

Focus on Prophecy GUIDE 11



Adopted by the King

- **Father and son were walking together in a long line of scared, hungry people who'd just been herded off boxcars in the middle of Poland. Up ahead the father could see Nazi guards dividing the line into two groups. The old and infirm were shoved to one side; the young and healthy to the other. As they neared the soldiers, the father realized he would be separated from his son. He didn't know what fate awaited them inside those barbed wire fences. What words could he leave with his precious boy? The father remembered there was royal blood in the family's veins. He knelt down quickly, looked his son in the eye, and said, "No matter what happens, always remember you're the son of a king."**

Adopted by the King

- **That father perished in the concentration camp. But his son carried those words with him the rest of his life. They were like a royal seal pressed into his mind. He knew who he was. And he lived a good, noble life—as the son of a king.**
- **In this lesson we'll discover how history is moving toward a final holocaust. Seven seals, opened one by one, reveal the stages of Earth's journey. But we'll also discover how each one of us can come to the end of that journey—sealed as a child of the king.**

John's Vision of a Scroll with Seven Seals

- **Revelation 6 and 7 depict a time of great anticipation. The sounds of an intense celebration that echoed through the courts of heaven are quieting. Harps are stilled. Heavenly beings settle down. Voices grow silent. Because Jesus Christ, the Lamb, is now opening the scroll that had been closed with seven seals.**
- **Revelation 5 has built up to this moment in the heavenly drama. Great secrets are about to be revealed.**

John's Vision of a Scroll with Seven Seals

- **Let's look closely at this scroll in Christ's hands. In Bible times scrolls were usually made from papyrus.**
- **The papyrus plant was cut into strips and the strips were laid out in a cross-work pattern, moistened, pounded flat, and dried. Small rectangular sheets could be connected end-to-end to form a scroll up to thirty feet in length.**
- **The scroll was rolled up around a stick and tied with a string. A lump of clay or wax covered the string and was called a seal.**
- **Often a name or identifying logo would be pressed into the seal. Important documents were secured in this way. They were intended to be opened only when a designated individual broke the seal.**

John's Vision of a Scroll with Seven Seals

- **As Revelation 5 has shown us, Jesus is the only One worthy to open the seals. He's the only One with the authority to read the scroll. So what does He reveal? What's inside the book? Everything. The entire history of the Christian church—from the cross to the Second Coming—is laid out before us.**
- **We see the triumph of the gospel as followers of Jesus travel the world proclaiming His kingdom. We see the furious opposition of Satan, who tries desperately to keep individuals from accepting Christ into their lives. Before a watching universe, we see how every single human being plays a part in the great struggle between God and Satan.**
- **John's previous vision of the seven churches was a review of the history of the Christian era. This prophecy of the seven seals in Revelation 6 covers the same time period from a different perspective.**

John's Vision of a Scroll with Seven Seals

- **Also, keep in mind that Revelation as a whole builds on the apocalyptic prophecies in the book of Daniel. At the end of his visions, Daniel was given this message: “But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase” (Daniel 12:4). A few verses later the prophet is told: “Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end” (vs. 9). Daniel was looking at events far in the future. But by John’s day, these were the “things which must shortly take place” (Revelation 1:1).**

John's Vision of a Scroll with Seven Seals

- **Whereas the message given to Daniel was sealed, John was told to write down what he saw (vs. 19). So let's study carefully this panoramic picture of Christian history. Jesus opens the seven seals one at a time, revealing a historical sequence. God wants to show us again how He has been working through history on our behalf. The period covered is between approximately A.D. 31 and the second coming of Jesus.**

John's Vision of a Scroll with Seven Seals

- **THOUGHT QUESTION: The visions of the seven seals and the seven churches cover the same period of history, but from different perspectives. (False or True)**
- **The seven seals reveal the entire history of the Christian church—from the Cross to the Second Coming. (True or False)**

