

TEXT - Revelation 6

REVIEW

Summary/Theme/Main Idea of the Middle Section of Revelation (chs. 6-19)

Rome, Perverse and Powerful, Persecutes the Saints;
Christ, Pure and Prevailing, Protects the Saints

When will these things happen?

Historicist interpretation with application from Idealist view

The middle section of Revelation contains three sets of seven things, which communicate to us how Rome will oppose the churches, and how our Lord Jesus Christ will protect the churches, and bring judgment on Rome during three periods of time.

Chapter 6 - seven seals - Rome non-Christian [pagan]

Chapters 8-9 - seven trumpets - Rome Christian [or Arian]

Chapter 16 - seven vials or bowls - Rome Antichristian [or Papal]

Why does Revelation not mention Rome or Caesar by name?

It is so that the disciples of Jesus Christ could not be misunderstood as being subversive of Rome or traitors against Caesar.

Why Rome?

We could expect the prophecy in Rev. to be about the Roman Empire because:

-Powerful cities and countries in the region where God's people lived had been the subject of prophecies in the previous scriptures many times.

-In the time the Revelation was given, rulers appointed by Rome ruled over most of the places where Christians lived.

-Rome had been persecuting Christians, had the power to go on persecuting them, and would persecute them severely in the times that were to come.

-That is where the prophecy in Daniel left off.

LESSON - **What do the seven seals tell us?**

It is the Lord Jesus who opens the seals. He is the executor of God's will.
He is Lord! He sits enthroned over all.

The pagan Roman Empire will go through four kinds of experiences.

Rev 6:1-2 military conquest and resulting peace (verse 4 "take peace...")

Rev 6:3-4 civil war

Rev 6:5-7 shortages

-high taxes, ruthlessly exacted

-either resulting from or causing severe shortages of necessities

Rev 6:7-8 widespread death from many causes; vast depopulation

All of these things will happen, as they almost always do everywhere, but these things will predominate in this order.

The pagan Roman Empire will make a last great persecution of Christians (6:9)

-the pagans believe or say that the gods are angry at them for tolerating the Christians

-vicious men see an opportunity to seize the property of Christians

Rev 6:10 the saints will pray

Rev 6:11 the Lord will comfort the saints, telling them to wait just a little longer

The pagan Roman Empire will be overthrown in a great convulsion (6:12-17)

-more about this language of convulsion another time, dv

The Christians first receiving the Revelation could not know what period of time into the future this all would take. But they could know it would be starting then.

We now know in history that this was about the next 200 years from when John wrote, the 2nd and 3rd centuries, plus a little more. Approximately from the death of Domitian a.d. 96 to the reign of Constantine w/ Edict of Milan a.d. 313

APPLICATION: These particular events are no longer ahead of us, but God causes countries to go through similar things.

-Let unbelievers not grow comfortable in what seems strong or reliable now. Let everyone repent and believe in Jesus Christ.

-Let unbelievers trust in the rule of Jesus Christ no matter what, even death.

The seven seals - God dealing with Rome non-Christian or pagan

The first four of the seven

“the four horsemen of the Apocalypse”

Knollys:

It is usual in the prophets to signify great and wonderful transactions and dispensations of God, by warlike horses. {Zec 6:2-3,6-7} So in this chapter.

Carroll:

We cannot rightly interpret Revelation without antecedent understanding of these horses and chariots of Zechariah.

The first one of the four

Revelation 6:1-2 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.

Trapp:

The apostles and preachers of the primitive times...

Poole:

the Roman emperors, armed with power, and having the imperial crown, carrying all before them.

Knollys:

the Lord Jesus Christ

By this white horse we may understand the ministry of the gospel of peace and grace, especially the powerful operation of the Holy Spirit in the word preached.

Gill:

Representing the ministration of the Gospel in the times of the apostles...the swift progress of the Gospel in the world...the ministration of the Gospel

...inasmuch as yet all things are not made subject to him, he is represented as going forth in the Gospel, still conquering

...the rider with a bow and crown may design Vespasian, whom Christ made us of as an instrument to conquer his enemies the Jews...

Clarke:

the gospel...Jesus Christ...preaching of the Gospel...the kingdom which Christ is to establish...spreading more and more the doctrine and influence of the cross...

Barnes:

...that this refers to Christ and his church - to Christ and his ministers in spreading the gospel. The objections to this class of interpretations seem to me to be insuperable:

...from the death of Domitian, 96 a.d. to the accession of Commodus...180 a.d.

The second one of the four

Revelation 6:3-4 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.

Gill:

those bloody wars within the period of time signified by this seal, which came as punishments on the enemies of the Gospel
...Trajan the Roman emperor, in whose reign John died; and who came from the west, and was a Spaniard, as was Hadrian his successor, who may be joined with him; which was the side, or quarter, on which the living creature was that spoke to John; and in the times of these emperors were very bloody and civil wars: wherefore power is said to be given him,

to take peace from the earth; that is, from the Roman empire

Barnes:

accession of Commodus 180 a.d.

