nations and the ambitions of men have their climax in this period before Christ comes. Though 'wars and rumors of wars' (Matt 24:6) are characteristic of the age, it is evident that warfare occupies a large place in the consummation of the age with a resultant great loss of life. There apparently is a series of wars, the greatest of which is under way at the time of the second coming.<sup>6</sup>

Hal Lindsey identifies the rider on the red horse with Russia, and with her Arab partners in the Middle East, assaulting Israel (Ezek 38; Dan 11), and spots this at the midpoint of the Tribulation. Lindsey states: "The war heightens until it includes all the real powers on the earth and turns into the greatest fight ever—the Battle of Armageddon."<sup>7</sup> Ray Stedman expresses: "Naturally, numerous Bible researchers today see this 'extensive sword' as an image of the huge energy of the atomic bomb." After bringing up the issue of whether Revelation truly describes current fighting, he presumes that our age is the age when humankind can destroy himself within seconds; therefore the message of this seal has to be talking about our age.

According to a more extreme futuristic view the Antichrist will begin World War III, and destroy any who claim to be Christians...He makes a compromise with the Arab world in an effort to conquer the entire planet, (Ezek 38; Dan 11) and only Jerusalem will stand in his way to world supremacy.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Re 6:3-4.

<sup>7</sup> Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Re 6:3-4.

<sup>8</sup> Pate, C. Marvin, *Reading Revelation: A comparison of four interpretive translations of the Apocalypse*, Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional. pp. 19–32

The quick achievement of the conqueror under the primary seal is trailed by a further outbreak of war. The red horse, and the immense sword given to the rider, is unmistakably typical of carnage. Peace is removed from the earth. "Country ascends against country, and kingdom against kingdom." War and slaughter on a huge scale are shown by this second seal.<sup>9</sup> John F. Walvoord puts it this way:

If the first seal is a period of peace, as some have held, though this seems to be contradicted by the fact that the rider of the first horse conquers, in any case when the second seal is broken, military warfare breaks out and peace is taken from the world. The constant tension among nations and the ambitions of men have their climax in this period before Christ comes. Though "wars and rumors of wars" (Matt 24:6) are characteristic of the age, it is evident that warfare occupies a large place in the consummation of the age with a resultant great loss of life. There apparently is a series of wars, the greatest of which is under way at the time of the second coming. The hope of permanent peace by means of the United Nations and other human efforts is doomed to failure.<sup>10</sup>

Generally speaking, most of those who believe in futurism say, that the second seal is nothing else but the beginning of the great tribulation which is going to take place at the end times. The Bible and Jesus himself was speaking about serious conflicts among people, and different nations, and so they believe that this is the time period we are talking about. According to many futurists this time is very near because now we live an era when people can kill and even erase human life from our planet because now we have very serious weapons, like the atomic bomb. More than this some say that, the great sword might represent these huge weapons which are used and owned today by many countries.

The wars and rumors of wars must be connected as well with this time period which is mentioned in Matthew 24, wars which have never been seen in human

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<sup>9</sup>T. B. Baines, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Galaxie Software, 2005; 2005), 87.

<sup>10</sup>John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Galaxie Software, 2008; 2008), 128.

history until now. These reasons make people believe that this is what the second seal and its horseman is talking about!

### **Idealism (2<sup>nd</sup> Seal)**

If the white horse generally represented victory, then according to Idealism the fiery red horse has to represent war in general or civil war in particular. Swete states that if we speak about victory in the perspective of the white horse and the crown, then the whole thing is going to have another aspect when we are going to look at it in the light of the battlefield.”

Kingdoms built up by conquest frequently brake up as an aftereffect of a lack of inner solidarity, leading to revolution and revolt. The horrors and carnage of war are another means by which God judges sinful societies. “If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people be afraid? If there is calamity in a city, will not the LORD have done it?” – says the prophet Amos. As the story of humanity is the story of war and conflict, the judgment of God can be seen everywhere throughout the life of a man. Friedrich von Schiller stated the following: “The history of the world is the judgment of the world.”

Hendriksen and Hailey, who believed that the white horse is Christ riding with the message of the gospel, understand the red horse to represent the persecution of the church that will follow the spread of Christianity into barbarian terrains. Their argument rests partly on the parallel they observe between this vision and the statement of Jesus in Matthew 10:34: “I did not come to bring peace but a sword.” In that passage, Jesus was warning the disciples about the restrictions they would receive for their dependability on Him.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Re 6:3-4.

The great sword given to this rider in this case is the *machaira*, a similar word utilized as a part of Christ's announcement quite recently referred to. It was a short sword or blade suited for the slaughtering of a sacrificial animal, for example, that utilized by Abraham when he planned to kill Isaac (Gen 22:6, 10 Septuagint). Additionally, the word murder is *sphatto*, a word utilized elsewhere of the killing of Christ the Lamb (Rev.5:6) and of those whose souls were seen "under the altar" (Rev 6:9). It appropriately signifies slaughter and thus could point to the sacrificial character of the faithful martyrs' deaths.<sup>12</sup>

Others say that because people rejected God's message, the rider on the red horse represents all of those wars which have occurred throughout history exactly because of the reason mentioned above. The fact that people rejected and reject God, they have had wars in their life, and they will have in the future as well. There is no escape from this judgement. If people are not living their life according to God's word, they are going to have war and peace less life.

According to the pulpit commentary:

There is a very general agreement that the red horse signifies *war*—slaughter by the sword which was given to “him that sat thereon.” Slight variations of the application occur. Wordsworth, following the more ancient expositors, thinks that only that aspect of war is intended which consists in the persecution of the saints; while Alford and others would not restrict the meaning, but consider that war in general is meant, relying upon the following words, “that they should kill one another,” and quoting our Lord's prophecy, “I came not to send peace, but a sword” (Matt 10:34). Both views may be correct. Though there had never been persecution, war would be one of the great afflictions from which Christians in various ages suffer and in which they need consolation; but we may well believe that St. John, in writing to Christians who were themselves being grievously persecuted, should refer especially to the slaughter of the saints, as one of the trials inflicted upon them with God's knowledge and permission. The Revelation, intended as a support to those to whom St. John wrote, and applying directly and specially to their situation, has yet a wider application, and foreshadows

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<sup>12</sup>Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Re 6:3-4.

the fate of each individual Christian and the Church in general throughout all ages.<sup>13</sup>

The sword mentioned here, most likely represents that instrument which is directed towards the saints of God. The words which say that they should kill one another must be referring to the inhabitants of the earth. As it has been mentioned above, this refers to both, the killing of the saints and war in general. As we observe there are similarities with the other interpretation schools. We might be able to feel a little bit of historicism, but as it has been mentioned before, there is no concrete event mentioned in Idealism; it only makes general remarks for all ages.

### **Historicism (2<sup>nd</sup> Seal)**

One of the most common approach according to historicism talks about the fact that the color of the horse is really important. Very often we are trying to find out who the rider is and whom it may represent but we can realize that the horses and their color is important too. The symbolism of the second horseman well portrays conditions under which the church found itself from about A.D. 100–313. The violent persecutions it suffered at the hands of the Roman Caesars are well characterized by a horseman who carries a “great sword” and has power “to take peace from the earth.”

In the previous case, if white represented the purity of the faith then the red color might be connected to the corruption of faith through the introduction of various heresies.<sup>14</sup> As we know from different documents and from the writings of the church fathers, in the early church there were several attempts to make a compromise with the state and with the heathens who lived among Christians.

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<sup>13</sup>*The Pulpit Commentary: Revelation*, ed. H. D. M. Spence-Jones (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2004), 184.

<sup>14</sup>Francis D. Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible With Exegetical and Expository Comment.*, Commentary Reference Series (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1978), Re 6:4.

Through these attempts they were trying to make peace within the people and mostly within people from different backgrounds, Christians, Jews, Heathens. For the leaders of the country nothing was more important but to have peace within the people, so that they can live near each other and of course to pay taxes and to bring profit to the country or maybe more importantly to the emperor. Because of these efforts, Christianity started to lose its purity and slowly more and more principles were “given away”. This way, from its purity which was represented by the white color of the first horse, it become dirty and from that point on, Christianity was not the same.