First Seal: The Conqueror

- ***First Century, starting approximately A.D. 31*** READ REVELATION 6:1, 2.
- **As the Lamb of God begins to open the first four seals, the curtain rises on four horses galloping one after another across the sky. The color of each horse says something about the spiritual state of the church in a certain era. And each horse's rider symbolizes Christian leaders of the time.**
- **When the Lamb opens the first of the seven seals, John sees "a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given him, and he went out conquering and to conquer" (Revelation 6:2).**

First Seal: The Conqueror

- **Many biblical historians believe this first seal represents Jesus and the gospel and the early spread of Christianity. In the vision of the seven churches, it corresponds to the church of Ephesus. White signifies the pure faith of the early believers. The bow represents their sweeping over the strongholds of Satan with the kingdom of Christ. The crown symbolizes their spiritual conquests based on Christ's victory over sin on the cross.**

First Seal: The Conqueror

- **The fledgling Christian church was composed of highly committed followers of Jesus and His teachings. In the book of Acts we are told believers studied their Bibles, prayed for each other, worshiped God together, shared meals, manifested love and kindness, met each other's physical needs, and talked to others about what God had done for them personally. One of the earliest pagan reactions to the Christian movement in the first century was, "See how these Christians love one another!" As a result, thousands from pagan and Jewish backgrounds decided to accept Christ.**

Second Seal: Conflict

- ***Second through Fourth Centuries A.D.* READ REVELATION 6:3, 4.**
- **As the Lamb opens the second seal a change is taking place. John is told to “come and see”—that is to watch as history unfolds. “When He [Jesus] opened the second seal, . . . , 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” (vs. 4).**
- **John sees two negative events taking place when the second seal is opened. The rider on the fiery red horse takes “peace from the earth” and causes people to “kill one another.”**

Second Seal: Conflict

- **Persecution breaks out during this period of Christian history, which parallels to a certain degree the church of Smyrna. The red of the second horse represents the blood of the martyrs. Historians tell us that thousands of believers were crucified, burned, or butchered for their faith in Jesus. Some of the faithful were starved to death in a forty-foot hole deep in Rome's Mamertine Prison. To add to their suffering, bags of food and jars of water were hung down by ropes—just out of their reach. When they died, their bodies were dumped into a sewer that drained into the Tiber River.**

Third Seal: Famine

- ***Fourth through Sixth Centuries A.D.* READ REVELATION 6:5, 6.**
- **This seal presents us with Christianity as the official state religion of the Roman Empire under the reign of Constantine. In this period Christianity spiraled downward.**
- **The black horse represents the corruption of the church. It suggests death, sorrow, and spiritual darkness.**
- **“When He opened the third seal. . . . 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 . . . 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’ ” (vss. 5, 6).**

Third Seal: Famine

- **The pair of scales represents a two-sided power, a mixture of church and state. Constantine used the might of the Roman Empire to enforce Christian observance. The barley, wheat, and oil refer to the basics for making bread. It takes a day's wage just to buy a loaf. In other words, famine has struck. But it's not a famine for food, but for the Word of God.**
- **The church's traditions turned the faith into what one historian calls "mechanical Christianity." Ritual replaced spiritual nurture. The clear principles of Scripture were all but drowned out in a flood of false teachings.**

Fourth Seal: Widespread Death

- ***Sixth through Sixteenth Centuries A.D.* READ REVELATION 6:7, 8.**
- **When Jesus opened the fourth seal, John saw “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” (vs. 8).**

Fourth Seal: Widespread Death

- **Jesus said the world would know we are Christians by our love. He even told us to love our enemies. But at its lowest point, the official Christian church turned this teaching on its head. It began to persecute those who questioned its absolute authority.**
- **The church of the Roman Empire came to believe it was justified in executing those who didn't accept all her doctrines.**
- **Church officials actually hauled people before tribunals because of their beliefs about the mode of baptism or the proper day of worship or the worship of images. Millions were tortured and murdered because they chose to follow the Bible when church teachings contradicted it.**

Fourth Seal: Widespread Death

- **TO THINK ABOUT:** *In your opinion, what are the two most prominent ways Satan attacks and corrupts society today?*
- **THOUGHT QUESTION:** The fourth seal shows us that God approves of forcing people to believe in Him and to be obedient if they won't accept Him any other way. (False or True)

