

Revelation 6 & 8:1–5 — The Opening of The Seven Seals

Notes on The Revelation with Practical Reflections

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We must beware lest the study of prophecy serve only to amuse the intellect. This is man's way of abusing God's revelation of the future. Unfolded to us by the Spirit, the knowledge of the future sheds an important light on the present, and we see all in connection with our Lord Jesus. This separates us unto God. It draws the affections and desires to heaven -- to Christ. As the Cross of Christ is the outflowing of all blessing from God to man, so Christ exalted and coming again is the center of all prophetic teaching. Prophecy is connected with Christ, and therefore concerns us, for we are His. They who know this see all prophecy in relation to Christ. We are only happy in tracing the prophetic word step by step in companionship with Him to whom all must bow, and thus the affections and desires are attracted to the Lord Himself. Watchfulness, then, is needed, as well as prayerfulness, lest we tread these holy paths with the mind of a politician, rather than with the heart of an adoring worshiper of our blessed Lord Jesus. Before entering upon the Apocalyptic seals, let us look at some other Scriptures which seem to me to bear upon this part of the Revelation. The well known prophecy of Daniel's seventy weeks has not yet been fully accomplished. The sixty-ninth week terminated with the cutting off of Messiah (Dan. 9:26). We read that seventy weeks (or hebdomads) are determined upon thy people, and upon thy holy city {Dan. 9:24}.

The prophecy, therefore, refers to Daniel's people -- the Jewish nation, and the city of Jerusalem. The Church of God is not found here. One week only -- the seventieth -- remains to be accounted for, and observe, it comes in after the rejection of Christ, because he was cut off {Dan. 9:26}

at the end of the sixty-ninth week. This one week -- one seven, hebdomad, or seven years -- is divided into two halves. For he [the prince, Dan. 9:26] shall confirm the covenant with many for one week; and in the midst of the week,

i.e. at the end of three years and a half, or forty and two months, he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate {Dan. 9:27}.

This, then, is Daniel's prophecy concerning his own people, of the last of the seventy weeks. Now, judicial blindness rests upon that people. Having killed the heir, God's beloved Son, He has not only burned up their city, but has scattered them over the face of the earth, until the elect from the Gentiles are fully gathered in to

God. Though natural branches be broken off, God is able to graft them in again, and so all Israel shall be saved; for they are beloved for the fathers' sakes. Prior to that, this seventieth week must have

its accomplishment; for the sorrow, distress, and the abomination that maketh desolate, must precede the nation's blessing. It is, therefore, between the sixty-ninth and this retarded seventieth week that the calling out of the Church takes place. Paul says it is a mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations {Col. 1:26},

and was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit {Eph. 3:5}.

It is no marvel, then, that Daniel should make no mention of the Church, and that his prophecy should refer to his own people. Christ being rejected by Israel, and received at the right hand of God as the firstborn from the dead {Col. 1:18}, the firstborn among many brethren {Rom. 8:29},

we get a new order of God's actings; viz. the Holy Ghost is come down to indwell and baptize believers into one body, in union with an ascended Christ, whom God gave to be Head over all things to the Church, which is His body {Eph. 1:22, 23}.

This action of the Holy Ghost goes on till every member of the one new man {Eph. 2:15}

is called out, till we all come unto a PERFECT MAN. Then the Lord Jesus will come and receive us unto Himself. After this, the Lord will turn again to His ancient people and city, fulfilling Daniel's seventieth week, with all its sorrows, and at His appearing in glory bring in the full restoration and blessing of the nation. (Compare Acts 15:14-17.) The question may be fairly asked, Do we get any allusion to this seventieth week in any of our Lord's discourses? I reply, Is it likely that a period of such importance to Israel would be unnoticed by our Lord in His intercourse with that people? Let us turn to the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew. At the end of the twenty-third chapter, Messiah is virtually cut off {Dan. 9:26}.

He says, O Jerusalem . . . how oft would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate! For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth

Notes on the Revelation till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord {Matt. 23:37-39}.

As to the city, the beautiful temple must be razed to the ground; for God must now deal with his people in solemn chastisement. There shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down {Matt. 24:2}.