On the other hand, there exists another historicist view. Christopher Wordsworth (30 October 1807 – 20 March 1885) a bishop in the Anglican church, who is quite known for his tremendous work in the church, wrote several commentaries, including on the book of Revelation and he said that the second horse might cover a 240-year period, from 64 to 304. During this time span Wordsworth indicated ten major persecutions. These persecutions in chronological order are the following: Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, Septimus Severus, Maximinus, Decius, Valerian, Aurelian and the last one Diocletian.<sup>15</sup>

Matthew Poole’s Commentary on NT says the following:

*And there was given unto him a great sword;”* and therefore a sword is given to him that rode upon the this horse. Some think that this period began with Nero, thirty-four years before the other ended (according to what was said before); others make it to begin with Trajan, and to comprehend eighty years, until the time of Commodus; in which time Trajan, and Hadrian, and the three Antoninuses successively ruled the Roman empire: the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian took up near half the time, in which time this prophecy was most eminently fulfilled; for in Trajan’s time the Jews rebelling, and killing many subjects of the Roman empire, to the number of twenty-two thousand in one place, and two hundred and forty thousand in another place, themselves were as miserably handled by the Roman forces sent by Trajan and Hadrian, who

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<sup>15</sup> Pate, C. Marvin (2009-05-31). *Reading Revelation: A comparison of four interpretive translations of the Apocalypse* (null ed.). Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional. pp. 19–32

slew of them (as histories tell us) five hundred and fourscore thousand: nay, the Jews themselves say, they lost double the number of those who came out of Egypt, and more than they lost by Nebuchadnezzar, or by Titus when their city was taken: on the other side the Romans lost very many. Many Christians also were put to death during this period, during which was the third and fourth persecution.<sup>16</sup>

The history of Christianity has been changed from peace into war. The red color of this horse brings into the scene blood and the fact that a great sword appears as well, shows us the reason of the blood/bloodshed. It is going to be a war.

The SDA Bible Commentary also mentions this second point of view where the color of this horse is suggestive of blood. As the first horseman may be taken as symbolizing the glory of military conquest so the second may be regarded as portraying other aspects of warfare—loss of peace and abundance of slaughter. Such would be the inevitable result of the conquest portrayed by the first horseman, if he is understood to symbolize the conquest and dominion of Rome.<sup>17</sup> However, after stating this, it mentions that the SDA view is generally the first one which talks about the church's purity.

Uriah Smith adds the following statement to this seal:

This seal represents a secular period, or union of church and state. Constantine aided the clergy, and put them under obligations to him. He legislated for the church, called the Council of Nicaea, and was most prominent in that Council, Constantine, not the gospel, had the glory of tearing down the heathen temples. The state had the glory instead of the church. Constantine made decrees against some errors, and was praised, and suffered to go on and introduce many other errors, and oppose some important truths. Controversies arose; and when a new emperor took the throne, there was a rush of the clergy to get him on the side of their peculiar tenets. Mosheim says of this period, "There was continual war and trouble." This state of things answers well to the declaration of the prophet that power was given to him that sat on the horse "to take peace from the earth and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a

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<sup>16</sup>Matthew Poole, *Matthew Poole's Commentary on the New Testament*, electronic ed. Libronix, Digital Library System, Re 6:4.

<sup>17</sup>Francis D. Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible With Exegetical and Expository Comment.*, Commentary Reference Series (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1978), Re 6:4.

great sword." The Christianity of that time had mounted the throne, and bore the emblem of the civil power.<sup>18</sup>

For some it is difficult to understand which one of these two viewpoints is better and it might be hard to decide which point claims a better idea. According to my understanding, God can have two different messages in one single sentence and if this is true, then the message of the second seal could contain both understandings. We have to admit that in the second seal there is a sword as well, which is not really clarified in the first understanding, so I believe that the red horse and its horseman have two messages. The first one is the corruption of the church, because its purity has been corrupted and second, the martyrs of the first two centuries. We have to accept that thousands and thousands of people gave their life for the message of the gospel, dying as martyrs and we do not have to forget about them either!

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<sup>18</sup> Uriah Smith, Daniel and The Revelation, Review and Herald Publishing Company, Battle Creek, MI, 1904, p.434

## CHAPTER 4

### THE THIRD SEAL

“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.’” (Rev 6:5-6 NKJV)

#### **Preterism (3<sup>rd</sup> Seal)**

The scales in the hand of the rider of the black horse suggests men must eat their daily food by great carefulness, as God warned the Jews that they would have to do if they rebelled against Him. This horse represents famine or lack of food. The color black also shows that the text must talk about famine. In the book of Lamentations there is a text which says: “Our skin was black like an oven, because of the terrible famine” (Lam 5:10). The denarius was a day’s salary for the usual worker. In return for his work he is to get a mere quart of wheat, or about one person’s daily ration. This way a man needed to work a full day just to have enough to eat on that day. For feeding his family, he has to turn to cheaper grain, which costs only one-third as much.

The Jews in Jerusalem suffered very often because of lack of food during the Roman oppression. Even though they have had food stored for hard times, very often those stores were destroyed so that they did not have that extra which they used to have before. Because of this hard situation, food became so scarce that Josephus recorded at least one case of a mother eating her small child during the siege of

Jerusalem. Preterits also understand that this time was that period which is connected to Jesus' words when he said: "But woe to those who are ... nursing babies in those days!"<sup>1</sup>

According to Hugo Grotius this famine is connected to the time of Claudius. During his reign there was a bad famine and many suffered because they were lacking food.<sup>2</sup> Volkmar, a modern preterist believes that the hardest time lasted from AD 44-66, when the first Jewish-Roman war took place.

Josephus Flavius writes about this famine as well. He described it in the following way:

The madness of the seditious did also increase together with their famine, and both those miseries were every day inflamed more and more; (425) for there was no corn which anywhere appeared publicly, but the robbers came running into, and searched men's private houses; and then, if they found any, they tormented them, because they had denied they had any; and if they found none, they tormented them worse, because they supposed they had more carefully concealed it. (426) The indication they made use of whether they had any or not, was taken from the bodies of these miserable wretches; which, if they were in good case, they supposed they were in no want at all of food; but if they were wasted away, they walked off without searching any farther; nor did they think it proper to kill such as these, because they saw they would very soon die of themselves for want of food. (427) Many there were indeed who sold what they had for one measure; it was of wheat, if they were of the richer sort, but of barley, if they were poorer. When these had so done, they shut themselves up in the inmost rooms of their houses, and ate the corn they had gotten; some did it without grinding it, by reason of the extremity of the want they were in, and others baked bread of it, according as necessity and fear dictated to them; (428) a table was nowhere laid for a distinct meal, but they snatched the bread out of the fire, half-baked, and ate it very hastily.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to famine, the vision mentions the oil and the wine. According to Preterism this fits very well into the picture, however the translation and the

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<sup>1</sup>Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Re 6:5-6.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick Charles Cook, ed. *The holy Bible, authorized version*, (comm. and a revision of the tr. by bishops

<sup>3</sup> Flavius Josephus, Wars, 5:10:2.

understanding is different. The expression “do not harm” is translated “is to be no shortage...” This implies that there would be no shortage of oil and wine. Josephus speaks of a person called John Gischala, the leader of one of the factions warring inside Jerusalem. He says about him, that he emptied the goblets of the sacred wine and oil, which the priests kept to be poured on the burnt offerings, and which laid in the inner court of the temple, and distributed it among the people. Moreover, during the siege of Jerusalem, Titus ordered that olive groves and vineyards were not to be ravaged.<sup>4</sup>

All these may appear to fit nicely together. However, the translation for the expression preferred is missing the point. The word in question in verse 6 is the verb **ὀδικέω**.<sup>5</sup> It does not have the meaning “to be no shortage”. As such, the preferred version does not seem to fit very well.

### **Futurism (3<sup>rd</sup> Seal)**

Most futurists understand this horseman to represent those starvation conditions which will start because of the fighting and war in the previous seal, which according to the futurist understanding represents the future Tribulation. Many of them fail to talk about the quart of wheat mentioned in the text, which was a man’s daily need to sustain himself, while the denarius was what a usual worker earned in a day.

Futurists see something else in these texts. Henry Morris is going on a different route to interpret the meaning of the third horseman and he finds in this seal a reference to the power of trade to produce flourishing or disaster, extravagance or

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<sup>4</sup>Ralph E. Bass, *Back to the Future: A Study in the Book of Revelation* (Greenville, SC: Living Hope Press, 2004), 180.

<sup>5</sup> The meaning of this word in most cases is to act unjustly or wickedly, or to be criminal, to violate the laws in some way.

starvation. Leaders from around the globe with great power will take full control of the oil, food and money resources of the planet. About the oil and the wine they believe that luxury items will not disappear completely, but they won't be available for everybody. Most of the population will not be able to have any of these items because they will not have any means to buy them.

According to another view the third seal represents the famine which is caused by the third world war. While most of the people will suffer from starvation and they will not have even the minimum they need for a day, there will be rich people who will enjoy the riches of the world.<sup>6</sup>

The match of scales the rider conveyed in his grasp pictures the proportioning that will come about because of the starvation. As in the Unified States during the financial crisis, in Europe in the fallout of World War II, and today in many war-torn underdeveloped countries, there will be starving individuals, staying in lines for food. People barely will be able to provide enough food for their families. In the light of these conditions God says not to "waste" the oil and the vine. In the old times these two components were very often used for cooking, so the message basically is to be careful what and how people will use because hard times are about to come. A misleading peace followed by great wars will cause big chaos among the population. This will occur amid the first part of the Tribulation, while the most noticeably awful events will be yet to come.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>C. Marvinm, *Reading Revelation: A comparison of four interpretive translations of the Apocalypse*, Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional. pp. 19–32

<sup>7</sup> John MacArthur, *Revelation 1-11* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 182.

