

The Opening of the Book

Rev. 6-7

Introduction:

1. In chapters 4 and 5 of Revelation we are enabled to look into heaven and see the throne of God.
2. In God's right hand is a book that no one can open. Only the Lamb from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David can open it. He is qualified because He has purchased for God with His blood people from every nation.
3. He has made them to be a kingdom and priests to God.
4. Chapter 5 closes with all creatures praising God and the Lamb saying, "Blessing and honor and glory and dominion to Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb."
5. In our previous study we identified the book as the plan or purpose of God as revealed in the work of the Lamb to purchase people and make them into a kingdom.
6. If our understanding of this sealed book is correct the rest of the Book of Revelation is about the unfolding of this plan.
7. But the Book of Revelation is written in symbolic language and to those of us unfamiliar with its ancient context it is often bewildering.

Discussion:

I. "God afflicts the comfortable and comforts the afflicted," (Lewis Foster). This statement calls to mind two aspects of the very nature of God: 1) His judgment against those who afflict His people and 2) His compassion on those who seek Him. Cf. Rom. 11:22; 2 Thess. 1:6-7. Revelation chapters 6 and 7 reflect this theme.

II. God's judgment on the earth is sure (reading 6:1-8).

- A. God's judgment on the earth is not a new theme. It permeates the history of the O.T.
 1. God brought His judgment against the Egyptians in order to deliver His people.
 2. God brought Israel into the land of Canaan by bringing judgment against the inhabitants of that land because of their iniquity.
 3. God brought His judgment against His own people when they rebelled by the hands of the Assyrians and the Babylonians.
 4. He then brought His judgment against those nations as a result of their harshness against His people.
- B. It is interesting to note that the language used here in Rev. 6 is reminiscent of the language God has used before to speak of His judgment. Time limitations will not allow us to make a thorough study of these contexts, but I would like to refer to some representative examples of such use.
 1. Zechariah prophesied during the reign of King Darius. The people of God had experienced the judgment of God and were now looking for relief. God promised them that relief saying He would return to Jerusalem in compassion. God sent out a patrol with red, sorrel and white horses (1:8; cf. 6:1ff). Note the context.
 2. A similar passage is found in Hab. 3:8-13. This passage also describes the

judgment of God and the deliverance that He brings for His people.

3. 6:5-6 is similar to Ezek. 4:16. This time it is judgment against Jerusalem in which the food supply is affected. Cf. Ezek. 5:17; 14:21.
4. Jeremiah speaks of God sending sword, famine and pestilence against Jerusalem (15:2; 24:10).
5. Luke Chandler referred to these as “stock photos.” They are emblems. Last week Steve and Nathan and I drove from Orlando to Tampa, Florida. On the side of the road was an electric pole, but it was not just any pole. On the top it was shaped like the head of Mickey Mouse. It was emblematic of Disney World. We use this kind of thing all the time. We use letters: “UK,” “WKU,” “EKU.” We use animals: “What is a wildcat anyway?” There is no such creature!

6. We come to the Book of Revelation and we go “bananas” because we are unfamiliar

with their emblems. (Try talking to a 4 year old about what it means to “go bananas” and you get an idea of the problem. Illustration: Looking at Max, our 4 year old grandson. He said, “What?” I said, “Chicken what.” He was absolutely taken aback. Questioned me extensively about “Chicken what.” Later he came to me

with

a piece of paper. He said it was a map to “Chicken what.”)

7. These images in Rev. 6 call to mind God’s judgment.

C. Confirmed in what is said next (read 6:9-11).

1. Those loyal to the word of God and the communication of it are under the altar.
2. They are asking, “How Long will you refrain from judging and avenging our blood?”
3. It is going to be delayed.
4. Reading 6:12-17.
5. Is this describing the end of the earth? Is it describing some great military conflict in the future? Such is not the point!!!
6. These images are used in the O.T. to picture God’s judgments on the nations that sought to destroy God’s people.
 - a. Isaiah used these same images to describe God’s judgment against Babylon (Isa. 13:10, 13; 50:3).
 - b. Joel described judgment against Jerusalem: “The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood” (2:31).
7. Jesus used similar language in Matt. 24:29ff (cf. Isa. 13:10; 24:23) to refer to His coming into His kingdom as per Dan. 7:13 (and the preaching of the gospel). As the message of the gospel goes forth it is a message of condemnation and judgment for those opposed to the plan of God AND a message of hope for those serving that as their purpose.
8. Are you beginning to see why “the book in the hand of God” reveals His unfolding plan and purpose?

III. God’s deliverance of those who are His will be realized (7:1-3).

A. But hold on! Before the judgment comes God’s bond-servants must be sealed.

B. There were 144,000 from various tribes.

1. Some in excitement conclude that only 144,000 people are going to be saved.

2. Compare the list of the tribes from the O.T. Some tribes omitted. Only Jews? (Contra Rom. 9:6.) But the blood of the Lamb purchased people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.
 3. These 144,000 represent the bond-servants of God that are on the earth who need protection from the coming judgment.
- C. The vision of the great multitude praising God reveals the ultimate deliverance of those who have washed their robes white in the blood of the Lamb (7:9-17).

IV. What is the take away?

- A. Part of the plan of God is to bring judgment on the earth.
- B. Part of that plan involves His avenging the blood of those who have been loyal to His word. Though they have been killed because of their loyalty to God they not only continue to exist but will be vindicated.
- C. The plan of God involves people from every nation having their robes washed white in the blood of the Lamb.
 1. The wrath of God is satisfied by this blood and they do not experience it.
 2. They are delivered.
 3. Their response is to worship Him.
 4. They experience the water of life and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Conclusion:

1. Where do you stand in relation to the judgment of God?
2. Is your robe washed white in the blood of the Lamb?
3. Are you praising Him for your deliverance?
4. Sometimes we think that perhaps there is not going to be any judgment by God. We begin to think that everything is going to continue just as it has throughout our lifetime—sunrise . . . sunset. Day after day the same . . . If God is going to judge the world why has He not already done so?
5. 2 Pet. 3:9 says, “God is not slow about His promise, but is patient, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”
6. The reason God has not brought judgment already is that He does not want any to perish, but would have all to be washed in the blood of the Lamb. Would you be washed?