

THE FIFTH AND SIXTH SEALS

David Baker, prepared for the Presbytery Fellowship word, 12 September 2021
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Introduction

Hello, everyone, and welcome to Session 20 in our series on 'The Seventy Weeks prophecy'. In this session we will consider the opening of the fifth seal and the opening of the sixth seal.

Jew and Gentile gathered into the kingdom of God in the time of the end

As we said last week, the opening of the seals is an important part of our consideration concerning how Jesus Christ and His messengers will *gather both Jew and Gentile into the kingdom of God* during the period of delay in the Seventy Weeks prophecy, and particularly during the final part of that period of delay, which is called 'the time of the end'. Dan 8:17. Dan 12:4.

We learn in the Scriptures that the opening of the seals in the time of the end will lead to *the salvation of one-third of the Jewish nation*. One-third of the Jewish nation will come into the kingdom of God to be united with the fullness of the nations, as part of that great multitude which no man can number, from every nation, tribe, people and tongue. Rev 7:9.

Remarkably, it is likely that that great multitude will be *fifty percent, or one-half, of the world's population* at that time.

The opening of the first four seals

In our last session we began to look at the opening of the first four seals, and we made the point that Jesus Christ opens those first four seals *together or in very quick succession*, so that all of the events that belong to those four seals are happening *concurrently*.

The first seal

When He opens the first seal, He rides forth on the white horse with His messengers. He is *accompanied by all of the overcomers who belong to His administration*, and He will 'go forth overcoming and to overcome'. Rev 6:2.

He will ride to judge the kingdoms of this world, and to also bring in a great multitude from every nation. The opening of the first seal precipitates a *time of great revival*.

The second seal

At the same time, the opening of the second seal precipitates *a time of great warfare*. Last week we considered the fact that *Michael is the rider of the red horse*. He is the commander of the Lord's host, and he is given a great sword. Rev 6:4.

And when he rides, he is given the mandate 'to take peace from the earth'. So, the opening of the second seal will precipitate a time of great warfare. Rev 6:4.

The third seal and fourth seal

At the same time, the opening of the third seal will precipitate *a time of economic scarcity and upheaval, and famine*.

When the third seal was opened, the apostle John heard a voice from the midst of four living creatures, or from the midst of the apostolic administration. Rev 6:5.

That voice proclaimed, 'A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius.' Rev 6:6. This defines the economic scarcity.

But, at the same time, that same voice proclaimed, 'Do not harm [hurt] the oil and the wine.' Rev 6:6. So, we also know that there will be miraculous provision and protection at that time for those who belong to the kingdom of God, and belong to the body of Christ.

The 'oil' is the fruit of the olive that belongs to the olive tree – 'the olive tree' represents the kingdom of God. And 'the wine' is the fruit of the grape that belongs to the true Vine – and the vine represents the body of Christ.

The opening of the *fourth seal* will precipitate *a time of pestilence and plague*. Rev 6:7-8.

A period of 'great tribulation'

The Scriptures clearly state that the accumulative effect of the sword, or the warfare, that belongs to the second seal; the famine that belongs to the third seal; and then the pestilence that belongs to the fourth seal, will be *the death of one quarter of the earth's population*, which is quite staggering when you consider that the world's population is approaching eight billion.

It is likely that this death toll will exceed two billion people.

Jesus described this time - the opening of the seals - as a period of 'great tribulation'. He said to the disciples, 'For then there will be *great tribulation*, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.' Mat 24:21. 'Tribulation' simply means 'affliction', or 'pressure'.

For those who are in the world, this pressure, or affliction, will be accompanied by the multiplication of anxiety, fear and anguish. When we look at the events in the world today, we see how quickly anxiety can multiply.

But, at the same time, in the world today, we still see an undergirding belief in the capacity of mankind to overcome these challenges to find a solution.

However, when the seals are opened, as Jesus explained, there will come a time when men's hearts will fail them for fear because of the expectation of the things that are coming upon the world. Luk 21:26.

The opening of the seals will be a time of intense pressure, and anxiety will be multiplied. This will be *unprecedented*. Jesus said that there has never been a time like this before, since the beginning of the world.

That is quite a remarkable statement, when we consider history. There have been many times of intense pressure and affliction in the history of the world.