### **Idealism (3<sup>rd</sup> Seal)**

It is possible that the famine brought by the black horse is connected with the war from the previous seal, the red horse. Since in that seal the horse represented war, this can easily represent the famine which most of the time is the result of war. The other possibility is that, this famine is caused by God, and it comes as a judgment upon sinful people. The oil and the wine are understood as something special, not yet removed from the people. Most of the food is not reachable for most of the people, but the deep-rooted olive and vine are not really affected so they still can to some extent level feed people.

Hendriksen and Hailey understand this differently than the majority. They say that since people were always persecuted for what they believed throughout history, this seal speaks about a persecution as well, an economic persecution. We can hear even today about people who are losing their jobs because they are faithful to God and to the principles they believe in. Because they are not accepting any compromise, they are often fired from their jobs losing their daily income, which makes life much harder.

The rider on the black horse is a symbol of economic disruption and the resultant famine. The real problem is not famine but inflation and scarcity. A denarius was the daily wage for a laborer, which ordinarily would buy eight times the amount of wheat and barley under these conditions. In our time, it is not hard to conceive of a global economic debt blowout.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, for Idealism the third horse may represent either global famine, or economic disruption for the people of God who refuse to compromise their faith.

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<sup>8</sup>Jack W. Hayford, *Spirit Filled Life Bible for Students: Learning and Living God's Word by Power of His Spirit*, electronic ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publisher, 1997, c1995), Re 6:3-7.

### **Historicism (3<sup>rd</sup> Seal)**

As we open the seal according to the historicist understanding, there are at least three different interpretations. One refers to a great famine which occurred in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century. Another connects this seal with the previous one to speak of spiritual degeneration. If the white horse represents purity, the black horse has to represent total depravation. The SDA Bible commentary puts it this way: “If the white horse implied victory or its color purity, so the black horse may be thought of as indicating defeat or its color further corruption of faith.”<sup>9</sup>

Others see a financial mistreatment forced by some of the rulers, emperors of the third century. The taxes could be paid either in money or in products, especially in grain, oil and wine. If they paid all their taxes in grain, oil or wine, the produce was given a value of monetary equivalence. This explains the meaning of the statement, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius...” For this approach, the translation for do not harm the wine, would be better translated, “do not be unjust with the oil and the wine”.

Caracalla who reigned between AD 218-222, had a very generous offer to everyone in the country. He offered Roman citizenship to all free people. But behind this kindness was a selfish reason. After people become citizens, he could make them pay taxes. Taxes could be paid in corn, grain, oil and wine. Historicists note other cases where emperors raised taxation to high levels, so that it was almost impossible to pay taxes off. Because of this taxation system many fell into great financial hardship.

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<sup>9</sup>Francis D. Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible With Exegetical and Expository Comment.*, Commentary Reference Series (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1978), Re 6:6.

The suggestion about a physical famine I find less persuasive. It is clear that famine was and it will be. Unfortunately, this is a very common problem even in our society. How then should we understand the third seal?

The black horse comes after the red one, like hunger and famine come after a war. However, grapes and olive trees have much better roots than wheat so they can stay longer in heat and drought. Moreover, wheat, olive oil and wine are usually associated with Israel because they are a staple in the country. This unnatural limitation of the famine makes us believe that the linguistic used here is more symbolic, and we should likewise have a symbolic understanding of this vision. Accordingly, this famine is not literal but represents a huge problem and a famine on a spiritual level. Furthermore, each produce mentioned are symbolic in the Bible of something greater. Wheat represents the Word of God, oil represents the Holy Spirit, and the wine represents the precious blood of Jesus Christ.<sup>10</sup>

In this famine the affected part is the wheat which means the most affected part is the Word of God. The Holy Spirit and the blood of Christ are not touched. On a spiritual level we can see and understand that Christianity (A.D. 313-538) has lost its calling. It does not fulfill anymore the spiritual and theological needs of the people. The church neglects to spend time in studying the word of God, and because of lack of study it has a weaker and weaker understanding of what God wants from the church.

What is beautiful and worth mentioning is that the wine and the olives are untouched. The influence of the Holy Spirit and the grace of God through the precious blood of Jesus Christ are in action and they offer comfort to neglected people. It is

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<sup>10</sup> Jacques B. Doukhan, *Enigmele Bibliei – Cartea Profetica Apocalipsa*, (Editura viață și sănătate, București, 2013), 63-64.

interesting to realize that in the old times the olive oil and the wine were used for healing wounds. This fact shows the beautiful work which God is doing through the Holy Spirit for the people who feel neglected and hungry after the word of God.<sup>11</sup>

This vision covers that period 313 – 538 A.D., when the church becomes one with the state and they start to be busier with business than with the spiritual problems of the people. They start to look after riches and the members of the church become completely forgotten and ignored. As the church grows more prosperous on a material level, it starts to become weak and poor on a spiritual level. The pure word of God was replaced by institutionalism and traditions.<sup>12</sup>

This is a great example even for our society today. We have to realize that as soon as we change the content with formality as a church we will start to lose our identity and we will start to go down the road with a great speed. We have to be very careful with this because in many of our churches there is more accent on the package than on its content!

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 65

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 65

## CHAPTER 5

### THE FOURTH SEAL

“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.”  
(Rev 6:7-8 NKJV)

#### **Preterism (4<sup>th</sup> Seal)**

Most preterits see in this seal events that occurred right after the Jewish revolt against the Roman Empire. According to this view, the four horses represent this time period in the first century, when this great war took place, and all the events are the result of this conflict. Earlier the famine and now death strikes these people who were involved in this war.

Milton S. Terry concludes:

In studying the first four seals we see that they “find fulfillment in the war which began about A. D. 66, swept over Galilee and Samaria, laid waste all the cities and villages of Palestine, and became intensified with all those scenes of blood and famine and woe which made the siege and final overthrow of Jerusalem by the Romans one of the most horrible events of human history.”<sup>1</sup>

Josephus describes the carnage and death in Jerusalem during the siege in the following terms:

So all hope of escaping was now cut off from the Jews, together with their liberty of going out of the city. Then did the famine widen its progress, and devoured the people by whole houses and families; the upper rooms were full of women and children that were dying by famine; and the lanes of the

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<sup>1</sup> Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Apocalypics*, 332.

city were full of the dead bodies of the aged. The seditious ... as not enduring the stench of the dead bodies ... had them cast down from the walls into the valleys beneath. However, when Titus, in going his rounds along those valleys, saw them full of dead bodies, and the thick putrefaction running about them, he gave a groan ... and such was the sad case of the city itself.<sup>2</sup>

According to a study on Revelation it isn't that wild animals didn't kill and eat Israelites as they tried to escape from the Romans, hiding in caverns and other places where they would be unprotected to this sort of thing. No doubt this happened. However, probably John was using a literary figure from the book of Ezekiel to make a point. What he wanted to say here is that Israel and Jerusalem would suffer devastation at God's hands in the judgments He would send on the land. It would be so pronounced that no one would be left to bury the dead bodies. So the beasts of the earth will consume them.<sup>3</sup>

Looking from this perspective, all optimism of evading was now cut off from the Jews, together with their freedom of going out of the city. Then did the starvation extend its development, and consumed the people by whole houses and families; the upper rooms were full of women and kids that were dying by starvation; and the roads of the city were full of the dead bodies of the elderly; the children also and the young men walked about the squares like shadows, all swelled with the scarcity, and fell down dead wheresoever their misery detained them. As for burying them, those that were sick they were not able to do it; and those that were vigorous and well were frightened from doing it by the great multitude of those dead bodies, and by the uncertainty there was how soon they should die themselves, for many died as they were burying other people, and many went to their tombs before that fatal hour was come! Nor was there any weeping made under these calamities, nor were heard any sorrowful complaints; but the famine confounded all natural passions; for those who were just going to die, looked upon those that were gone to their rest before them with dry eyes and open mouths. .... Now the rebellious at first gave orders that the dead should be buried out of the public places, as not enduring the stink of their dead bodies. But later, when they could not do that, they had them cast down from the walls into the valleys underneath. However, when Titus, in going his rounds along those valleys, saw them full of dead bodies, and the thick degeneration running about them, he gave a groan; and spreading out his hands to heaven, called God to

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<sup>2</sup>Josephus, Flavius and William Whiston, *The works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, Wars V, xii 3-Apion. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996, c1987.