Sismondi: "With Commodus' death commenced the third and most calamitous period. It lasted 92 years, from 193 to 284. During that time, 32 emperors, and 27 pretenders to the empire, alternately hurried each other from the throne, by incessant civil warfare."

The third of the four

Revelation 6:5-6 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.

Gill:

...a famine...in the times of the Emperor Severus, and others, as the historians of those times (a), and the writings of Tertullian show; when the Heathens ascribed the scarcity that was among them to the wickedness of the Christians (b), whereas it was a judgment upon them for their persecution of them:

...famine, and such a scarcity as that bread is delivered out by weight to men

Barnes:

...a rigid administration of the laws of the empire, particularly in reference to taxation, producing a scarcity among the necessary articles of living...

...a most rigid and exact administration of severe and oppressive laws...

The fourth of the four

Revelation 6:7-8 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.

Poole:

here was prophesied what should happen to the Roman empire, and the church within it, from the time when Maximinus was made emperor,

which was about the year 237, to the time of Aurelianus, which was about 271. Some extend it to Dioclesian's time, which ended about 294

Knollys:

all historians tell us, that these judgments of God were executed upon the European empire, and kingdoms thereof, in the days of the Roman pagan emperors

Gill:

Maximinus...Gallienus

things were now desperate, and the Roman empire was almost destroyed Under this seal all the judgments of God on Rome Pagan meet together; and it is observable that Maximinus, a Roman emperor, and one of the last of the Pagans, boasted, that for worshipping of the gods, and persecuting Of the Christians, neither pestilence, famine, nor war, were in his times, when on a sudden all these three came together at once (x); to which may be added the following observation, that though the several steps and methods which God took to punish, weaken, and destroy the Roman Pagan empire, were remarkably seen in the distinct periods to which these first four seals belong, yet they must not be entirely restrained and limited to these periods, as if they were not made use of in others; so though the Gospel proceeded with remarkable success under the first seal, in the times of the apostles, to the subduing of multitudes in the Roman empire, it was also preached with great success under the following seals; and though there were most grievous wars under the second seal, in the times of Trajan and Adrian, so there were also in after times; that was not the only period of war, though it was remarkably so; likewise there was a famine in the times of Claudius, under the first seal, Act_11:28; and in the time of Trajan, under the second seal (y), and of Commodus (z) as well as under the third; and there were pestilences also in those times, as well as under the fourth seal; and because God did by each of these weaken, break, and at last bring to ruin that empire, they are showed to John one after another

Barnes:

if it be admitted to be probable that the fifth seal refers to a time of persecution, it would be most natural to fix this period between those times and the times of Diocletian, when the persecution ceased ...this whole period (248-268 a.d.), embracing the reigns of Decius, Gallus, Aemilianus, Valerian, and Gallienus...

Edict of Milan 313

Gill:

the close of the fifth seal, or the Dioclesian persecution...about 313

Revelation 6:12-17 And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal...

Trapp:

Understand hereby those horrible commotions and confusions that occurred in the Roman empire upon those ten bloody persecutions, and the earnest supplications of the saints which can work wonders...The death and destruction of the persecutors was...the effect of faithful prayers calling for full and final vengeance.

Poole:

...denotes that period when Constantine, the first Christian emperor, restored peace to the church, by overturning the whole pagan state, and making Christianity the religion of the greatest part of the world. This was about the year 311, and perfected upon his victory over Licinius, 325. ...by earthquake here is to be understood a great change in the Roman empire.

Knollys:

the great revolution of the Roman pagan empire, which should put an end unto the bloody persecutions of the heathen emperors, and all their tyrannical torturing of the Christians by cruel deaths; which revolution is there set forth in a prophetic style and manner of speaking. For when the Prophets did foretell the destruction of Kingdoms, or some great changes and revolutions therein they used such figurative and metaphorical terms, words and expressions, as are in the following verses

Gill:

the business which is the subject of this seal is the removing of Paganism, and Pagan governors out of the Roman empire; this was the thing the rider upon the white horse, under the first seal, set out upon to effect, and never ceased until he had accomplished it; and this is what ensued upon the close of the fifth seal, when Pagan persecution ceased, on Constantine, a Christian emperor, having the reins of power in his hands; and it cannot be thought, that so wonderful a change of things as this should be omitted

in this prophetic history; and it is easy to observe that changes in kingdoms and governments, both as to the polity and religion of them, are sometimes expressed in such like figurative terms as here ...earthquake...shaking...here it intends the removing of Pagan worship and idolatry, and of Pagan magistrates, that the Christian religion and Christian magistrates might take place. ...symbols of the change in the empire

Clarke:

A most stupendous change in the civil and religious constitution of the world. If it refer to Constantine the Great, the change that was made by his conversion to Christianity might be very properly represented under the emblem of an earthquake, and the other symbols mentioned in this and the following verses.

The sun - the ancient pagan government of the Roman empire, was totally darkened; and, like a black hair sackcloth, was degraded and humbled to the dust.

The moon - the ecclesiastical state of the same empire, became as blood - was totally ruined, their sacred rites abrogated, their priests and religious institutions desecrated, their altars cast down, their temples destroyed, or turned into places for Christian worship.