

General Comments on Revelation 6

In the preceding chapter God has a scroll containing His will for the inhabitants of earth. In this chapter, the seven seals on that scroll are opened by the Lamb, and God's will is manifest.

Meaning of the Seals

According to D&C 77:7 each seal represents one of the seven 1000 year time periods of the earth's temporal existence. The seven seals are divided as follows:

| | |
|-----------|-------------------------------------|
| 6:1-6:2 | Conquest |
| 6:3-6:4 | War |
| 6:5-6:6 | Famine |
| 6:7-6:8 | Death |
| 6:9-6:11 | Martyrs |
| 6:12-6:17 | Terror |
| 8:1-10:3 | Seven Trumpets of Woe (also ch. 16) |

The contents of each of the seven seals are very negative. This is no objective and impartial distillation of history into a few pithy verses. For example, in the fifth seal the message isn't one of salvation or redemption as a result of the Atonement by Jesus. Rather, it focuses on the suffering and martyrdom of the believers.

The first set of four seals address the judgement of the wicked with standard OT covenant curses (cp. Lev. 26:14-39, Deut. 28:15-68. Ezek. 14:21). The wicked world is punished by invaders, war, famine, and death to chasten the repentant and destroy the unrepentant. In each of the first four seals one of the four beasts introduce each of the seals, and after the first four seals they all fall entirely silent. And each of the first four seals is accompanied by horsemen which represent a type of punishment meted out. We don't hear from the four beasts again until 19:4 where they shout "Alleluia" at the Lord's "true and righteous...judgements" (cf. 19:2). And we don't see another horseman again until it is Christ coming "in righteousness [to] judge and make war" (cf. 19:11).

The second set of three seals is presented in a slightly different fashion. In the fifth seal, the martyrs complain "how long...dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" With the fifth seal things change and

judgement is not meted out immediately upon the wicked, hence the complaining of the martyrs. Rather it is forestalled and builds up for a crescendo shortly after the opening of the seventh seal, the Day of the Lord, the Second Coming of Christ. Why is it forestalled from the fifth seal until the Day of the Lord? Chapter 7 answers that question by stating the elect of scattered Israel must be gathered out before the great and final Day, cp. Jacob 5:49-51, D&C 121:12. Additionally, the remaining three seals represent the time after Jesus' death. The inhabitants of the earth must wait for the Second Advent for resurrection, so there are no exalted men or beasts present.

Imagery

The first four seals are attended by one each of the four beasts from ch. 4, then the remaining four seals are unaccompanied. As each of the seals represents 1000 years of the earth's existence and the beasts represent exalted men and animals, it is likely the symbolism is intended to represent those who participated in the First Resurrection with Christ (cf. Matt. 27:52, 3 Ne. 23:9-11). Thus, for the breaking of each seal there is a redeemed exalted being present as well as judgement upon those who were not redeemed. Thus, the imagery is a compound of exaltation in heaven for the worthy and punishment on earth for the wicked.

The same compounded imagery is presented for the second set of three seals in ch. 19 when the exalted men and beasts return to praise the Lord and the Lord comes out to judge the wicked.

General Christian Interpretation

Christendom in general does not see the seven seals as representative of the seven thousand years of the earth's existence. Many commentators see these seven seals as being historical and therefore fulfilled. Some commentators recognize there are elements in the various seals which history does not attest to, and so they forward an eschatological reading of the seals, for example:

Many (MEDE, FLEMING, NEWTON, &c.) hold that all these seals have been fulfilled, the sixth having been so by the overthrow of paganism and establishment of Christianity under Constantine's edict, A.D. 312. There can, however, be no doubt that at least the

sixth seal is future, and is to be at the coming again of Christ. The great objection to supposing the seals to be finally and exhaustively fulfilled (though, probably, particular events may be partial fulfilments typical of the final and fullest one), is that, if so, they ought to furnish (as the destruction of Jerusalem, according to Christ's prophecy, does) a strong external evidence of Revelation. But it is clear they cannot be used for this, as hardly any two interpreters of this school are agreed on what events constitute the fulfilment of each seal. ([Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Bible, 1871](#))

Some commentators attempt to draw parallels between the seven seals and the seven days of Creation in Genesis, presenting them as the seven days of destruction of the wicked to prepare for the New Creation and the Millennial reign ushered in by the Second Advent. Some commentators attempt to draw parallels between the seven seals and the seven years of suffering during the tribulation.