<sup>3</sup>Ralph E. Bass, *Back to the Future: A Study in the Book of Revelation* (Greenville, SC: Living Hope Press, 2004), 182.

observe that this was not his responsibility: and such was the sad case of the city itself.<sup>4 5</sup>

In reviewing the first four seals we realize that for Preterists, they “find fulfillment in the war which arose about A. D. 66, swept over Galilee and Samaria, laid waste all the cities and villages of Palestine, and became strengthened with all those scenes of blood and starvation and grief which made the siege and final overthrow of Jerusalem by the Romans one of the most terrible events of human history.”<sup>6</sup>

### **Futurism (4<sup>th</sup> Seal)**

If we look at the 4<sup>th</sup> seal from the futurist view, Walvoord adds that the area covered by this sentence, described as the earth though sometimes only of the Promised Land given to Israel, is a general word referring to the populated world and in this framework apparently extends to the entire globe. Geographically it would be equal to the devastation of more than the whole population of Europe and South America.

Because of the present world population being so high in number, one fourth of the population would represent a number greater than those destroyed in Noah’s day, says Steve Gregg. Hence, this would be the “Great Tribulation” of extraordinary magnitude spoken of by Jesus in Matthew 24:21. Since “Great Tribulation” is the term that technically refers to only the final three and a half years of the seven-year Tribulation, some believe that these seals apply only to that period.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ralph E. Bass, *Back to the Future: A Study in the Book of Revelation* (Greenville, SC: Living Hope Press, 2004), 182.

<sup>5</sup> Flavius Josephus, Wars, 5:12:4.

<sup>6</sup> Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Apocalypics*, 332.

<sup>7</sup> Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Re 6:7-8.

The color of this horse is pale or yellowish green. The same Greek word, *chlōros*, is used in Revelation 9:4 of green vegetation. It can refer to a yellowish green, the bright green of a plant, or the paleness of an individual who is critically ill. The English words chlorophyll or chlorine come from this word.

The name of this horse is death and Hades follows. Futurists also say that “Death” refers to physical death, not annihilation - only the physical body is claimed “Authority was given him over one fourth of the earth...” According to current statistics and approximations this is about 2 billion, a shocking figure. The weight of this judgment is death on a massive scale. Four different forms of death are mentioned here. The first one is the sword which refers to death by war and perhaps by the brutality of the beast and his godless system under the dominion of the Red Dragon, Satan. The second is famine, of course, anticipates death on an even larger scale by hunger. The third one is pestilence which speaks of death by illness and plagues. The fourth one is the wild beasts; perhaps, as an outcome of the earlier events, anticipates the fact that people will be weak, defenseless and easy prey for wild animals.

After seeing all these, J. Hampton Keathley concludes that the unprecedented character of the Tribulation is now beginning to show itself, and some think this is still in just the first half of the Tribulation. However, others see the unprecedented nature of this fourth seal as an indication the second half of the Tribulation has begun.<sup>8</sup>

### **Idealism (4<sup>th</sup> Seal)**

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

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<sup>8</sup>J. Hampton Keathley III, *Studies in Revelation* (Galaxie Software, 2002; 2002), Re 6:7.

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.<sup>9</sup>

This is the last horse John has seen. After this picture, the events are going to change and no more horses appear in his visions. There are three more seals, but they are different in their appearance. Now, coming back to this horse, we can see that is pale, accurately pale green. Upon this shocking looking horse is a rider with the name Death, a suggestion of what would happen to many people upon the earth. Death was also followed by Hades, the following step for all who have not received salvation. According to this understanding the message is extremely noticeable. One-fourth of the earth's populations would die and perish. They would be destroyed by the sword, which in many cases represents war and crime, hunger which is caused by famine, the beasts of the earth which are man killers, and other forms of death. Jesus might refer to this event by describing in Matthew 24 "pestilences and earthquakes"

These kinds of tragedies have always been with us. Whether earthquakes, illness, catastrophes or other calamities, many have perished from the face of the earth. If statistics could have been kept on these throughout history, they probably would total one-fourth of the population. Lerry Fogle also mentions that here, as with the red horse rider of war, "*power was given unto them*". That is how all these events could occur. Only God has that kind of authority, and it fits into His divine redemption arrangement. The God of love and mercy in His wisdom knows very well what actions must be taken to turn men to Him, the source of life.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, "An Exposition of the New Testament Comprising the Entire 'BE' Series"--Jkt. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996, c1989), Re 6:1.

<sup>10</sup>Lerry W. Fogle, *Revelation Explained* (Plainfield, NJ: Distributed by Logos International, 1981), 172.

Hailey and Hendriksen interpret the seals in connection with their effects upon the church, in contrast to the following trumpet judgments of God upon the unbelieving world. Of the fourth seal with its four serious judgments, the sword, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts, Hendriksen writes: “These four, moreover, are symbolical of all universal woes which believers suffer along with the rest of humanity throughout the entire dispensation.”<sup>11</sup>

If we have to conclude, we can see that all the idealists see one major idea in this seal. When men turn against men, this is what happens.<sup>12</sup> When a war breaks out, the result is devastation and death. There is no escape. The most important information however, that we have to see here, is that still, in the idealistic view, there is no a certain point fixed in history. They don’t claim they talk about the future, or about the past, events that took place already, but what they say is that all these events can be applied throughout history.

### **Historicism (4th Seal)**

The color of fear and death appears in this seal. With the pale horse the times of sorrow reach a fearful climax, something that people did not really encounter before. Probably a wide area of the earth is in this situation that is what the one fourth of the earth expression means here.

The series - sword, hunger, death or pestilence; and beasts - may be thought of as describing the advanced decline of civilization that follows warfare. The results of the sword, killing men and destroying harvests, produce starvation; hunger, resulting

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<sup>11</sup>Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Re 6:7-8.

<sup>12</sup> Pate, C. Marvin, *Reading Revelation: A comparison of four interpretive translations of the Apocalypse* (null ed.). Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic and Professional. pp 19-32

in the breakdown of healthiness, brings disease; and when disease has taken its toll, human society is so weakened that it cannot protect itself against the wild beasts. When we apply these events to a particular period of Christian history, the fourth horseman seems to represent a situation especially typical of the period from about 538 to 1517, spanning the Dark and Middle Ages, all the way to the beginning of the Reformation.<sup>13</sup>

At the opening of the fourth seal, the fourth living being calls for a pale horse, a color that describes a dead body or a person, who is very ill. The one who was sitting on the horse, his name was Death, and Hades was following him. These words sound very terrible and scary to modern readers, however, if we look at the beginning of the book of Revelation, we can see in 1:18 that Death and Hades are under Christ's control. He is the one who holds the key of Hades. Here this two terrible pictures appear as a consequence of the rejection of the gospel. The fact that Death and Hades had authority over one fourth of the earth, and moreover, that this authority was given to them, means that Death and Hades do not have ultimate control. They are under Christ's control. The plagues of the first four seals are just a precursor and a foretaste of the final judgement.<sup>14</sup>

There is another historicist view that explains and dates the events of the seven seals a little differently. According to this view, the time of fulfillment, is the twenty years from A.D. 248 to 268, covering the reigns of Decius, Gallus, Aemilianus, Valerian, and Gallienus. Barnes, who holds this opinion quotes Gibbon, who states the following:

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<sup>13</sup>Francis D. Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible With Exegetical and Expository Comment.*, Commentary Reference Series (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1978), Re 6:8.

<sup>14</sup> Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ – Commentary on the book of Revelation*, Andrews University Press, Berrien Springs, MI, 2002, p.234

From the great secular games celebrated by Philip to the death of the emperor Gallienus, there elapsed twenty years of shame and misfortune. During this calamitous period of time ... every province of the Roman world was afflicted by barbarous invaders and military tyrants, and the ruined empire seemed to approach the last and fatal moment of its dissolution.<sup>15</sup>

Gibbon also marks that, from the years 248 to 296, “five thousand people perished daily in Rome; and many cities that escaped the hands of the barbarians were completely deserted.”

Of the four judgments listed in verse 8, sword, hunger, death, and beasts of the earth, Gibbon notes that three—sword, famine, and pestilence—did indeed cause chaos in the empire and estimates that half the human population of the earth was slaughtered in this period. This would be even more than the one fourth of the earth that the seal is talking about. Eusebius adds information on the beasts of the earth, in the dogs that were on the streets. Here is what he states:

Death waged a desolating war with ... famine and pestilence ... Men wasted away to mere skeletons, stumbled hither and thither like mere shadows, trembling and tottering. They fell down in the midst of the streets. ... Some indeed were already the food for dogs. (*Ecclesiastical History*, Book III, Chapter VI)

Elliott favors to translate a fourth of the earth as does the Latin Vulgate, “over the four parts of the earth,” referring to the four divisions into which the Roman Empire was divided at that time.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Vol. 1, by Edward Gibbon, [1776]

<sup>16</sup> Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Re 6:7-8.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE FIFTH SEAL

“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. <sup>10</sup> 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?” <sup>11</sup> 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.” Rev 6: 9-11(NKJV)

#### **Preterism (5<sup>th</sup> Seal)**

After seeing the previous four seals and its horses and riders and everything that followed them, now we are able to see something else.

