

Conquest and War  
Revelation 6:1-4  
2/8/2015

Wars and rumors of wars. Power-hungry dictators. Violence and bloodshed. We see these things so often nowadays that we have become desensitized to it. We almost think to ourselves “ho-hum.” At least, we do think this way until war affects us directly. Or until we see pictures of the devastation that war causes. One of the interesting developments in people's reaction to warfare comes as a result of the media. We have access to far more media than anyone at the time of WWII had. We can have real-time footage of what is happening in a war. As a result, individual deaths weigh far more heavily. And yet we are also desensitized to war and death, through video games and movies. What is the biblical perspective on all this? We have a glimpse of it in the first two seals that Jesus opens.

Most of us, reading from chapter 5 to chapter 6 will notice that there is a huge change that goes on. Chapters 4 and 5 are all about the heavenly worship that takes place around the throne of God. Now we hear about conquest and war. What is going on here?

Well, the scroll is being opened. You remember at the beginning of chapter 5 that John wanted to see the scroll opened, since it contained God's plan for His people and also for the world that rejects Jesus. We saw also that the Lion of the tribe of Judah is worthy to open the scroll and its seals. Well now, the scroll is being opened, one seal at a time. The seals do not appear to be something different than the scroll. What is happening is that as each seal is opened, more of the scroll is unveiled for us to see what is happening. It is a series of progressive seals. The progression, however, only has to do with the scroll itself. What we are going to see is that the things described in the seven seals are all constantly going on from the time of Christ's first coming to the time of His second coming. It does not refer only to a period at the end of all history. Otherwise it would be irrelevant to the first hears of this book. It has to have relevance for the church of all ages. So, these seals describe events that are going to happen all over the place all the time. There is still a logical progression in the seals, as we will see. It's just not a temporal progression that applies only to one small slice of time.

The first thing we notice about the first seal is the command of the four living creatures. This living creature had a very loud voice, and it uttered the command “Come” to the rider on the white horse. This is a very significant thing, because it means that only by God's permission can these troubling things happen on earth. In fact, it does not matter how evil and terrible the event is, it cannot happen unless God allows it. This should be vastly encouraging to people undergoing persecution and facing death for their faith.

The next question, and the obvious question, is this: why does God allow

things like that to happen? In this case, the answer is relatively simple: the events in Revelation happen in order to bring about complete deliverance for God's people and complete judgment for God's enemies. That is not the only reason that God could allow evil things to happen. We don't even know all the reasons why God allows certain things to happen. Do we have to know? It is not an error to ask God the reason why. It is an error to expect God to answer to us. He may choose not to answer. If He does not answer us (and even that delay is only temporary! For one day we will know), we need to know that it is okay for God to know and for us not to know. God does not answer to us. We answer to Him. If you ask God why, just remember that you are petitioning God to answer, not demanding God to answer.

Now we come to the most perplexing part of this passage. Who is the rider on the white horse? It was a bit amusing (and at least somewhat disconcerting!) to read the commentaries on this passage. One commentator whom I deeply respect, said that there is absolutely no question that this rider is Jesus Christ. After all, chapter 19 shows us Jesus on a white horse. And just as Jesus is the conqueror with a crown, so this rider in chapter 6 is a conqueror with a crown. The very next commentator I read said that there was absolutely no question: this rider was the antichrist! I went back and forth a few times myself. I am convinced that this rider is not Jesus Christ. I believe that he is a counterfeit. Two things convinced me of this. The first thing was that the rider here has a bow. In chapter 19, Jesus is described as having a sword, not a bow. Now, that is not absolute proof, since the Bible does describe God sometimes as having a bow and arrows. However, it seems more likely here that the rider is supposed to look like Jesus, but not actually be Jesus, and that is because of the second reason, which is that all the following riders are bringing judgments to bear, and the fourth one is death and Hades. I believe we are meant to see the four horsemen of this chapter as a team. I cannot imagine Jesus being in league with death and Hades. So, the immediate context of the judgments and the difference of having a bow lead me to believe that this is a very clever counterfeit of Jesus Christ.

The idea of counterfeiting is extremely important to the book of Revelation. In fact, I would say that we cannot understand the book of Revelation without recognizing the counterfeit when we see it. There is a true church in the picture of the woman in the desert. There is a counterfeit church in the portrayal of Lady Babylon. There is a true Triune God. There is a counterfeit trinity of the dragon and the two beasts. One of these even looks like it had been slain, just like the Lamb here looks as though it has been slain. One of the counterfeits even has a counterfeit resurrection, which causes the whole evil world to worship the beast. Satan can only ever counterfeit. The Bible says that even he appears as an angel of light. Pictures of Satan as a fork-tailed, horned beast with a trident in his hand are pure fiction. Satan does not appear like that, as an object of our ridicule. Satan

appears in the form of an angel of light.