The Latter-day Saint reader owes a great deal to D&C 77 when it comes to deciphering this text.

Comments on Revelation 6

1 AND I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. 2 And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.

v1-2 Conquest. The exalted lion introduces the first seal wherein the wicked are punished by foreign invasion, a classic covenant curse, cp. Lev. 26:17.

v1 The Inspired Version (IV/JST) differs from the KJV, as follows:

KJV

And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard,

IV

And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, one of the four beasts, and I heard,

as it were
the noise of thunder,
one of the four beasts
saying, Come and see.

as it were,
the noise of thunder,
saying, Come and see.

The KJV makes it appear that John heard thunder when the first seal was broken, and then one of the four beasts said "Come and see". The IV makes it clear it was the beast's voice that was as the voice of thunder when it said "Come and see".

v2 The horsemen in the first four seals are sometimes equated with the horsemen and chariots of Zech. 1:7-11 and Zech. 6:1-8. This seems unlikely as Zechariah presents horses and chariots as messengers who report back to God, not mounted riders who deal out God's punishment upon the wicked.

3 And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see. 4 And there went out another horse [that was] red: and [power] was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.

v3-4 War. The exalted calf presents the second seal of war poured out upon the wicked, a classic covenant curse, cp. Lev. 26:36-38.

5 And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. 6 And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and [see] thou hurt not the oil and the wine.

v5-6 Famine. The exalted man presents the third seal of famine sent to afflict the wicked, a classic covenant curse, cp. Lev. 26:19-20, Lev. 26:26.

v6 "hurt not the oil and the wine", use them sparingly because the famine is so severe olive trees and grape vines are unproductive.

7 And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see. 8 And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with

death, and with the beasts of the earth.

v7-8 Death. The exalted eagle presents the fourth seal as death come upon the wicked of the earth, a classic covenant curse, cp. Lev. 26:16, Lev. 26:25.

v8 "and Hell followed with him", when the wicked die they are cast into hell rather than being exalted.

"over the fourth part of the earth", one quarter of the earth is afflicted by various things that result in widespread death.

"the beasts of the earth", cp. Lev. 26:22.

9 And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: 10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? 11 And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they [were], should be fulfilled.

v9-11 Martyrs. The faithful spirits who were persecuted await their exaltation, but stand as a witness against those who murdered them.

v11 "they should rest yet for a little season", the martyred Saints await exaltation in a state of peace, cp. ch. 14.

12 And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; 13 And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. 14 And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. 15 And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; 16 And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: 17 For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

v12-17 Terror. The text is a series of quotes and paraphrases from Isa. 24:19-23 and Isa. 34:4. Also cp. 16:17-21 for similar statements. The text intended to build up the suspense for the opening of the seventh seal, "the great day of his wrath" (v. 17) as opposed to being a comment on the history of the 1000 years.

v12 "the moon became as blood", the intent and meaning is obscure. A plain physical interpretation comes from when there is considerable ash in the air as a result of fires the sun and moon appear to be red.

v14 The IV/JST differs from the KJV, as follows:

| <u>KJV</u> | <u>IV/JST</u> |
|---|--|
| And the heaven departed as a scroll | And the heavens opened as a scroll |
| when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. | is opened when it is rolled together; and every mountain, and island, was moved out of its place. |

The IV/JST emends the text so as to make it plainer to understand.

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