The Preterist say that just as the blood of sacrificial animals was poured out at the base of the altar, so the souls of the martyrs are seen under the altar. “The soul of the flesh is in the blood.” Their blood cries out for justification, as did the blood of Abel. The fact that the martyrs are asking for the avenging of their blood upon those who dwell on the earth suggests that their oppressors were still alive on earth at the period John saw the vision. Before A.D. 70, the main oppressors of the righteous Jews and Christians were the leaders of the Jewish nation, the headquarter being in Jerusalem. These thoughts are brought together by Jesus when He foretold the following event:

On you [Jerusalem] may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah ... whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. ... All these things will come upon this generation (Matthew 23:36).

Russell states that it is impossible not to be hit with the marked similarity between the vision of the fifth seal and our Lord's parable of the unjust judge. And shall not God revenge his own elect, which call day and night unto him, though he stands long with them? Surely He will avenge them rapidly. Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith in the land?' This is more than similarity: It is identity.

When Jesus was told that Pilate had mingled the blood of some Jewish worshipers with their sacrifices, He responded, "unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:1–3). This seal for Preterists implies that the sentences on Jerusalem are taking place.<sup>1</sup>

According to another view, also Preterist, this is the cry for justification by the Christian victims who were persecuted by the Jews after Christ's death and leading up to the fall of Jerusalem in the year AD 70. Ernest Renan and Volkmar, both modern rationalist Preterists, see the year 64 as an important year for Christian martyrdom. The name "Jerusalem" became identical with the persecution of the just. But God took revenge on the deaths of the righteous by allowing the Romans to defeat the holy city as vengeance for the Jews giving Jesus over to Pilate.<sup>2</sup>

### **Futurism (5<sup>th</sup> Seal)**

The futuristic view says about the fourth seal that these souls under the altar are people martyred during the Tribulation period. Walvoord says that the introduction of these martyred dead in heaven at this point instantly after the fourth seal seems to

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<sup>1</sup>Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Re 6:9-11.

<sup>2</sup> Pate, C. Marvin, *Reading Revelation: a comparison of four interpretive translations of the Apocalypse* (null ed.). Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional. pp. 19–32.

suggest that these martyrs have come from the tribulation scene on earth. Gaebelein, despite the mention of souls, opposes the idea that they are raised from the dead and are in glory with redeemed bodies.

To the dispensationalists, this passage applies to a time after the Rapture of the church, and the martyrs cannot, therefore, be identified with Christians of the church era. Their cry for vengeance shows that they stand on other than Christian ground. Whether the vision pertains to those slain only in the first half or the second half or throughout the entire Tribulation period is a debated point.

Moorehead believes that the martyrs in this vision are indeed Christians killed during the Tribulation, and Mounce sees the vision as an interpretation of Christian martyrdom.<sup>3</sup>

As we have seen in the previous four seals, things are going badly. The bow of the horseman on the white horse is damaged. Blood flows. Famine follows. Disease and sickness run widespread. All of these terrible things happen, and the world should blame someone. Of course they will blame believers, those who come to Christ during the Tribulation. This is not something new. In the days of the Black Plague, one of every four people died. The one group of people secure was the Jews. Today, we know this was so because they were following the biblical principles of hygiene. But their contemporaries became convinced the Jews were the cause for the disease, and started persecuting them.

The same thing will take place in the Tribulation according to Futurists. Amid sickness and blood, economic disharmony and war—believers will be martyred. And this is where the Lord appears to intervene.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Re 6:9-11.

<sup>4</sup>Jon Courson, *Jon Courson's Application Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 1705.

## **Idealism (5<sup>th</sup> Seal)**

According to the idealistic view the first part of the revealing of God's purposes, the first four seals, has revealed his judgment, but now we are able to see a slight of God's purposes for believers who have perished and are yet to die beneath these judgments. What is to become of them? The evil that has been released upon the world has led to Christians dying for their faith. The fifth seal thus brings a clarification to those of John's day, as well as to the generations that follow, who will suffer death for their faith in Christ.

In our own day and time we may well think of those who have died under persecution in northern Nigeria, parts of Indonesia or any other places where Christians were persecuted. We are asked to join John in this vision and to see their souls under the altar, in other words, they are under the shelter of the Lamb who was sacrificed. In heaven they are kept and protected by Christ himself. And yet they cry out with the same call that has been the cry of God's people in both the OT and NT. It is the cry in Isaiah 6:11 and Zechariah 1:12: *How long, Sovereign Lord...?* It is okay to have some understanding of what God is doing in judging the world and ordering evil to carry out judgment on nonbelievers. But the saints are caught up in this. They are suffering and dying for their faith. Even in heaven and under Christ's protection, though the martyrs understand something of what is going on, still they ask this question: how long?

Their concern is double. First, they are concerned for those who will continue to suffer. Will this go on for long? How many more Christians will have to die, whether under the plagues, famines, war or directly under persecution? In other words, they want to know how much longer this age will continue, and when the new age with no more wars or rumors of wars will start.

They are also concerned for God and his honor. How long ... until you judge...? When are we going to see clearly God's justice? When will evil be finally shattered? How long will God ask evil forces like the previous four riders to do his work for him? When will he destroy them as well? When will the day come when he will vindicate his name?

These are questions that all Christians ask at certain times in their lives. Maybe it is as a result of certain sorrows and deaths in the family or maybe because we have heard of another Christian dying for his faith, and so we are affected from this situations and so we ask for the very thing for which we so long: Lord, how long until Christ returns and all this sorrow and evil is finished once and for all?

The response is that they are told to wait a little more. In the meantime, each is given the reward of a white robe. This white robe is to confirm their merit and purity in the presence of God. However, God's purposes are not yet finished. More will yet have to die or suffer the hardships of this world in which the four horsemen are on the loose, before finally the end will come.<sup>5</sup>

To say what we have seen so far in the idealistic view we can tell that this vision reveals to the suffering church the present state of those who have previously died for their faith. They were as the apostle Peter says, "Judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit" (1 Pet 4:6). The image of the martyrs shown here highlights the sacrificial character of their deaths. Thus, their souls are under the altar, where the blood of sacrificial sufferers was poured in the temple.

Hobbs writes:

Like the Lamb they had had their throats cut—this is the meaning of "slain" here and in 5:6. But it is a symbolic word. We are not to understand that these

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<sup>5</sup>Paul Gardner, *Focus on the Bible: Revelation*, electronic ed., Re 7:1.

peoples' throats were cut any more than was that of Jesus ... These martyrs had been sacrificed because of their faithfulness.

Whether these martyrs signify all who suffer in any way for Christ's sake, or stand particularly for those slain by Domitian or other rude rulers, who have persecuted God's people, the vision retells us that the martyrs of Christ from every age live on before God. (It is necessary to mention though, that this is what we call, the belief in life after death, in which most of the idealists believe. This is not my personal statement and I do not believe in the immortality of the soul!)

They anticipate ultimate vindication, which is not complete until their killers have been taken to justice. They are, however, comforted by the giving of white robes, meaning they are pure in God's eyes. They are at rest. As the book of Revelation says: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.'"<sup>6</sup>

After reading through the idealistic approach, it might give the sensation that I believe in life after death. However, this is NOT the case. We should remember that I am presenting what each interpretation school has to say about the seals. According to what we have seen earlier in this seal, idealists have the tendency to believe in some sort of life after death. We will have a short look into this subject why this is not Biblical. In the following part of the paper, when we will look into the historical approach of the 5<sup>th</sup> seal, we are going to discuss about the souls under the alter, and what they exactly represent

### **Historicism (5<sup>th</sup> Seal)**

There are historicists who say that this period of time most likely is the ruling time of the emperor Diocletian (284-303). This time was one of the most severe

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<sup>6</sup>Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Re 6:9-11.

periods of persecution because this emperor was one of the worst persecutors. He really used the Christians for entertainment and put them into life and death situations. Then Constantine came to power, and he was the one who legalized the church, therefore the church was vindicated. This is a simple way to understand this seal, however, I believe there is a deeper meaning into it.

According to another historicist view, the altar shown in the prophetic picture was possibly talking of the bronze altar of the Hebrew sanctuary, and the martyrs may be thought of as sacrifices presented to God. As the blood of the victims was poured out at the base of that altar, as we can see in Leviticus 4:7, and “*the soul of the flesh is in the blood*” so the souls of those who have given themselves in martyrdom may be thought of as being underneath the altar. Later Jewish custom set forth the idea that Israel’s dead were buried, as it were, beneath the altar, and those buried under the altar were buried, as it were, under the throne of glory.<sup>7</sup>

When we talk about the souls, mentioned in this seal, it should be remembered that John was watching symbolic pictures, and that the rules governing the interpretation of this kind of prophecies must be kept in mind when the sense of the various symbols are wanted. John saw an altar at the base of which lay the “souls” of martyrs. Rules of interpretation do not require us to locate a specific altar in a certain location at a certain moment of history. As with the details of a parable, not all features of a prophetic symbolization essentially have interpretative value.