The disciples then say, Tell us when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the age? {Matt. 24:3}.

Where, I ask, should we expect a prophetic discourse parallel to the seventieth week of Daniel, to fit in so well as here? for it begins with Messiah virtually "cut off," and ends with Messiah coming in power and great glory (Matt. 24:30), to put all enemies under His feet, which we know, from other Scriptures, occurs at the end of this week (2 Thess. 2:3; Rev. 19:11). If this view be correct, we should expect to see some corresponding points between Daniel's prophecy and our Lord's discourse: and so

we do. The prophet speaks of the Man of sin, desolation, and abomination, until the consummation. Our Lord, after speaking of false Christs and sorrows, mentions the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet (Matt. 24:15),

followed by Christ's personal return in glory, and the redemption of Israel, as the parable of the fig-tree suggests. Moreover, while we are distinctly told that Daniel speaks of his own people, our Lord gives locality to his prophecy, by saying, Then let them which be in Judæa flee into the mountains (Matt. 24:16):

and we may say of nationality also, for it is followed by, Pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day 7{Matt. 24:20}.

There seems, then, good reason for identifying our Lord's prophetic discourse, in Matt. 24:1-30, with the seventieth week of Daniel; and there are also remarkable points of similarity between this chapter in Matthew and the seven seals of the Revelation. The prophetic incidents, and also the order of their narration, strikingly coincide. In Matt. 24 we have: 1. False Christs, deceiving many. 2. Wars, and rumours of wars. 3. Famines. 4. Pestilences. 5. Afflictions, many killed, and the gospel of the kingdom preached. 6. The sun darkened, the moon not shining, the powers of the heavens shaken. 7. The sign of the Son of man in heaven, and His coming in the clouds with power and great glory.

2. War -- peace taken from the earth. 3. Famine. 4. Death, and hell following. 5. Souls under the altar crying for vengeance, for being killed for the Word of God and for the testimony which they held. 6. The sun black, the moon red, stars falling, and the heavens departing. 7. Silence in heaven, voices, lightnings, and an earthquake, connected, as I believe, with our Lord's personal return to the earth with His mighty angels, in flaming fire. The seven seals being opened may co-extend with the contents of the whole book which the Lamb took out of the right hand of Him who sat upon the throne; and if so, whatever period of this time the trumpets and vials occupy, they may be regarded as terminating at the same time 8-- the personal return of Christ with His saints in judgment. The end, therefore, of each of these series of judgments would be very similar; and so it is. The seventh seal is connected with thunderings and lightnings and an earthquake (Rev. 8:5);

the seventh trumpet is also marked by lightnings, and voices and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail (Rev. 11:19);

and the seventh vial has also voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake (Rev. 16:18).

It is remarkable also, that at the termination of each series there is reference made to the temple of God in heaven. It is quite true that we do not get the temple mentioned in the seventh seal, but we find some of the well-known furniture of the temple spoken of, such as the altar, censer, incense (Rev. 8:3). At the sound of the seventh trumpet, it is said that the temple of God was opened in heaven (Rev. 11:19);

and when the seventh vial was poured out, we are told, There came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, saying, It is done (Rev. 16:17).

There are reasons, then, for considering the seven sealed book to contain all the apocalyptic judgments, and to embrace the whole period from the Lamb's taking the book till the heavens are opened, and Christ comes forth in royal majesty and power to put all enemies under His feet. We must not forget that the "elders," or heavenly saints, are sitting on thrones in heaven in glorified bodies, before the Lamb takes the book or opens one of the seals. It is well also to observe, that the elders do not appear in connection with opening the sea's, but the living creatures only are engaged in the first four of these sorrowful enactments. We afterwards see one of them also occupied in giving to the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God (Rev. 15:7); and

In the seven seals of Revelation we have: 1. The emblem of the false Christ having great power and success.