Jesus said that *this* time will be unprecedented. And it will be unprecedented because of its *intensity*; but also because of its *global impact*. It will be all encompassing; it will impact the whole world.

He will shorten the days for the sake of the elect

'And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.' Mat 24:22.

We don't know the exact length of the time from the opening of the first seal to the sovereign intervention of the Lord in the affairs of men at the opening of the sixth seal. However, we do know that it will be a relatively *short* period of time. The

time of the first seal to the sixth seal may only be a few years.

We finished our last session by reading Paul's statement concerning the great harvest of Jews and Gentiles in the time of the end.

'For He will finish the work [That is the work of gathering Jew and Gentile into the kingdom of God - gathering a great multitude of sons.] and cut it short in righteousness, because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth.' Rom 9:28.

Jesus said that He will shorten the days for the sake of the elect because, if He did not cut it short, *no flesh* would be saved.

Once peace has been taken from the earth - that is, with the opening of the second seal - the world will descend into such a period of overt conflict and warfare that, if the Lord does not sovereignly intervene in the affairs of man, mankind will surely wipe itself out.

Now, *He will intervene*, and He will intervene *for the sake of the elect*. The 'elect' are the sons of God who walk obediently by the Spirit in the fellowship of Christ's offering.

Jesus Christ will shorten the days to preserve the elect, so that they can finish the days and complete the works that were authored for each of them, during Christ's offering on the cross.

The fifth seal - those slain for the word of God and for their testimony are 'under the altar'

With this in view, we will briefly consider the opening of the fifth seal and the opening of the sixth seal.

'When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.' Rev 6:9.

We know that is the testimony of Jesus. This is a group of overcomers who have overcome 'by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death'. Rev 12:11.

Five distinct groups of overcomers

It is helpful if we 'take a step back' here and say that the book of Revelation identifies at least five distinct groups of 'overcomers'.

The *first* group of overcomers are *the presbyteries and the lampstand churches* who have responded to the

admonition of Christ with *repentance* and *faith*; have embraced their fellowship in Christ's offering; and have learned to *walk blamelessly in the fellowship of that offering*.

Jesus finished the admonition to every presbytery of every lampstand church with a promise 'to him who overcomes'.

This is *our present focus*. We are learning what it means to be *overcomers*; we are learning what it means to walk blamelessly in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings so that we are ready for the time when the Father takes His seat.

The *second* group of overcomers is *those who will be killed for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ during the time of the end*.

During the intense persecution that the church will experience at the hands of the seventh world kingdom, this is the group that the apostle John saw under the altar in the true temple when the fifth seal was opened.

There is a *third* group of overcomers – that is, the 144 000. The 144 000 are sons of God who will be brought forth by the church, the bride of Christ; and they are the firstfruits of the great multitude which no man can number. Rev 14:1.

The *fourth* group of overcomers is *the great multitude* who will come out of the world and into the kingdom of God *from every nation, tribe, people and tongue*, as the *fruit* of the evangelistic ministry of the church in the time of the end.

There is also a *fifth*, or final, group of overcomers. That is *the group who will respond to the final evangelistic ministry of Christ's messengers* during the emergence of the *eighth* world kingdom. They will be killed because they refuse to worship the beast and his image, and they will refuse to receive his mark. Rev 13:15-17.

The death of the martyrs at the opening of the fifth seal

In relation to the fifth seal, the second group of overcomers will have clearly overcome 'by loving not their lives to the death', and this is in a very literal sense. They will have 'died with Christ', and are ready to receive their eternal reward.

It is important to recognise that the death of these martyrs – the death that will be experienced by these overcomers who are seen under the altar at the opening of the fifth seal – is a very different

kind of death from the death of all those who will have died under the judgement of the second, third and fourth seals.

As we considered in our last session, all those who die under the judgement of the second, third and fourth seal will descend directly and immediately into Hell.

We remember that John saw, at the opening of the fourth seal, the rider of the pale horse. His name is Death. And, immediately following that horse, right on its heels, was another rider, and that rider's name is Hades. Rev 6:8.

So, all of those who die under the judgement of the second, third and fourth seal – by the sword, the famine and the pestilence – will descend directly into Hell.

In stark contrast to that kind of death, there will also be some Christians who, because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, will lose their lives during this time of persecution upon the church by the seventh world kingdom.