Any attempt to interpret these “souls” as the disembodied spirits of departed martyrs does violence to the rules of interpretation of symbolic prophecies. John was not given a view of heaven as it essentially appears. There are no white, red, black, or

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<sup>7</sup> Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 3, p. 803

pale horses there with aggressive riders. Jesus does not appear there in the form of a lamb with a bleeding knife wound. The four beasts do not represent real flying creatures. Similarly, there are no “souls” lying at the base of an altar in heaven. The whole passage was an illustrative and symbolic representation designed to teach the spiritual lesson that we were talking about.<sup>8</sup> Of course, this does not mean that we do not have to take the message seriously. The message of this seal is a serious one and it has to be taken seriously, but not literally as many interpreters are doing.

It looks that the symbolization of the fifth seal was shown to encourage those who faced martyrdom and death, with the guarantee that despite the apparent triumph of the enemy, vindication would ultimately arise. Such a reassurance would be particularly heartening for those living in the time of the awful persecutions of the later Middle Ages, but more particularly during the time of the Reformation and after (1517–1755). To those people who lived in that time, it must have seemed that the long period of domination would never end. The message of the fifth seal was a hope that the cause of God would finally triumph. The same encouragement will come to those going through the last great conflict.

The fifth seal marks a real turning point. Until now we have seen the oppressors in the image of the horses and their riders. Now we are seeing those who were oppressed by these. However, from the victim’s point of view only two questions are important. Why? And How long? Their reason of having the question “why”, is because they are suffering because of the word of God. They are faithful to the eternal God, and their oppressors don’t tolerate this, so they will also ask “how long” will this suffering go on for. The good news is that God sees their suffering and

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<sup>8</sup>Francis D. Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary: The Holy Bible With Exegetical and Expository Comment.*, Commentary Reference Series (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1978), Re 6:9.

He promises that He does not only bring salvation and freedom but He also brings justice and the oppressors will be punished for their actions. God is a loving God, but His love is not uncaring to suffering. It is a love combined with justice that intervenes in favor of the oppressed.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation – The Apocalypse Through Hebrew Eyes*, Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, MD, 2002, p.64-66

## CHAPTER 7

### THE SIXTH SEAL

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. 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?" Revelation 6: 12-17

#### **Preterism (6<sup>th</sup> Seal)**

Russell the previously mentioned Preterist suggests that this is 'the great and terrible day of the Lord' predicted by Malachi, by the apostle John, by the apostle Paul, by the apostle Peter, and, above all, by Jesus Christ in His apocalyptic discourse on the Mount of Olives. It is hard, to not observe the connection between the seventeenth verse and the language of Malachi. *'But who may abide the day of his coming?'* The vision for Preterists represents the end of the Jewish state and the fall of its leaders.

David Clark writes:

It may doubtless be taken for granted that these convulsions of nature were seen in vision and are not to be looked upon as actual occurrences. As no one would assume that the four horses actually rode over the earth, but were symbolical representations of things that were to happen, so these convulsions of nature were probably to be understood in the same way. ...

Striking and terrible things seen in the visions foretold striking and terrible judgments upon the wicked persecutors of the church.<sup>1</sup>

The language used here to describe these events may appear bizarre to modern ears, but is commonly used in the OT, as denoting the end of temporal empires in prophecy. The images of the stars falling like figs and the heavens being rolled up remind us of Isaiah's prophecy about the fall of Edom (Isa 34:4). These terms are used by Jesus in predicting the disaster that would come upon the Jewish nation in that generation (Matt 24:29, 34).

J. Stuart Russell, anticipating the objection that the fall of Jerusalem was not as catastrophic as the language of this seal would suggest. He writes:

Prophecy is poetry and Oriental poetry also, in which gorgeous symbolical imagery is the vesture of thought. Besides, the objection is based upon an inadequate estimate of the real significance and importance of the destruction of Jerusalem. That event is not simply a tragically Historicist incident; it is not to be looked at as in the same category with the siege of Troy or of Carthage. It was a grand providential epoch; the close of an aeon; the winding up of a great period in the divine government of the world.

These preterists also say that not all the language is necessarily symbolic. The fact that the people of Jerusalem would seek refuge in caves and under the rocks at this time, for example, was predicted by Christ (Luke 23:28–31) and verified as historical by Josephus, who wrote: So now the last hope which supported the persecutors and that crew of robbers who were with them, was in the caves and caverns underground.<sup>2</sup>

Hugo Grotius a Preterist from the 17<sup>th</sup> century viewed the sixth seal as it is in connection with the events during the Siege of Jerusalem by Titus in year

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<sup>1</sup> Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Re 6:12-17.

<sup>2</sup> Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Re 6:12-17.

70. Volkmar, a modern rationalist preterist, believes that the beginning of the sixth seal is the year 68. According to many preterists, all these events that occurred, were the punishment of God, because they crucified Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

### **Futurism (6<sup>th</sup> Seal)**

Mounce, a contemporary scholar sees this seal, and the disasters that go with it, to be prefiguring the beginning of the last days through great cosmic instabilities. For example, the earthquake was a regular feature of divine visitation (Ex 19:18; Isa 2:19; Hag 2:6). He does not commit himself to a firmly literal understanding of the phenomena stated, but sees them as “signs in the heavens” that are both symbolic and literal. The reader is therefore left wondering whether some of the events are literal and some symbolic, or if they are literal, but with symbolic implication. The anterior of these possibilities is favored by Gaebelin, who says that most of these events are symbolic, however at the same time great physical phenomena are involved as well. The earthquake possibly means a literal earthquake. Everything is being shaken in this world. The civil and administrative powers on earth all are going to break into fragments. Every class from kings to slaves is affected by it and frightened. The political and religious world is going to fall apart.

Ryrie in company with Walvoord, Morris, and other futurists, takes this passage quite literally. There is only one exception in which he believes it has to mean something else. This is the falling of stars. He believes this should be a meteor shower or any kind of phenomenon that is similar to it.

Hal Lindsey contends that this seal describes the first nuclear exchange. A nuclear explosion will trigger the worst earthquake ever. The smoke will darken the

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<sup>3</sup> Frederick Charles Cook, ed. *The holy Bible, Authorized Version*, (comm. and a revision of the tr. by bishops and other clergy of the Anglican Church ed.). Oxford University. p. 583.

sun and make the moon appear red. The falling stars are Russian bombs. This is similar to the view of Ray Stedman, who believes that the sun and the moon will appear darkened, probably as a result of dust and ash. This may well be the result astronomer Carl Sagan has dubbed “nuclear winter,” the darkening of the sun by smokes of dust and ash thrown up by the mass explosion of nuclear weapons.<sup>4</sup>

Going through the futurist interpretation we can see that most of them agree on this seal and they have two ways to interpret it. Literally or symbolically. There is of course a third party who would say that the meaning of the seal can be understood literally and symbolically as well. Any interpretation we would take or talk about, the main focus is that they all are going to be fulfilled somewhere in the near future. As interesting as it sounds, I believe there is more than that behind this seal.

### **Idealism (6<sup>th</sup> Seal)**

According to the spiritual or idealistic approach the descriptions of these great catastrophic events are possibly symbolic. In another place in the Bible a similar picture language is used of the destruction of nations. However, the fact that many descriptions in this book are symbolic does not diminish their seriousness. Moreover, most likely the reverse is true. Metaphorical language is used to define the worst scene we can imagine. The actual fact of God’s judgment will be even worse, for we really cannot imagine correctly, whatever images we use, just how awful will be that day. No surprise the section ends with the question, who can stand? The question is vital. Is there actually anyone who can stand before the mighty wrath of God as He is going to judge this world?

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<sup>4</sup>Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Re 6:12-17.

The sixth seal has shown the future. We are invited to look beyond this age, to the time when Christ at the end will come to judge. The church through the ages is not being asked to wait endlessly. The Lord in whom the church trusts is protecting her at present-day, limiting the work of these satanic powers, but he will one day redeem her and avenge his name and the name of his people. The question here should be: is the church going to be strong enough to be able to stand in the face of God himself?<sup>5</sup>

Some scholars believe this is too early in the book to describe the final judgment of the world at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, since, according to their understanding because John's vision does not deal with this until Revelation 20. These interpreters would see these disasters as representing the judgment of God upon those who were persecuting the Christians in John's day, the Roman Empire.