The question then, is this: how do we tell when Satan is trying to trick us, or whether it is the real thing? After all, it is not easy to say that this rider is a counterfeit. So also, it is not always easy to see when Satan is working. In order to discern, we need wisdom, of course. And that is something for which we ought to pray most fervently. Satan is alive and well today counterfeiting like crazy in America. Here are some diagnostic questions that we might ask: is this person or this story trying to get me distracted from Jesus and from the Bible's truth? Is it trying to get me to ooh and ah over a particular experience, or is it trying to lead me to Christ? Is this person or experience trying to get me to focus on the person or experience, or is the person/experience trying to help me grow in my love of Jesus? I am thinking particularly here of what I call sensationalist experiences. There is the boy who supposedly saw into heaven, and came back and wrote about his experiences in a book, entitled "Heaven is for Real." Well that boy has now come out to say that the book is a lie. He did not go into heaven, and he did not see those things. I will read his letter: "Please forgive the brevity, but because of my limitations I have to keep this short. I did not die. I did not go to Heaven. I said I went to heaven because I thought it would get me attention. When I made the claims that I did, I had never read the Bible. People have profited from lies, and continue to. They should read the Bible, which is enough. The Bible is the only source of truth. Anything written by man cannot be infallible. It is only through repentance of your sins and a belief in Jesus as the Son of God, who died for your sins (even though he committed none of his own) so that you can be forgiven...not by reading a work of man. I want the whole world to know that the Bible is sufficient. Those who market these materials must be called to repent and hold the Bible as enough. In Christ, Alex Malarkey." Now that's real repentance! I couldn't put a gospel invitation in any better words. Notice in the letter that Alex points us back to God's word as being sufficient for us. That is the mark of the truth. Lifeway Christian Bookstores, to their credit, are now pulling the book from their shelves. What is not so much to their credit is emails that seem to indicate that they knew about the scam before selling the book. When supposedly Christian book publishers become more concerned about making a dollar than about explaining the truth, then we have serious problems. Just because a Christian bookstore has it in their store does not make something true. Just because you find something on the internet or hear something on TV does not make it true. We need to develop discernment here, so that we can tell the difference between what is true and what is false. As for me, I have become quite skeptical of any claim for some sort of miraculous experience like the heavenly tourism. How do we know that this experience comes from God? How do we know it is not a very clever counterfeit designed to confuse us, and take our eyes off of Jesus? Now, miracles can happen. God is not limited to the physical forces of nature. But then, neither is

Satan. If you hear of any post-conversion experience that starts attacking the sufficiency of God's word, and about which people say something like, "You're not really a Christian unless you've had this experience," then you know that it is not from God. The Bible judges our experiences, not the other way around. I believe that the Christian world needs to be much more careful about these sorts of things. There is too much of a willingness to believe that anything spectacular must be from God. What Revelation consistently teaches is that Satan is very crafty, and can appear almost as spectacular and almost as convincing as Jesus can.

The second seal does not need nearly as much explanation. It is rather clear. It is about war and bloodshed. Its color is the color of blood. When this rider came out, people started to slaughter each other, and there was no peace on the earth. This is what happens when the first rider goes out to conquer. The relationship of the first rider to the second rider is instructive: people bent on conquest start wars. The most obvious example is Adolf Hitler. He set out to conquer everything in his way, and promote the Arian race as the superior race. It was the survival of the fittest, and Hitler worked very hard to make the Arian race superior and the fittest. He viewed himself as helping the evolutionary process along. That led inevitably to war, when Britain, Russia, and the United States found out how far he was willing to go to pursue his goals. Someone in the world will always want more power, and they are willing to fight to get it. War is an evil. Sometimes it is a necessary evil. Almost everyone would agree that Hitler needed to be stopped.

It is worth pointing out also that war exists because sin exists. Sometimes it is necessary to fight wars. Christians throughout the ages have agreed on this. There are good reasons why wars sometimes have to happen. However, let us never lose sight of the fact that wars happen because of sin. This leads us to a glorious hope that one day, war will be no more, because sin will be no more. What a reason to look forward to the new heavens and the new earth! And how do we look forward to that new heavens and the new earth? In the words of the hymn, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace." Amen.