7. Sabbath day, strictly speaking, never belonged to any nation but Israel.

8. {In some valuable writings on the Revelation, insufficient attention has been paid to Rev. 15:1, which shows that the seven vials are the last plagues. Thus, the seven bowls follow the trumpets, issuing out of the seventh trumpet, as the seven trumpets issue out of the breaking of the seventh seal. The opening of seventh seal completely opens the roll and brings the action to the middle of the 70th week, and the seventh vial brings to the appearing of the Lord in glory. See also note 9, below.}

the first being poured out, there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them that worshipped his image (Rev. 16:2). Beloved in the Lord, these solemn realities will soon come to pass. How terrible the thought, that living men and women around us shall so shortly feel the hand of God in judgment. Now God bears with man's wickedness, and preaches peace, through the blood of Christ, to the vilest of sinners; but then He will begin His strange work, and make men feel that justice and judgment are the habitation of His throne. How godly and earnest with souls a consideration of these things should make us!

The First Seal The rider here has been thought by many to be Christ, because He is sitting upon a white horse, and is so successful. Hence they speak of the Lord's now going forth in His gospel chariot conquering and to conquer. Blessed be God, Christ does subdue proud and rebellious hearts to Himself; but it is not by the bow, or any other carnal weapon, but by the word of His grace {Acts 14:3, 20:32}

It is His love, His redeeming, exhaustless love! This, this alone subdued and won us to Himself; and "True pleasures abound In the rapturous sound; And whoever hath found it Hath Paradise found. My Jesus to know, And feel His love flow, 'Tis life everlasting, 'Tis heaven below."

That the rider in this first seal cannot be Christ is further proved, because He is seen as having His place in heaven, at this very time, as the Lamb opening the seal, while the vision of the white horse and its rider relates to the earth. It is quite true, that when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven, He is

presented to us as riding a white horse: but then heaven will be opened; He will be publicly manifested; there will be no possibility of mistaking Him; for every eye shall see Him {Rev. 1:7}.

His saints also will follow in the train; and judgments under the iron rod of the Lord's personal reign will go forth. Whereas the opening of the other seals that follow this one show that the judgments are of a providential character, and not immediately from the Lord's own presence. When the Lamb in heaven opens this seal, a noise of thunder

is heard, for it is God dealing in righteousness, not in grace; and one of the living creatures says, Come and see {Rev. 6:1}!

or rather, Come,

and not Come and see;

that is, one of the living creatures calls the rider on a white horse, and he immediately appears on the scene. The seer then says, I saw, and behold a white horse; and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer {Rev. 1:2}.

This is evidently a mighty subduing power put forth in the earth, and not only successful, but increasingly so; and accomplished not in man's ordinary mode of overcoming, as by the sword, but by the exertion of a more quiet yet more powerful influence. He is shown as having a crown given unto him, not many diadems of power and glory, which Jesus will wear when He is revealed from heaven, but a wreath, a chaplet, such as men award to each other, like the conqueror's wreath at the public games. The question is, What does this mean? May it not be the mighty, subduing anti-christian power which is to arise after the Church has been removed? The apostle Paul speaks of something now hindering the full development of the mystery of iniquity {2 Thess. 2:7};

but when the hindrance is removed, then shall that wicked [or lawless] one be revealed . . . whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power, and signs, and lying wonders {2 Thess. 2:8, 9}

By the rider on the white horse, then, in this first seal, we understand the mighty anti-christian deceiving and subduing power which our Lord foretold: There shall arise false Christs, and shall deceive many {see Matt. 24:24}.

He rides not only a horse, the emblem of power in the earth; but as Satan always tries to deceive men by imitating God, this rider is on a white horse, because Christ will be symbolized as on a white horse; as Christ will appear wearing many crowns or diadems, this great deceiving power will have a crown given to it; and as Christ will subdue all to Himself, this mimic of Satan will go forth conquering and to conquer; and, alas! with all power, and signs, and lying wonders.

Then God will send men strong delusion, that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. Then will our Lord's words be fulfilled: If another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive {John 5:43}.

What a solemn lesson this reads us; for we are told that the mystery of iniquity doth already work {2 Thess. 2:7}.

