



# Opening the Seven Seals of Revelation

## Information Booklet A

### Supplement to Lesson 3

In the seven seals of Revelation, as in the seven churches and seven trumpets, John was shown a delineation of conditions which would characterize the successive stages of the Christian era. By studying the outline given in these prophecies, we are able to see where we stand in the stream of time.

As the **first seal** is opened (Revelation 6:1, 2), a white horse appears, “and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.” This is a description of the advance of the gospel in the first century. Through the missionary zeal of the early church the gospel “was preached to every creature which is under heaven” (Colossians 1:23). The white horse indicates the church in its original purity. The crown, or victory wreath, shows its conquest over the power of the enemy through the direction and leadership of Christ.

The **second seal** (Revelation 6:3, 4) reveals a red horse. In this bloody scene, peace is taken from the earth, and many are killed with a great sword. From the beginning of the second century until Constantine’s edict of A.D. 313, Christianity was illegal throughout the pagan Roman empire, and Christians were terribly persecuted.

The opening of the **third seal** (Revelation 6:5, 6) provides us a view of Christianity’s status for the 200 years following A.D. 313. The horse, now black, reveals that the church had lost its original purity. Its rider holds a pair of balances. A voice is heard declaring that the amount of money which previously was equivalent to a full day’s wage (Matthew 20:2), is now only worth a quart of wheat. What an appropriate illustration of how, through Constantine’s efforts to blend it with paganism, Christianity had been cheapened. Previously, to declare yourself a “Christian” might cost you your life. Now the word had so lost its value that every vile pagan walking the street was a member of the church.

The opening of the **fourth seal** (Revelation 6:7, 8) ushers in a pale horse. Here is a church that is lifeless and pale, its religion a mixture of truth and error. Its rider is Death, and the Grave follows closely behind. This represents the period of the Dark Ages during which the spark of true godliness was almost entirely extinguished by the high hand of church representatives. “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.” The tribulation of those days was so terrible that Jesus said, “Except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved” (Matthew 24:22).

When the **fifth seal** is opened (Revelation 6:9-11), the figure changes. The cumulative deaths of millions of God’s people through centuries of oppression are now pictured as crying out to God, calling for justice. “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” The answer is given that the dead must “rest yet for a little season.”

The first five seals have brought us down from the first century to the mid 1700’s. We now turn our attention to the signs of the end which would then appear under the opening of the sixth seal (Revelation 6:12, 13).

### **Sign #1: November 1, 1755, “Lo, there was a great earthquake.”**

“Probably the most famous of all earthquakes is that which destroyed Lisbon on Nov. 1, 1755. There were three great earthquakes (the first was the largest) at 9:40 A.M., 10 A.M. and at noon. The main shock lasted six to seven minutes, an unusually long duration. Within six minutes at least 30,000 people were killed, all large public buildings and 12,000 dwellings were demolished. It was a church day, and great loss of life occurred in the churches. A fire followed which burned for six days. A marble quay at the riverside disappeared into the river bottom laden with people. Alexander von Humboldt stated that the total area shaken was four times that of Europe.” *Encyclopedia Britannica Vol. 7, p 848 (1961 ed.)*.

“By far the most spectacular earthquake of earlier times was that of Lisbon, in 1755. This has some claim to be regarded as the greatest earthquake on record. If it is possible to believe reports, the felt area, which was certainly more than 700 miles in radius, extended from the Azores to Italy, and from England to North Africa. A source of confusion in the reports of this shock, which makes it difficult to judge the real extent of the felt area, was the widespread occurrence of seiches,...wave movements in ponds and lakes....

“Oscillations of this kind were observed in France, Italy, Holland, Switzerland, and England, and reports of the movements even came from Norway and Sweden, at a distance of nearly 1800 miles from the epicentre. In those countries, however, the shock was certainly not felt....

“In 1755, the damage to Lisbon itself was very great. At that time, the city had about 230,000 inhabitants, nearly 30,000 of whom were killed, according to conservative estimates. Great numbers of people were in the churches, for it was All Saints’ Day, and the time of the first Mass. The shock was followed by a tsunami (tidal wave:) about twenty feet in height, and by fire.

“The disaster shocked all Europe, and the moralists and the wiseacres were not slow to make capital of it.” *About Earthquakes, p 141-142, by G.A. Eiby (New York: Harper, 1957).*

## **Sign #2: May 19, 1780, “And the sun became black as sackcloth of hair.”**

“About eleven o’clock the darkness was such as to demand our attention, and put us upon making observations. At half past eleven, in a room with three windows, 24 panes each, all open towards the south-east and south, large print could not be read by persons of good eyes. About twelve o’clock the windows being still open, a candle cast a shade so well defined on the wall, as that profiles were taken with as much ease as they could have been in the night. About one o’clock a glin of light which had continued ‘till this time in the east, shut in, and the darkness was greater than it had been for any time before, Between one and two o’clock, the wind from the west freshened a little, and a glin appeared in that quarter. We dined about two the windows all open, and two candles burning on the table. In the time of the greatest darkness some of the dunghill fowls went to their roost: Cocks crowed in answer to one another as they commonly do in the night: Woodcocks, which are night birds, whistled as they do only in the dark: Frogs peeped In short, there was the appearance of midnight at noonday.” *The Boston Gazette and the Country Journal, May 29, 1780, p 4.*