Jesus was very clear that the church will be hated by all nations – that is, by the entire seventh world kingdom. Mat 24:9.

Betrayal among families and brethren within the church

Specifically, He said to His disciples concerning this time, 'Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be *hated by all nations* for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will *betray* one another, and will hate one another.' Mat 24:9-10.

It was the betrayal of Judas, who was one of the twelve, that led to Jesus being delivered into the hands of the religious leaders of that day, who then delivered Him into the hands of the secular rulers of the day; and He was crucified by the Romans.

In the same way, it will be *betrayal among those who belong to the church in the heavenly places* that will lead to this martyrdom during this time of persecution under the seventh world kingdom.

This betrayal among families and brethren within the church will be great wickedness.

The abomination which makes desolate, and the outpouring of the wrath of God

It will be a further manifestation of 'the abomination which makes desolate, standing in

the holy place' that causes the 'trampling' of the Lord's messengers and His people. Mat 24:15.

'The abomination that makes desolate, standing in the holy place' does not refer to 'idolatry' in the world. Rather, it refers to *the violation of the Lord's table*; the violation of the fellowship of the Lord's table in the heavenly places.

The shedding of the blood of Christ and the blood of all those who have died with Him in the fellowship of His death will invoke *the outpouring of the wrath of God upon mankind* in the end of the age.

When the fifth seal was opened, John saw these martyrs under the altar, and he heard those who had died with Christ, asking when this judgement will happen.

'And they cried with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' Rev 6:10.

A white robe - priestly garments for the new heavens and new 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.' Rev 6:11.

We know that this group of overcomers will have already washed their priestly robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

They will have finished the works of their priesthood that Christ authored for them in *this* present age. But here, they receive a *new* white robe – it is their priestly garment for the new heavens and new earth; it represents their priestly work.

They will then *rest in the hope of the resurrection* at the last day. Specifically, they were told to 'rest a little while longer' until the number of their fellow servants and brethren had been killed as they were.

As we have already said, there will be one final group of martyrs who will be killed during the emergence of the eighth world kingdom, because they will refuse to worship the beast and his image.

The opening of the sixth seal - a great earthquake

Now we come to the opening of the sixth seal. John wrote, 'I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a *great earthquake*'. Rev 6:12.

We will 'pick up' this theme of 'the great earthquake' in the book of Ezekiel and in the book of Zechariah as well.

'There was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood.' Rev 6:12.

The day of the Lord

These unique signs, or wonders, in the heavens are the fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel. Joel prophesied that 'the sun would be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and awesome *day of the Lord*'. Joel 2:31.

'The day of the Lord' is a major prophetic theme in the Scriptures. In the first case, the day of the Lord is *the day of Christ's offering*.

In relation to 'the time of the end', it is the revelation of everything that Christ accomplished on the day of His offering, particularly during the three hours when the sun was darkened, and great darkness covered the whole world.

The day of the Lord includes the *judgement* of the kingdoms of this world, the end of the present universe – the present heavens and the earth – and the final judgement of Satan and fallen mankind in the lake of fire forever.

This is why the day of the Lord is also called 'the day of the Lord's anger', 'the day of the Lord's wrath', 'the day of the Lord's vengeance'.

'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. 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 [It is a very exhaustive list.] 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!"' Rev 6:13-16.

We see that this is the same dynamic that occurred in the very beginning when Adam *hid* himself from the presence of the Lord among the fig trees and the trees in the garden. Gen 3:7-8.

At the sixth seal, the mighty men will *hide* among the rocks and the mountains, saying, 'Fall on us

and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!

We note that the mighty men of the earth will be afraid of God, but this is not the fear of the Lord. This is a very acute manifestation of the fear of death, which holds the whole of mankind in bondage to Satan. Heb 2:14-15.

It is not the fear of the Lord that we receive, and continue to learn, by receiving the word of the cross and turning to meet Christ 'eye to eye and heart to heart'.

For they then say, 'For the great day of His wrath [the day of the Lord] has come, and who is able to stand?' Rev 6:17.

That is an important question, isn't it? Who is able to stand? Of course, when the mighty men make this statement, the inference is that *no-one* is able to stand.

We may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming

The apostle John answered this question for us.