It is around us on almost every side! How important to distinguish now between truth and error, between the holy principles and ways of Christ, and the mimicry and counterfeits of Satanic deception. Surely Satan is the deceiver of the world, as well as the accuser of the brethren. How we need to abide in God's presence at the blood-sprinkled mercy seat! How much we require of the anointing with spiritual eye-salve, to distinguish between things which differ! How we need to visit Calvary, and to feed on the flesh and blood of the Son of man, to be strengthened against the devil's cheats! Let none of us suppose that bare knowledge of the letter of Scripture is enough for this. Nothing less than abiding in the love of God -- communion with the Father, and with His Son

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Jesus Christ -- will enable us to keep our garments unspotted from the world, or to avoid the snares of the fowler. May God graciously use the knowledge of these things which must shortly come to pass {Rev. 1:1},

to make us watchful, prayerful, earnest, and humble saints!

The Second Seal Here we have another rider, but the horse is red, indicative of a blood-shedding power. Now God is revealing Himself to sinful men as the God of peace. He commands the gospel of His grace to be preached to every creature, and saves to the uttermost all that come unto Him by Christ; but then peace will be taken from the earth, a mighty influence will be exerted by the sword, and men will slay one another. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. It is a time of wars and rumours of wars {Matt. 24:6; Mark 13:7},

but the end of the age is not yet. Now we feel what a mercy outward peace is, however men deceive and flatter themselves with cries of peace and safety; then, alas! when the great sword {Rev. 6:4}

is put into the hand of this representative warrior, peace will be taken from the earth, and men will kill and slay one another. Surely this forcibly reminds us how dependent we are on God, for outward peace!

The Third Seal Now follows what we might expect -- God's judgment in the way of scarcity or famine. It is a further scene of mourning and sorrow, as indicated by a black horse, and the rider having a pair of balances in his hand. The voice in the midst of the four living creatures says, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny {Rev. 6:6}:

this shows a dearth or scarcity of the staff of life. "A penny," or denarius, would be the amount of a labourer's daily earnings, and "a measure of wheat," or a chœnix of wheat, the smallest daily allowance granted to a slave. It has been thought by some, that because the barley and wheat harvests are earlier than the ingathering of the fruit of the vine and olive, this judgment of dearth would be limited to the two former; and therefore it is said, Hurt not [or injure not] the oil and the wine {Rev. 6:6}.

However this may be, it is clear that we are to understand that it is a scarcity of the necessities of life, a time of famine.

The Fourth Seal The judgments increase in severity. When the fourth seal is opened, a pale horse appears, its rider is Death, and Hell follows. This is very appalling: Death and Hell, or Hades, are afterwards cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14). The different coloured horses and riders are clearly symbolic of a general character of things rather than of individuals. This fourth seal brings out God's four sore judgments

as Ezekiel calls them, over a limited portion of the earth. Ezekiel, however, speaks of them in relation to Israel: For thus saith the Lord God, How much more when I send my four sore judgments upon Jerusalem, the sword, and the famine, and the noisome beast, and the pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast (Ezek. 14:21).

What we are to understand by the judgments of this fourth seal being limited to a fourth part of the earth {Rev. 6:8}

I know not; but it is terrible to think what power and authority will then be given to Death and Hades, to kill with the sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth {Rev. 6:8}.

It is a time of distress of nations, with perplexity, of famines and pestilences in divers places; and these are but the beginning of sorrows {Matt. 24:8}.

Thus we see, after the saints have been caught up to meet the Lord at His coming, and are seated on thrones in heaven, as represented by the twenty-four elders, that the first four seals are opened, and we have a mighty subduing antichristian power, war, famine, and God's four sore judgments.

They are not extraordinary in their character, but preparatory dealings of God before the wrath of the Lamb. We may notice that in each of these four seals, one of the four living creatures is officially engaged, which is not the case in the opening of the other three.

The Fifth Seal This seal discloses something very different. It is a distinct notice, that there have been saints on the earth since the rapture, some of whom have yielded up their lives as sacrifices to God for the truth's sake. The apostle John says, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held {Rev. 6:9}.