A more shared view however, is that we do have the Second Coming of Christ presented here. The events of the first five seals are social and political disturbances that persist often in history, but this "great day of His wrath" signifies a climax of all the cycles of judgment. The seals are a self-contained series, culminating in this final judgment at Christ's eschatological coming. There are additional series to come in the book, which will bring us to the same highpoint in their own turns.<sup>6</sup>

If we are about to summarize in a few words what this approach says, we can say the following: This is the time when Christ will return in great glory, to redeem those who were suffering under the oppression of the ungodly throughout history, and God finally will bring punishment upon those who were persecuting His people.

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<sup>5</sup>Paul Gardner, *Focus on the Bible: Revelation*, electronic ed., Re 7:1.

<sup>6</sup>Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Re 6:12-17.

### **Historicism (6<sup>th</sup> Seal)**

According to some historicists these great apocalyptic signs might symbolize the fall of paganism to Christianity in the Roman Empire, associated with Constantine's agreement and conversion. The earthquake is a prophetic image for political or spiritual revolutions. Sun, moon, and stars represent earthly dignitaries, political authorities, and other great personalities in the political or religious realms. Elliott calls this the ending of paganism.<sup>7</sup> Others relate this vision to the division of the empire in 395 between the East, under Honorius, and the West, under Arcadius. This is taken as a signal of the fall of the empire, which basically did not take place until 476.

Barnes applies this seal in a different way. He sees in this the invasions of the Roman Empire by the northern people of Goths and Vandals, between 376 and 418. Therefore, he sees the sixth seal as fulfilled by the same events decoded in the early trumpet judgments which follow.

Adam Clarke believes that all these things may accurately apply to the final destruction of Jerusalem, and to the rebellion which took place in the Roman Empire under Constantine the Great.<sup>8</sup>

As we see the understanding of this book and of the seals varies within Historicism. I believe that we have to take a look to all the interpretations that are given to us, and after we can make a distinction between them and make a conclusion for ourselves. In the historicist approach there is more than we have seen so far. We have seen that the historicist interpreters and the Adventist interpreters have

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<sup>7</sup> Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Re 6:12-17.

<sup>8</sup> Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Re 6:12-17.

differences in understanding in many places. Not because I am an SDA but because I believe that this interpretation makes a lot of sense, therefore we have to mention them!

According to the SDA Bible Study the events of the sixth seal expose the division of the physical universe. The prophet Joel had already used the picture of an earthquake to describe the turmoil of nature in the day of the Lord.

There are historians, who identify this earthquake with the Lisbon quake on November 1, 1755, one of the most widespread and severe seismological instabilities ever recorded. The shockwave of the quake was felt not only in North Africa but also as far away as the West Indies. Identification with the great Lisbon earthquake suggests 1755 as a proper beginning date.

In combination with following fires and tsunamis, the earthquake almost totally destroyed Lisbon and attached areas. Seismologists today estimate the Lisbon earthquake had a magnitude in the range 8.5–9.0 on Richter scale, with its epicenter in the Atlantic Ocean about 200 km west-southwest of Cape St. Vincent.

Approximations place the death toll in Lisbon alone between 10,000 and 100,000 people, making it one of the deadliest earthquakes in history.<sup>9</sup>

The darkening of the sun is often mentioned in OT prophecy in connection with the catastrophes that lead to the day of the Lord. Jesus took specific note of this phenomenon in His prophecy of the end of the world, and noted it as one of the signs by which His followers might know that His coming was near.

A remarkable, literal fulfillment of the scene described here was experienced in eastern New York and southern New England on May 19, 1780. A cautious study of newspaper reports of that time tells that an uncommon darkness appeared in eastern

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<sup>9</sup> Historic Earthquakes – Lisbon, Portugal, U.S. Geological Survey, October 26, 2009.

New York and southwestern New England about ten o'clock that morning, and throughout the day made its way eastward through southern and central New England, and to some distance at sea. Each locality reported that the darkness persisted several hours.

In this time period people observed meteorite showers as well, with great intensity. The exact time period is between 1800 and 1900 and it was observed throughout Europe, America, Africa and Asia as well. These phenomena were observed in an area where an extraordinary revival of interest in the prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation was about to take place, and was recognized by students of these prophecies as fulfilling the events that are described in the 6<sup>th</sup> seal.<sup>10</sup>

The 6<sup>th</sup> seal, therefore, spans the period from the cry of the martyrs to the end-time. Since the heavenly signs had a great impact on the evolving interest in the study of prophecy, the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 is the best candidate for the earthquake of Revelation 6:12. Revelation 6:14 points forward to the final crash of all things terrestrial and celestial insofar as they pertain to this planet.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the fact that there was this extremely big earthquake in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it does not mean that we limit this seal unto that event. That was just the beginning. This seal represents a period of time just like all the other seals, which means that these kind of events are about to take place more and more often before the second coming of Jesus.

To the sighs of the crushed victims, answer the cries of terror of the oppressors as they tremble before God's wrath. As we see the opening of the sixth seal, we can

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<sup>10</sup>Francis D. Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary: The Holy Bible With Exegetical and Expository Comment.*, Commentary Reference Series (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1978), Re 6:12.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, Symposium on Revelation, Introductory and Exegetical Studies, Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of SDA, Silver Springs, MD, 1992, p. 237

see from another side the justice of God. In the fifth seal we saw God's judgment from the victims' perspective. At this time the judgment is shown from the oppressors' perspective. This is a very clear picture of how salvation works. To truly save, God must create again, and the creation of the new can happen only through the destruction of the old.<sup>12</sup> It is really amazing to see how God is still in control of everything. Even though it looks like everything is falling apart, we know that there is a reason for that and God will finally restore everything.

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<sup>12</sup> Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation – The Apocalypse Through Hebrew Eyes*, Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, MD, 2002, p.66

## CHAPTER 8

### THE SEVENTH SEAL

“When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.” Revelation 8: 1

#### **Preterism (7<sup>th</sup> Seal)**

The short silence in heaven is in sharp contrast with the noise of praise and song that characterized the heavenly scene in Chapters 4 and 5. Noticeably missing are the loud voices of the martyrs asking how long it would be before they were revenged. Possibly their cries have stopped because the wished vengeance upon their persecutors, the leaders of the Jews, had now began. For a short period, symbolically represented as half an hour, there would be no more such moans heard in heaven. Soon, however, new persecutions of Christians by Rome would cause the righteous blood to again cry for vindication. This might be what is described symbolically in the following verses, where prayers of the saints again are offered as incense to God.

The half hour may be the period of time generally required by the priest in the temple to offer the daily incense. This time of incense was a time of silent prayer for the worshipers.<sup>1</sup> In this situation it is an angel in heaven, not a priest in the temple, who is offering the incense.<sup>2</sup> So basically there is silence in heaven because for a short period of time there was no persecution. Nobody was oppressing the Christian

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<sup>1</sup> *The Temple*, p.167, cited by Chilton in *Days of Vengeance*, p. 230.

<sup>2</sup> Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Re 8:1.

worshippers. They had peace; therefore, they did not need to cry out loud for vengeance. However, this situation has been for a short period of time.

The silence also could mean the preparation for the judgment about to fall upon Jerusalem in the year 70. This judgment was the godly response to the cry for justification from the martyred Christians, such as Stephen, James and other apostles who had been killed or tortured for Jesus' sake.

Matthew Henry in his commentary says that the silence could be the silence of peace, that for this time no moans were sent up to the ear of the Lord God; all was quiet and well in the church, and thus all silent in heaven, for whenever the church on earth cries, through persecution, that cry comes up to heaven and echoes there.<sup>3</sup>

### **Futurism (7<sup>th</sup> Seal)**

Concerning this special silence in the seventh seal, Walvoord writes:

Contained in the seventh seal are all the subsequent developments leading to the second coming of Christ, including the seven trumpets and the seven bowls of the wrath of God ... [this silence] may be compared with the silence before the foreman of a jury reports a verdict; for a moment there is perfect silence and everyone awaits that which will follow.<sup>4</sup>

Ryrie says that with the opening of this last seal the book is now fully opened, and one would anticipate a holocaust to be let loose. Instead there is silence. This is a silence of suspense, for this is the last seal. It is also a silence of foreboding that precedes the onslaught of judgments. It lasts for half an hour which may be understood just as literally as the other time designations in the book.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996, c1991), Re 8:1.

<sup>4</sup>Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Re 8:1.

<sup>5</sup>Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Re 8:1.

According to the futurist understanding this silence is nothing else but the lull before the storm. The period is not calculated as it would be literal or symbolic, if it has to be understood in prophetic time or in actual thirty minutes period. It is simply a very short period of time, a silence that brings judgment to the world, and this judgment is going to come through the seven trumpet's message.