'And now [right *now*], little children [This is how He is speaking to *us*.], *abide* in Him.' 1Jn 2:28.

We *abide* in the fellowship of His body, and we *abide* in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings. We are participating in the fellowship of His table.

'Abide in Him, that when He appears' refers to when He will sovereignly intervene in the affairs of men at the opening of the sixth seal. 1Jn 2:28.

'We may have *confidence* [Or, great assurance of faith, because we have been receiving His word and we have been meeting Him.] and not be ashamed.' 1Jn 2:28.

We will not recoil in shame or fear as the mighty men will do, because we have been meeting Him eye to eye and heart to heart, and the Lord has been removing from us the source of our shame and our fear in the fellowship of His offering and suffering.

In this regard, John wrote, 'That we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.' 1Jn 2:28.

In fact, we are equally *looking forward to His coming*.

A great earthquake – the judgement of God will reveal the fury in His face

The book of Revelation contains a succinct summary of the opening of the sixth seal. And it identifies the major outcome, which is the revelation of the judgement of God and the wrath of the Lamb before the eyes of all mankind.

However, the context of what is happening in the world and the detail about the Lord's sovereign intervention in the affairs of men at this time is contained in the book of Ezekiel and the book of Zechariah.

For example, we find a very detailed account in the book of Ezekiel, Chapters 38 and 39. It explains that the Lord will provoke the king of the north, who is called Gog in the Scriptures, to lead a large and mighty army, from many nations, into the land of Israel. This army will surround Jerusalem.

Significantly, the Lord declared through Ezekiel, 'And it will come to pass at the same time, when Gog comes against the land of Israel [This gives us the context.], says the Lord God, that My fury will show in My face.' Eze 38:18.

This is the background to the statement, 'Hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb.'

The judgement of God upon Gog and his army will reveal the fury in His face to the kings of the whole world. 'For in My jealousy and in the fire of My wrath I have spoken: "Surely in that day there shall be *a great earthquake* in the land of Israel".' Eze 38:19.

This connects us to the book of Revelation Chapter 6 verse 12, identifying the great earthquake that will occur at that time.

It is also recorded in the book of Zechariah and, notably, Zechariah recorded the *cause* of the earthquake.

'Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle [Christ on His white horse]. And in that day *His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives*, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south.' Zec 14:3-4.

The feet of Christ, who will stand on the Mount of Olives, will cause the great earthquake.

We remember that the Lord split the Red Sea when the nation of Israel was coming out of Egypt, and that was part of their miraculous *deliverance*. It was also the *judgement* of God upon the Egyptians, who were the first world kingdom.

In a similar way, He will split the Mount of Olives to deliver the remnant of the Jews from the hand of Gog, and the alliance of nations that belong to the seventh world kingdom, when those armies surround Jerusalem.

They shall know that I am Yahweh - miraculous intervention and sovereign judgement

This miraculous intervention will enable those who have turned to Christ to be *delivered* and to flee to safety.

It will occur *at the same time* as the Lord's sovereign *judgement* upon Gog and his armies.

The Lord declared through the prophet Ezekiel, 'I will call for a sword against Gog throughout all my mountains,' says the Lord God. 'Every man's sword will be against his brother.' Eze 38:21.

This 'calling for the sword' tells us that Michael, with the great sword, who is the rider of the red horse, will be part of this judgement.

In the same way that he will take peace from the earth at the opening of the second seal, so the whole of the seventh world kingdom will turn against itself. This will also be the first element of the judgement of God against Gog and his armies. *They will turn against each other.*

Furthermore, the Lord said, 'And I will bring him to judgement with pestilence [or disease] and bloodshed; I will rain down on him, on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, flooding rain, great hailstones, fire and brimstone.' Eze 38:22.

We will continue to compare the account in the book of Ezekiel with the account in the book of Zechariah. The prophet Zechariah described the nature of this judgement in even more graphic detail.

'And this shall be the plague with which the Lord will strike all the people who fought against Jerusalem. Their flesh shall dissolve while they stand on their feet, their eyes shall dissolve in their sockets, and their tongues shall dissolve in their mouths.' Zec 14:12. That is very graphic, isn't it?

This description of the judgement of Gog and his armies, in the book of Zechariah, indicates that it is highly probable that they will perish in the midst of nuclear warfare. There is no doubt that this is an unprecedented world event.