“People were unable to read common print determine the time of day by their clocks or watches dine or manage their domestic business, without the light of candles. In some places, the darkness was so great, that persons could not see to read common print in the open air, for several hours together.” *Memoirs of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences: to the End of the Year 1783, Vol. 1, p 234-235, by Harvard professor Samuel Williams (Boston: Adams and Nourse, 1785).*

“The 19<sup>th</sup> of May, 1780, was a remarkable dark day. Candles were lighted in many houses; the birds were silent and disappeared, and the fowls retired to roost. The legislature of Connecticut was then in session at Hartford. A very general opinion prevailed, that the day of judgment was at hand. The House of Representatives, being unable to transact their business, adjourned. A proposal to adjourn the council was under consideration. When the opinion of Colonel [Abraham] Davenport was asked, he answered, ‘I am against an adjournment. The day of judgment is either approaching, or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for an adjournment: if it is, I choose to be found doing my duty. I wish therefore that candles may be brought.’” *Timothy Dwight, quoted in Connecticut Historical Collections, compiled by John Warner Barber, p 403 (2d ed.; New Haven: Durrie & Peck and J. W. Barber, 1836).*

“Twas on a May-day of the far old year Seventeen hundred eighty, that there fell Over the bloom and sweet life of the Spring, Over the fresh earth and the heaven of noon, A horror of great darkness.

“Men prayed, and women wept; all ears grew shap To hear the doom-blast of the trumpet shatter The black sky, that the dreadful face of Christ Might look from the rent clouds, not as he looked A loving guest at Bethany, but stern As Justice and inexorable Law.

“Meanwhile in the old State House, dim as ghosts, Sat the lawgivers of Connecticut, Trembling beneath their legislative robes. ‘It is the Lord’s Great Day! Let us adjourn,’ Some said; and then, as if with one accord, All eyes were turned to Abraham Davenport. He rose, slow cleaving with his steady voice The intolerable hush. ‘This well may be The Day of Judgment which the world awaits; But be it so or not, I only know My present duty, and my Lord’s command To occupy till He come. So at the post Where He hath set me in His providence, I choose, for one, to meet Him face to face, No faithless servant frightened from my task, But ready when the Lord of the harvest calls; And therefore, with all reverence, I would say, Let God do His work, we will see to ours. Bring in the candles.’” *“Abraham Davenport,” in his Complete Poetical Works, p 260, by John Greenleaf Whittier (Cambridge ed.; Boston: Houghton, 1894).*

“Perhaps some, by assigning a natural cause of this, ascribing it to the thick vapor in the air, will endeavor to evade the force of its being a sign, but, the same objection will lie against earthquakes being signs which our Lord expressly mentions as such. For my part, I really consider the darkness as one of the prodigies foretold in the text; designed for our admonition, and warning.” *Discourse by eyewitness Elam Potter, delivered May 28, 1780, in Enfield, Conn., quoted in The Advent Herald, March 13, 1844, p 46.*

[**Note:** Any suggestion of a natural cause can in no wise militate against the significance of the event as a prophetic fulfillment. The time-honored explanation is that seventeen and a half centuries before it occurred, the Saviour had definitely foretold this twofold sign saying, “In those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light” (Mark 13:24); and these signs occurred exactly as predicted and at the time indicated so long before their occurrence. It has long been pointed out that it is the fact, and not the cause, of the darkness that is significant in this connection; as also in the case of earthquakes, falling stars, and other events seen as signs of the times. When the Lord would open a path for his people through the sea, he did it by “a strong east wind.” Ex. 14:21. Was it for this reason any less miraculous? In like manner, to account for the remarkable darkening of the sun and moon or of the falling of the stars as events in nature is not to discredit them as merciful signs of the approaching end of probationary time.]

### **Sign #3: May 19, 1780, “And the moon became as blood.”**

“The second is that of the moon’s turning to blood; this I have not seen, but, from information, I have reason to believe it did take place between 2 o’clock and day break in the morning of the same night after which the sun was darkened, which was said to appear as a clotted blood; and it is the more probable, as that night, before the moon appeared, was as dark, in proportion, as the day, and of course would give the moon an extraordinary appearance-not suffering her to give her light.” *A View of Spiritual, or Anti-typical Babylon, p 73, by Benjamin Gorton (Troy [N.Y.]: the Author, 1808).*

News item from *Providence, R.I., dated May 20, in The Pennsylvania Evening Post (Philadelphia), June 6, 1780, p. 62,* which news dispatch refers to a red moon in certain areas for a three day period.