Fifth Seal: The Cry of the Martyrs

- ***Sixteenth through Nineteenth Centuries A.D.* READ REVELATION 6:9, 10.**
- **Brave Protestant reformers had to champion the primacy of God's Word while the blood of martyrs still ran in the streets and the smell of a "heretic's" burning flesh still hung in the air. But the age of persecution finally gave way to the age of reformation. When asked to give up his Bible-based faith in favor of human traditions, Martin Luther, referring to the Bible, declared, "Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise, God help me!"**

Fifth Seal: The Cry of the Martyrs

- **As the Lamb opens the fifth seal, John sees all those who died a martyr's death because of their faithfulness to God and His Word. These champions of the faith begin crying out: “ ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’**
- **Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed” (vss. 10, 11).**

Fifth Seal: The Cry of the Martyrs

- ***What do you think is the meaning of God giving a white robe to the martyrs?***
- **When the martyrs asked, “How long?” God answered, in essence, “Just a little while longer until My plans can reach complete fulfillment.”**
- **The sixth seal is opened immediately after this. In a sense, it’s a response to the question, “How long?”**
- ***Have you ever felt so bad that all you could do was cry out, “God, how long?” How does it make you feel when you discover that God really is there with you, loving you and making something good come out of a terrible experience?***

Sixth Seal: Cosmic Disturbances

- ***Eighteenth Century A.D. through the Second Coming of Jesus***
- **When the sixth seal is opened, John views certain events which are signs Christ's second coming is getting near.**
- **They are important events because they are God's way of telling us, "I will soon end the tragedy of sin and suffering on the Earth and in the universe."**

Sixth Seal: Cosmic Disturbances

- **“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” (vss. 12, 13).**
- **The first of these signs occurred on November 1, 1755. A terrible earthquake in Lisbon leveled this city of 150,000 inhabitants.**
- **The convulsions were felt over a four-million-square-mile area in Europe and Africa. On certain coastlines, the sea rose fifty feet above its ordinary level.**

Sixth Seal: Cosmic Disturbances

- **A few years later on May 19, 1780, broad daylight suddenly turned to deep darkness. R.M. Devens described it in Our First Century:**
- **“Almost, if not altogether alone, as the most mysterious and as yet unexplained phenomenon of its kind, in nature’s diversified range of events, during the last century, stands the dark day . . . Eyewitnesses of the Dark Day said that the next night as they looked up at the sky, they saw a moon that was the color of blood-red” (pp. 89, 90).**

Sixth Seal: Cosmic Disturbances

- **Mr. Devens also wrote about a memorable night when the stars fell:**
- **“Extensive and magnificent showers of shooting stars have been known to occur at various places in modern times; but the most universal and wonderful which has ever been recorded is that of the thirteenth of November, 1833, the whole firmament, over all the United States, being then, for hours, in fiery commotion!” (pp. 329, 330). (References from R.M. Devens, Our First Century, quoted from God Cares, Vol. 2, Maxwell, pp. 195-198.)**

Sixth Seal: Cosmic Disturbances

- **How well do these events qualify as the fulfillment of Christ's predictions? Each event was notable in its own right.**
- **Jesus said the signs would immediately follow the tribulation of those days, and they did. The evidence reveals that these signs were fulfilled as they followed the described biblical sequence.**
- **It is also possible that similar events may occur again at Jesus' second coming since the Bible describes nature being shaken out of its normal course at that time.**

Sixth Seal: Cosmic Disturbances

- ***What happens next?***
- **“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?’ ” (vss. 14-17).**

Sixth Seal: Cosmic Disturbances

- **Notice the reaction of those who do not have a personal relationship with Jesus. They realize their sins have separated them from God.**
- **They fear His judgments so much that anything—even death—is preferable to facing the Lamb and the One who sits on the throne.**
- **They call out for the rocks of the mountains to fall on them and hide them from God's face.**
- **What a terrible picture of the fate of those who have refused to accept Jesus as their Savior!**