With the seventh seal being opened, we expect to see the final judgment, and yet we are given a dramatic image in which everything stops in heaven for a period of silence. But what is the purpose of the silence? As the final great day of the wrath of the Lamb comes, the entire heaven stands in silence, in wonder of the terrible event that is about to happen.<sup>6</sup>

### **Idealism (7<sup>th</sup> seal)**

The idealistic approach of the 7<sup>th</sup> seal is similar conceptually to the futurist approach. For Idealism this seal represents the silence before the storm that is about to fall upon the Earth, through the dreadful events that are mentioned in the seven trumpets. Idealists and futurists as well mostly agree that the seven trumpets are not going parallel with the seven seals. They are not describing the same periods in time, but the trumpets follow the seals with their own events and it represents the next great occurrences that are going to take place before Jesus glorious second coming will take place.

For a short time heaven is in impressed silence, anticipating the completion of God's purposes. Hailey points out that "a half hour is ordinarily a short period of time, but it seems long when one is waiting." What follows this silence is the blowing of seven trumpets, recalling the fall of Jericho at the blast of seven trumpets. It should be remembered that Jericho's fall also was

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<sup>6</sup>Paul Gardner, *Focus on the Bible: Revelation*, Re 10:1., Christian Focus; Reprint edition (March 20, 2008)

preceded by a period of silence, as the Israelites circled the city seven days without a sound.<sup>7</sup>

However, there are exceptions and some idealists believe that just as the seven seals are repeating themselves again and again throughout history, that is the case with the trumpets as well, and this short period of silence is just explaining what is about to take place very soon on earth. All the martyrs who have given their life for Christ's cause finally will see that all the trouble they were in, it worth it, because they will be vindicated.

### **Historicism (7<sup>th</sup> Seal)**

Elliott identifies this silence with the short period during which the 144,000 were sealed in the seventh chapter. It represents the short interval between the opening of the seventh seal and the first barbarian invasion to be seen in verse seven. This time period is thought to be the seventy years that interfered with Constantine's victory over Licinius, followed by the ending of the pagan heavens, IN A.D. 324, and Alaric's revolt and the invasion of the empire, resulting in the death of Theodosius, A.D. 395. Elliott believes the half an hour in heaven is exactly equivalent to seventy years of Roman history.

Albert Barnes marks that the half-hour silence was for effect to mark the solemnity of the events about to be described, those following from the sounding of the seven trumpets. These events follow chronologically after those noted in the previous visions. "He states that this is a symbolical illustration, and is designed not to signify a pause in the actions themselves, but only the remarkable and fearful nature of the events which are now to be revealed. Matthew Henry proposes two probable meanings of the silence in heaven. The first one is that there was a short period

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<sup>7</sup>Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Re 8:1.

following the destruction of Jerusalem during which no moans from the saints were presented in heaven because all was momentarily peaceful for the church on earth. The second meaning could be that this is a silence of expectation. The church of God, both in heaven and earth, raised silent, to see what God was doing, according to the text in Zech 2:13, *Be silent, O all flesh, before the Lord, for he has risen up out of his holy habitation.*”<sup>8</sup>

According to the SDA Bible Commentary it is very interesting to see the difference between this seal and the previous six. In the previous seals we were able to see and hear terrible events and loud noises. Here we have silence in heaven. Even the scene is changed because the previous events occurred on earth, but now we see what is happening in heaven. This silence has been explained in at least two ways. Some believe that this silence in heaven is caused by the angels that left heaven to accompany Christ to the earth at His glorious second coming.<sup>9</sup>

Another view explains this silence in heaven to be a quietness of awesome expectation. Until now we have seen the heavenly courts being filled with praise song and joy. Now everything is quiet, in awesome expectancy of the things that are about to happen.<sup>10</sup> Silence expresses what even words, music and art cannot. Only silence can communicate the indescribable and only silence can express the infinite God. As we have seen, the silence took place for about half an hour. Some believe that this is a literal half an hour, a thirty minutes period. However, there are interprets who believe

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<sup>8</sup>Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), Re 8:1.

<sup>9</sup> Francis D. Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary: The Holy Bible With Exegetical and Expository Comment.*, Commentary Reference Series (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1978), Re 8:2.

<sup>10</sup> Francis D. Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary: The Holy Bible With Exegetical and Expository Comment.*, Commentary Reference Series (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1978), Re 8:2.

that this has to be understood prophetically. In prosthetic language one day stands for one year. If this is true, and one 24-hour day equals to one prophetic year, one hour equals 365 divided by 24, that is 15 days. A half hour would the equal one literal week, seven days.<sup>11</sup> If this truly represents the second coming of Jesus Christ, that means that this is the end of historicist time for the Earth. Interestingly in the beginning it took exactly seven days to create this world, and it will take the same amount of time to close the history book of Planet Earth.

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<sup>11</sup> Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation – The Apocalypse Through Hebrew Eyes*, Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, MD, 2002, p.73

## CHAPTER 9

### CONCLUSION

After a careful study of the seven seals we can see some major differences on how Bible scholars understand this issue. Studying the four interpretation schools and their understanding we are able now to determine why some of the interpretation schools are wrong in determining what the seals try to say for us today.

First of all, we have noticed that Preterism has been developed from the 15<sup>th</sup> century by a Spanish Jesuit. Here we have to include Futurism as well, because this interpretation school was formed also by a Spanish Jesuit from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. If we look carefully behind the walls, we will realize that these schools came into existence shortly after the Reformation period, when the time had come for Luther and his fellow reformers to point out that the Roman Catholic Church was not exactly what it claimed to be. This is when the reformers stood up, without fear in their hearts and told that in the book of Revelation the Beast is the pope itself, and Babylon is the Roman Catholic Church.

Of course, this was a big issue for the church and they needed to do something so that this problem in time would fade. One of the best ways to do that was to create a new way to understand the apocalyptic books of the Bible and that is when Preterism came into the picture. This way they clarified themselves and washed their hands. Now there was another way to understand to book of Revelation and they started to spread this way of thinking. This way the problems and the pain that is described by the seven seals was now covered and nobody could say that the Catholic

church caused suffering to people, because all of the previously mentioned events took place in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, way before the wrongs of the Catholic church came into existence.

When the 16<sup>th</sup> century has arrived there was still need for more “cure” because even though Preterism existed already, there was quite a lot of pressure from the outside. The solution, another interpretation school, called Futurism, which says that all the events of the book of Revelation are about to take place sometimes in the future. This was a very good way to wash the hands of the church one more time. So according to the futurists, all the terrible events mentioned in the seven seals are some future tribulation, which has not happened yet.

Another important finding demonstrates that futurism is not the best way to approach towards the seven seals. According to the view of Jon Paulien the language of judgment (*krima, krisis, krino*) is totally absent in the book of Revelation until Rev 6:10 where it is clear that judgment has not yet started. It seems unimaginable that Rev 4-5 could be the end-time judgment scene when that judgment has not yet started even at the opening of the fifth seal.<sup>1</sup>

Interestingly, most of the schools agree on the symbolic interpretation of Revelation 1-5. However, according to futurism all those terrible events described in the seals are going to be literal events right after the secret rapture.<sup>2</sup> I believe we should use the same method by interpreting the book, therefore the events that appear after the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter, should have symbolical interpretation as well therefore they are not literal events.

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<sup>1</sup> Jon Paulien, *Historicism, The Seals and the Trumpets: Perspective on some current issues*, A Paper Presented to the Daniel and Revelation Committee, March, 1990

<sup>2</sup> Matthews Jr. Kenneth, *Revelation Reveals Jesus*, Second Coming Publishing, LLC, Greeneville, TN, 2012, p.308

If we are going forward in the findings, we will be able to see something really interesting. In the Bible we are seeing that God always had messages for his people. Until Jesus came to earth in a human body, it was all predicted, all the events, that needed to take place before that happened. If we assume that after the death of Jesus there was one book that described the future, the book of Revelation, and those predictions have been fulfilled in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, then for almost twenty centuries God did not have and does not have any prophetic messages. If we switch and talk about the futuristic approach, we can apply the same theory. If the seven seals messages are describing the future tribulation, then God did not have any prophetic message to his people for more than 2,000 years.

Coming to the idealistic or spiritual approach, we can say that in some places we might be able to accept what this interpretation school has to say. However, idealism does not have anything clear or concrete. It is going back and forth but it does not stay in one position, it does not say any clear message. According to that understanding the seven seals and generally the whole book of Revelation is not too concrete.

Arriving to the Historicist School, there is something relevant to mention. In the book of Daniel the future predictions are revealed in a chronological order. All the prophecies in this book are staying on a stable timeline. The Bible says about God that He is not changing. According to this understanding the book of Revelation and the Seven Seals have to predict the future in the same way, in a chronological order. Consequently, the book of Revelation has to have a logical order as well. If this is true, we cannot assume that the seven seals were opened in the 1<sup>st</sup> century; neither can we say that they will be opened sometimes in the future. The only clear and biblically logical understanding is that the seven seals were opened throughout history, and they

will end with the last seal that will be opened at the glorious Second coming of Jesus Christ.

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