This is very solemn. The removal of the saints from earth to heaven at the coming of the Lord, though it excite alarm and distress for a time, does not improve mankind. Soon again the enmity of the carnal mind is manifested; for His servants with a new testimony are martyred for the word of God. We saw, in the fifth chapter, that some persons were praying on earth, while the elders were in heaven, having bowls full of incense, which are said to be the prayers of saints {Rev. 5:8}:

Though "saints," these are not "the Church," indwelt by the Holy Ghost, and baptized into "one body"; but after the Church has been caught up to meet the Lord at His coming, the Spirit of God will

move the hearts of a remnant of Israel -- not all Israel, but a few, who have the hope of Messiah's coming, and pray for the kingdom to be set up of which prophets prophesied. These will be God's witnesses in the earth, who will go out among the Gentiles,

and declare the gospel of the kingdom {Matt. 4:23, 9:35; Mark 1:14} among all nations. This will be their testimony {Rev. 6:9},

and their authority, that which the Holy Spirit always gives the word of God {Rev. 6:9}.

They will witness to Messiah's coming to deliver His people Israel, and to reign as King over all the earth. We now wait for God's Son from heaven, to be caught up to meet Him in the air, and so be for ever with the Lord; but they who are on the earth after this rapture will wait for Messiah coming in glory as Deliverer of Israel, to sit on the throne of David, reign before His ancients gloriously, and, like the true Solomon, bring in by judgment and power the promised day of the Lord, when all the earth shall be filled with His glory. This is the hope proper to a godly Jew. The difference in the two expectations is obvious. The former agrees with a heavenly standing, citizenship, and union with Christ ascended, as members of His body; the latter is consistent with those whose promise is blessing in the earth, and is suited to such when they are groaning under persecution, and sighing for present deliverance on earth, according to God's promises to Abraham and his seed. The two expectations will be clear to those who carefully read and compare the last chapter of Malachi with the last chapter of Revelation. Those in the fifth seal, then, clearly do not belong to the Church. The altar reminds us of the temple. Their cry is not for mercy on their enemies, but for vengeance. This, too, shows us that they are on Jewish ground. The Church of God is taught to love her enemies, and, like Jesus, to cry, Father forgive them {Luke 23:34};

or, like Stephen on behalf of his murderers, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge {Acts 7:60}.

Whereas these disembodied souls under the altar cry with a loud voice, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? {Rev. 6:10}.

Many judgments had been poured out from the hand of God on opening the previous seals, but their blood had not been avenged; and it may be that their cry brings out the fearful signs and wonders, terror, distress, earthquakes, and lightnings, of the two next seals, and the terrible wrath that will be inflicted by the personal revelation of Christ Himself. Their cry, then, may hasten His revelation from heaven, in flaming fire to take vengeance, etc. His Church will accompany Him; for when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory {see Col. 3:4}.

These "souls" had been God's witnesses in the earth. In the face of frowning infidelity and ignorance, they contended that the earth belonged to God, and that the feet of Messiah would soon stand on the Mount of Olives, and all the earth be in subjection to Him. Like the experience of those in the book of Psalms, they expect God to judge and avenge in the earth, whereas we simply wait for God's Son from heaven to take us to Himself. These martyred ones know full well that vengeance will come, that God will make inquisition for blood, and judge

righteously in the earth; but it seems long to wait, and they cry, “How long?” God answers their cry at once, by giving to each of them a white robe, in token of their standing in acceptance before Him, and by telling them that they must rest for a little season, until their fellow servants also and their brethren should be killed as they were. This we find described in Rev. 13:7. It is well to see that the Lord calls them brethren {Rev. 6:11};

and those who are spoken of as suffering, in Matt. 25:40, are also called “brethren,” which seems to refer to the same class and period. These “souls,” having lost by faithful testimony their lookedfor inheritance on earth, have it more than made up by living and reigning with Christ in the first resurrection. This is brought out in Rev. 20:4, where they are spoken of as beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God.

The Sixth Seal God’s promise, that He will yet shake, not the earth only, but also heaven, leads us to expect a great convulsion, both in the heavenly and earthly divisions of the created universe. We know, also, from Scripture, that the time will come when the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up {2 Pet. 3:10}.

The present earth and heaven shall flee away before the face of Him who will sit on the great white throne, and no place shall be found for them. This will be followed with new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness (see 2 Pet. 3:10, 13; Rev. 20:11).

Again, Paul, in writing to the Hebrews on the Godhead of the Son, quotes from the 102nd Psalm to show that He endures after this present creation-scene shall have passed away. Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thine hands: they shall perish, but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment, and as a vesture, shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail {Heb. 1:10-12}.