Sixth Seal: Cosmic Disturbances

- **Today we can say, the earthquake is over, the dark day is history, and the bloody moon and shower of stars have also come on us in the sequence prophesied. What is the next major event? The coming of Jesus! Yes, Jesus is coming. Each individual must answer the question, “And who shall be able to stand?” All the money in the world and all the status in the world won’t prepare us for that day.**
- **Human beings will divide sharply into two groups when they look up and see Christ flashing across the sky: those who beg the rocks to crush them and those who recognize the One whose blood has washed away their sins. The rocks or the blood of the Lamb—there is no other choice. And no one can make it for you. But all of heaven is working to help you choose Jesus.**

The Time Between Seals 6 and 7

- ***Just prior to the Second Coming of Jesus***
- **Before Jesus opens the seventh seal, God gives us a wonderful preview of the joy of those who are redeemed. He wants each of us to know that we can be part of the great numberless multitude from every nation who stand confidently before God's throne. And God explains that before Christ returns to Earth, He will mark, or "seal," those who are His. It's a sign that declares, "This is a child of the king."**
- **This interlude in the prophetic sequence gives us further assurance about the day all human suffering will end and an eternity with God begin.**

The Time Between Seals 6 and 7

- **READ REVELATION 7.** “After these things,” John says, “I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels . . . saying, ‘Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads’ ” (Revelation 7:1-3).
- The winds represent what we usually call “the storms of life.” They are destructive forces poised to bring human history to its climax. The angels are told to delay the cataclysms about to fall on the world and its inhabitants, represented by “earth, sea, and trees,” until God seals His people. The seal is placed on the forehead. This implies individuals have used their minds to freely make a decision to follow Christ. They weren’t coerced into some loyalty to human tradition. They reflected on the truths of God’s Word. And they chose to be set apart as a child of the king.

The Time Between Seals 6 and 7

- **Two groups of people are sealed with “the seal of God.”**
- **“And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed. . . . After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands” (vss. 4, 9).**
- **This is a message of hope for all men and women! The 144,000 represent a group which goes through the end-time crisis on Earth and remains alive when Jesus returns. The great multitude represents all those since the creation of Earth who have accepted Jesus as the Lord and Savior of their lives. Notice that those in both groups are dressed in “white robes” (vss. 9, 14). Both have right standing with God only because they’ve been forgiven by Jesus; they’ve been cleansed by His blood.**
- **THOUGHT QUESTION: Receiving God’s seal in the forehead represents using our minds to freely make a decision to follow Christ. (False or True)**

Seventh Seal

- ***Second Coming to the New Heavens and Earth***
- ***READ REVELATION 8:1. What happens when the last seal—the seventh seal—is opened?***
- **“When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour” (Revelation 8:1).**
- **The silence in heaven is a silence of great expectation. It precedes the most awesome event in human history. Heaven is quiet because Jesus and the angels have left; they’re coming to Earth; they’re coming for the followers of Jesus, for the children of the King; they are going to take us back to our heavenly home.**

Conclusion

- **Henry Martin, a brilliant Cambridge scholar, devoted his life to Bible translation in the Hindu and Muslim worlds. His brief life was filled with incredible adventures—dodging Arab pirates, walking across steaming hot deserts, crossing remote mountain passes on horseback. But he completed a New Testament in Hindustani and supervised translations into Persian and Arabic. One of the reasons this frail, tubercular man showed great stamina was that he had a wonderful Companion through all his treks. Once he wrote, “My joy was too great for my body. How sweet to walk with Jesus—to love Him and to die for Him.”**

Conclusion

- **Friends, eternity has a face; it's the face of Jesus. And each one of us can have a home with this wonderful Companion in heaven. He doesn't want us to miss out. He doesn't want our place at His table to be empty. Say "yes" to the One who is coming to take you home. You too can be sealed as a child of the King.**
- **TO THINK ABOUT: *As you have studied the seven seals how has God spoken to you? What would you like to say to Jesus?***