### **Sign #4: November 13, 1833, “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.”**

“The morning of November 13<sup>th</sup>, 1833, was rendered memorable by an exhibition of the phenomenon called SHOOTING STARS, which was probably more extensive and magnificent than any similar one hitherto recorded....

“Probably no celestial phenomenon has ever occurred in this country, since its first settlement, which was viewed with so much admiration and delight by one class of spectators, or with so much astonishment and fear by another class....

“The reader may imagine a constant succession of fire balls, resembling sky rockets, radiating in all directions from a point in the heavens, a few degrees south-east of the zenith, and following the arch of the sky towards the horizon....The balls, as they travelled down the vault, usually left after them a vivid streak of light, and just before they disappeared, exploded, or suddenly resolved themselves into smoke. No report or noise of any kind was observed, although we listened attentively....

“The flashes of light, although less intense than lightning, were so bright as to awaken people in their beds. One ball that shot off in the north-west direction, and exploded a little northward of the star Capella, left, just behind the place of explosion, a phosphorescent train of peculiar beauty....

“The meteors began to attract notice by their unusual frequency or brilliancy, from nine to twelve o’clock in the evening, were most striking in their appearance, from two to five, arrived at their maximum, in many places, about four o’clock, and continued till rendered invisible by the light of day.” *The American Journal of Science and Arts*, #25, Jan.? 1834, p 363, 365, 366, 386, 393, 394, article: “*Observations on the Meteors of November 13<sup>th</sup>, 1833,*” by Denison Olmsted.

“To understand the use of the word shower in connection with shooting stars we must go back to the early morning hours of Nov. 13, 1833, when the inhabitants of this continent [of North America] were in fact treated to one of the most spectacular natural displays that the night sky has produced....For nearly four hours the sky was literally ablaze....More than a billion shooting stars appeared over the United States and Canada alone.” *The Telescope*, #7, May-June, 1940, p 57, article “*The Falling of the Stars,*” by Peter M. Millman.

“The shower pervaded nearly the whole of North America, having appeared in nearly equal splendor from the British possessions on the north to the West-India Islands and Mexico on the South, and from sixty-one degrees of longitude east of the American coast, quite to the Pacific Ocean on the west. Throughout this immense region, the duration was nearly the same.” *Letters on Astronomy, Addressed to a Lady: in Which The Elements of the Science Are Familiarly Explained in Connexion With Its Literary History*, p 348-349, by Denison Olmsted (1840 ed.).

“Neither language, nor the pencil, can adequately picture the grandeur and magnificence of the scene....It may be doubted, whether any description has surpassed, in accuracy and impressiveness, that of the old negro in Virginia, who remarked ‘It is awful, indeed, sir, it looked like ripe crab-apples falling from the trees, when shaking them for cider.’” *The New-England Magazine*, #6, Jan.-June, 1834, p 47-48, article “*The Meteoric Shower,*” by J.T. Buckingham.

“The five winter counts [chronological records in picture writing naming each year (winter) by an outstanding event] next cited all undoubtedly refer to the magnificent meteoric display of the morning of November 13, 1833, which was witnessed throughout North America and which was correctly assigned to the winter corresponding with that of 1833-‘34. All of them represent stars having four points, except The-Swan, who draws a globular object followed by a linear track.

“Fig. 1219. It rained stars. Cloud-Shield’s Winter Count, 1833-‘34. White-Cow-Killer calls it ‘Plenty-stars winter.’

“Fig. 1220. The stars moved around. American-Horse’s Winter Count, 1833-‘34. This shows one large four-pointed star as the characterizing object and many small stars, also four-pointed.

“Fig. 1221. Many stars fell. The Flame’s Winter Count, 1833-‘34. The character shows six stars above the concavity of the moon.

“Fig. 1222. Dakotas witnessed magnificent meteoric showers; much terrified. The- Swan’s Winter Count, 1833-‘34.

“Battiste Good calls it ‘Storm-of-stars winter,’ and gives as the device a tipi with stars falling around it. This is presented in Fig. 1223.” “*Picture-Writing of the American Indians,*” [U.S.] *Bureau of Ethnology. Tenth Annual Report...to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1888-‘89*, p. 723, by Garrick Mallery (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1893).

“I witnessed this gorgeous spectacle, and was awe-struck. The air seemed filled with bright descending messengers from the sky. It was about daybreak when I saw this sublime scene. I was not without the suggestion, at the moment, that it might be the harbinger of the coming of the Son of Man; and in my then state of mind I was prepared to hail Him as my friend and deliverer. I had read that the ‘stars shall fall from heaven,’ and they were now falling.” *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, quoting Frederick Douglass, p. 117, Original edition 1855 (New York: Pathway Press, 1941).*

We now stand between verses 13 and 14 of Revelation chapter 6. The next event to occur is the end of the world (verses 14-17).