We are thus taught to expect the passing away of the present heaven and earth, which we know will take place at the close of the millennium; but, prior to that, we look for terrible convulsions and changes; for God hath declared by His prophet Joel, I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come {Joel 2:30, 31}.

Our Lord Himself, also, when asked what would be the sign of His coming to Israel, when they shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord (Matt. 23:39, and 24:3),

replied,

Notes on the Revelation The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken; and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven {Matt. 24:29, 30}.

Our Lord also said; There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations; with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them for

fear, and for looking after those things which are coming upon the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken (Luke 21:25, 26).

Thus we see that terrible shaking, both of the heaven and earth, will not only take place before our Lord is revealed, but that it will be of such duration that men will have time to fear, and to look for what further is coming. We are not surprised, then, to find in the Apocalypse, when the Lamb opened the sixth seal, that Lo! there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig-tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together [or, the heaven was removed as a book rolled up]; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places, etc. {Rev. 6:12-14}.

It seems to me that these changes, whether physical or political, take place not long before the Lord is visibly revealed from heaven. We must remember that at this period infidelity is thriving in the earth, man is deified, and the only Lord God, the Creator of the ends of the earth, is denied. In this way, we can understand how God will rebuke and confound the wisdom of the wise by such terrible commotions. Men will be greatly alarmed and distressed at the actions of the sixth seal; but it is not the actual coming of the Lord, though they say so; for the seventh seal has yet to be loosed. At this time we find, 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 freeman, hid themselves in the dens, 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 that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for [mark, they say,] the great day of His wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand? {Rev. 6:15-17}.

The fear and distress of men are plainly marked in this scene; but after this, though it may be a very short time after, when the Lord is actually revealed, men are in a different mind; alarm and fear seem to have passed off, and infidelity to have usurped its place in their hearts; for they are in full league with the Man of Sin against Christ. With reference to that awful time, it is said, I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him that sat on the horse, and against His army {Rev. 19:19}.

Then men will be bold indeed in their antagonism to the Lamb, instead of being overwhelmed with anguish and terror, as at the time of the sixth seal.

Whatever physical changes may take place at the opening of the sixth seal, it is clear that the falling of the stars from heaven unto the earth, and the heaven departing as a scroll rolled together, before the appearing of our Lord, have a symbolic meaning. There may be reference to the fall of bright and distinguished personages, the breaking up of ecclesiastical powers and governments, and the shaking of everything that man tries to rest and glory in; but whatever it be, it clearly fills the minds of those dwelling on the earth with extreme terror and distress, and causes great alarm at the thought of the Lamb coming in wrath.

The Seventh Seal We pass on now to the beginning of the eighth chapter, to notice the last of the seals, because we regard the seventh chapter as a parenthesis; that is, not containing events which, in their occurrences, come in between the sixth and seventh seals, but which may take place during other parts of the apocalyptic period. The seventh seal discloses to us the unfolding of the last roll of the prophetic book that was in the right hand of Him who sat upon the throne, and, I suggest, has its accomplishment, together with the last trumpet and last vial, in ushering in the personal revelation of the Lord from heaven, when the prophetic word will be fulfilled: The Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with thee (Zech. 14:5).

We do not expect lightnings and thunderings after Christ is manifested, but we find, in Rev. 19 where an account of Christ's glorious appearing is given, it is said, I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia; for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth {Rev. 19:6}.

We are told that when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour {Rev. 8:1}.

There have been many conjectures about what this "silence in heaven" can mean; but there has been no better thought suggested, perhaps, than that of all intelligences in heaven standing in solemn awe at the fact, that the Lord Himself was now about to go forth in flaming fiery vengeance, to judge the world in righteousness, and to put all enemies under His feet. We can understand "silence in heaven," I think, under such unparalleled circumstances. John also saw seven angels which stood before God, and to them were given seven trumpets; and another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer: and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense which came with the prayers of the saints ascended up before God out of the angel's hand. And the angel took the censer, and filled it with the fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake {Rev. 8:2-5}.