Ezekiel recorded that, in the aftermath of this conflict, it will take seven months to bury all of the bodies, and seven years to burn all of the weapons that will have been amassed by these world powers.

Most significantly, the Lord identified that the outcome of this event will be the unmistakable revelation of His judgement and wrath in the world.

'Thus I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations. Then they shall know that I am the Lord [I am Yahweh.]' Eze 38:23.

144 000 sons of God sealed and set apart

Immediately after this sovereign intervention in the affairs of men by the Lord, 144 000 people will receive the seal of the living God on their foreheads. They will have been brought forth as sons of God by the church, the bride of Christ, in the heavenly places.

They will be set apart for their unique ministry in relation to the judgement of the eighth world kingdom. We will consider the significance of the 144 000 at another time.

A great multitude will confess that salvation belongs to God

In this session, our focus is on the *fruit* of the evangelistic ministry of the church during the opening of the seals.

We remember that Christ will continue to ride on the white horse, and that He will be accompanied by all of the overcomers who belong to his administration in the heavenly places.

During the opening of the seals, the fruit of the evangelistic ministry of the church will be *a great multitude* which no man can number, from every nation, tribe, people and tongue.

'After these things [after the opening of the sixth seal and also after the sealing of the 144 000] I looked, and behold, *a great multitude which no one could number*, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne [the throne of God the Father] and before the Lamb, clothed with white

robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" ' Rev 7:9-10.

We notice that this is a very different confession from that of all of the kings of the earth - the great men and the mighty men - who are saying, 'Hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb.'

This great multitude will confess, by faith, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'

They will have this unshakable assurance of salvation because they have *received the gospel of sonship* that has been proclaimed by Christ's messengers and the church. They have also *embraced their unique participation* in the fellowship of the Father and the Son.

At least one-third of the Jewish nation will come into the kingdom of God

Significantly, we read in the book of Zechariah that the Lord will bring at least one-third of the Jewish nation into the kingdom of God in the time of the end. The opening of the sixth seal will be the climax of these events.

'I will bring the one-third through the fire [through this time of fiery trial], will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, and I will answer them. I will say, "This is my people"; and each one will say, "The Lord is my God."' ' Zec 13:9.

We will conclude on a highpoint, because one-third of the Jewish nation coming into the kingdom of God is a remarkable harvest, isn't it?

The word of the cross will bring a breach in every family

However, we would expect that the percentage that will be saved from the remainder of the nations of the world will be even higher than this.

Jesus foretold that the word of the cross will bring a separation in every extended family. This means that, instead of generation after generation after generation after generation being lost in the world, He will make a breach on every family with the word of the cross, and bring fifty percent of the world's population into the kingdom of God.

Speaking about a representative family with children who have come of age so that they are able

to make their own accountable response to the gospel, Jesus said, 'For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three.' Luk 12:52.

Of course, there will be varying percentages in each individual house. It might be all five in one; it might be none in another; it might be four versus one or one versus four; or three versus two.

The point is that Jesus said that the word of the cross, the sword, will bring a breach in every family, and will cut every person in every family free to make their own accountable response to the gospel.

The harvest in the end of the age

And He will harvest fifty percent of the earth. The expectation that the Lord will harvest fifty percent of the world's population is supported by the example of the two thieves who were crucified with Christ.

We know that Christ has tasted death for every person and, therefore, every person who has ever lived has been crucified with Christ.

'We judge thus: that if One died for all, then *all died*.' 2Co 5:14.

In this respect, the two thieves are representative of the whole of humanity, who have been crucified with Christ.

More than this, the two thieves exemplify the two possible responses that a person can make to Christ.

When the word of the cross is proclaimed to a person, accompanied by the spirit of grace and supplication, they will either turn to meet Christ eye to eye and heart to heart and become a God-fearer like the believing thief, or they will harden their heart and remain in their unbelief, and reject Christ as did the unrepentant thief.

So, it was a fifty percent harvest on the day of Christ's crucifixion. And when the gospel is proclaimed as a witness in every nation, and Christ is lifted up and portrayed as crucified before the eyes of all, it will also be *a fifty percent harvest in the end of the age*.

That is quite remarkable, isn't it? It is very encouraging, and a very exciting point to finish on - that these days are just ahead.