"The altar," and "fire of the altar," clearly show it to be the altar of burnt offering; whilst an angel-priest standing at the golden

altar, using the censer, and burning the incense, gives acceptance to "the prayers of the saints." These points invite our attention to a scene in connection with those who are on Jewish ground. It is remarkable, too, that the one who is seen acting as High Priest is not presented as a partaker of flesh and bones, but as an angel. No doubt it is Jesus the Lord, whom Israel will know, for He is a Priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedec {Psa. 110:4}.

The Church of God now knows Jesus as her great High Priest, compassionate, merciful, faithful, and sympathizing, who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin; who intercedes for us and loves us as His own flesh and bone. This priestly intercession of Jesus will not be needed by us, as it is now, when we are glorified with Him, though we shall always know Him as a blessing priest; but those in Israel who do turn to Jehovah, and look for their Messiah, will need a priestly intercessor to

present their groans and cries to God. Jesus will be both King and Priest to Israel. A praying people on earth, after the taking up of the heavenly saints, has been noticed in Rev. 5:8, and also in Rev. 6:10, where we see the character of their prayers as that of calling on God for vengeance. In this 8th chapter, God is known, we judge, as regarding the sighing of these poor and needy ones, and as having provided a faithful High-Priest in Jesus for them. He presents their prayers with incense from the golden censer, and in answer, it appears, the censer is filled with the fire of the altar -that consuming fire -- and cast into the earth; and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake are the result, -- accompanied or followed, if I mistake not, by the personal return of Christ in fiery vengeance: for He will avenge His own elect speedily. It seems as if the cry of an oppressed remnant will be the means of bringing Christ Himself to judge the world in righteousness, and of bringing His beloved nation into its long-promised rest and blessing. Though the seven angels are seen here with trumpets, it does not follow that their several actions do not begin before the seventh seal is opened. John says he saw them, and he also saw them in Rev. 7:1-3, and heard commands given to them. For reasons previously given, the seals, trumpets, and vials, seem to be synchronous in their termination. 9 Neither should I suppose that the priesthood of the Lord for His afflicted and oppressed ones only actually began when the seventh seal was opened. John seems to have seen it when the seventh scroll was unfolded; and in relating the different visions we find in this book, while some events are recorded in chronological order, others are not: for instance, at the end of the fifth chapter we are taken into the millennium, and in the following chapter brought back again; at the end of the eleventh chapter we are taken to the close of the millennium, and the twelfth begins with the incarnation of Christ.

9. {It is helpful to see that the opening of the seventh seal opens the roll completely -- bringing the action to the middle of the 70th week -- the time when Satan is cast down from heaven, and also the Whore is overthrown, when Antichrist, the Man of Sin (the second beast in Rev. 13) is revealed. Then the trumpet judgments begin. Rev. 15:1 shows that the seals, trumpets, and bowls cannot be synchronous in their termination. Rather, it appears that the seals occupy the first half-week, the trumpets the second half-week, and the bowls occupy a short space between the sounding of the seventh trumpet and the appearing of the Lord in glory in connection with the pouring out of the seventh bowl.}

The fourteenth chapter also takes us to an event after the Lord's personal return, when He will tread the winepress of the wrath of Almighty God; and afterwards we are brought back again. There are other instances of a similar character. As we go through the Revelation, a series of pictures or visions pass before the eye, each perfect in itself, but the several pictures do not follow each other in distinct sequence as to order of fulfilment. It may be said that the parallel of the seventh seal is not found in the twenty-fourth of Matthew, which we have considered as giving us a prophetic sketch of the seventieth week of Daniel, or the apocalyptic period, which we understand the seven seals to include. True, it is not so plainly referred to as the other six seals are; but as we have the sixth seal distinctly brought out in the 29th verse of that chapter, and the mourning of the tribes predicted by Zechariah (chap. 12:10), and the gathering of the elect of Israel, which we know will be after the Lord's personal revelation in the clouds of heaven, in the following verses, the seventh seal, trumpet, and vial, will be prior to this. We

conceive therefore, that it will come so speedily after the commotions of the sixth seal, that we must leave room for the seventh seal, and we are inclined to connect it with the first line of the 30th verse: Then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven {Matt. 24:30}.

Notes on the Revelation