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Revelation – The Seven Seals
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LESSON 30

Revelation 6:7-11

When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!" And I saw, and behold, a pale horse, and its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him; and they were given power over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth. 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 witness they had borne; they cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?" Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

November 1, 1981

If we are attentive to the successive opening of the first four seals, and this is the fourth, we will observe a gradual progression of events. First, the gospel, symbolized by the white horse, is preached and all things are auspicious and pleasant. After this, the reaction of Satan and his minions, symbolized by the flame-colored or red horse, begins with the persecution and martyrdom of the preachers and followers of the gospel. Much Christian blood is shed as a result and as the gospel spreads, there are civil wars and much civil strife in both the specific and more general sense.¹ Then God, in order to punish the persecutors of His gospel, unleashes famine, mourning, and misery, which are represented by the black horse of the third seal.

The persecutors do not conform, but stubbornly persist in their denial of the gospel. The opening of the fourth seal is indeed a punishment from God. Among those punished are also those fallen Christians who have betrayed Christ and returned to their old life of idolatry. These are baptized Christians who deny their baptism. They deny their Christian identity. They become agnostic, atheists, or secularized; they contribute to the attack against the Christians. Thus, the opening of the fourth seal introduces war, hunger, attacks by the beasts of the earth, and

¹ From year 180 A.D. up until 283 there was great unrest in the Roman Empire. There were 25 different emperors, a clear sign of internal strife and unrest.

death by way of pestilence and illness, that which we call plague, or Black Death, and illnesses in general which afflict one fourth of the world's population.

Remember that through the cyclical method of interpreting the events of the Apocalypse we can observe events throughout the history of Israel and in both the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, we primarily see the cyclical interpretation of Scripture. This is the method of interpretation of which I have previously spoken. Whenever I have the opportunity I will repeat so that this knowledge of the cyclical interpretation will be firmly established within you.

In the Old Testament there is the following cycle: God makes promises to Israel. He will explain to the people: if you listen to Me you will eat the fruits of the earth; but if you ignore Me you will be handed over to the sword, and you will perish. The people listen. As time passes, they become lackadaisical and forgetful. They fall into idolatry, so punishment arrives. Then, the people come to their senses and repent. God forgives them and renews His Testament, meaning that the prophets, judges and all those who govern the people remind them about the statutes and judgments of God. Again, the people come to their senses, only to forget, return to idolatry and fall under punishment from God again. So, we have these cycles and we may view the Old Testament in this manner. Yes, this is a cyclical interpretation that whatever happened in the last century will happen in this one, and in the next. However, it is not exactly the same because we simultaneously have a conical helix [like a spiral], so that what we do in this century will be similar to what we did in the previous century, with the difference being a specialization or concentration of these events. Yes, we do come full circle. History does repeat itself. However, this time we are higher on the spiral than during the previous cycle. In this manner, we rise upward with a perpetual concentration of events. Thus, these four seals are continually repeated through history. If we understand this, then we will begin to understand Revelation. Otherwise, we will fall prey to many incorrect interpretations.

We will now analyze the fourth seal. The fourth living creature is the one likened to a flying eagle. The color of the fourth horse is pale, that is, yellow-green or ash yellow. This is the color of death. In fact, we use a yellow flag to indicate an area under quarantine. A yellow flag on a ship is a sign of contagion. When the yellow color is associated with a human being, it reminds us of death. We are aware that this person is very ill or near death. The horseman who sits on the pale horse bears the name Death.

And the name of him who sat on it was Death and Hades followed him (6:8). Hades is personified here, just as Death is also personified. It is natural for Hades to follow death. This verse reveals strong proof that after death souls continue to live. If souls did not live after death, why would Hades be presented here as following close behind Death, as the one who gathers those who have died thus making them his possession or his property? This means that souls do not die, but that the life of each mortal human continues even after death.

And power [authority] was given to them. To whom was this authority given? It was given to Death first and then to Hades. Christ, Who is the Lord of life and of

death, granted this authority; it was not granted by favor, but by concession. Christ is the Lord of life and death. How then are Death and Hades given permission to gather one fourth of the earth? Surely, this does not please God.² He allows it not because He favors and desires it, but as a concession out of His great respect for our free will. He grants it; He concedes to it. Never forget this difference between the primary (perfect) and the secondary (concessionary) will of God, His will by *favor* or will by *concession*. God allows this to happen in order to punish the rebellious people.

The result of the opening of the fourth seal is the four plagues: war, pestilence, famine, and the beasts of the earth. In the Gospels, the Lord Himself speaks of the first three plagues as He refers to the final things, those that are to take place in the last days. He says, *Nation will rise up against nation and kingdom against kingdom* (Matthew 24:7, Mark 13:8, Luke 21:10). These are wars. *And there will be famines and pestilences and these are the beginning of sorrows* (Matthew 24:7). This indicates that these plagues are truly elements of the final days. However, this does not mean that these events will not occur repeatedly from the moment of the authorship of the Apocalypse. In fact, from that moment onward, the final days begin with a concentration on the literal final days.

Now we will begin to examine these four signs. I can tell you that these elements: war, pestilence, famine, and the beasts of the earth truly shock each reader and listener of Revelation as nothing else has shocked them. If sometimes we have a sinful curiosity and desire to interpret Scripture, it is because we wish to draw near and find out what will happen next. We want to know if we will live during war, famine or some terrible epidemic. However, I would not want us to think like this, because these events continuously repeat themselves. The analysis of these elements will enhance our understanding.

First, we have the element of war. What does war mean? [*Polemos* (π ὄλεμος) in Greek, from which the word *polemics* is derived, means ill relations among people.] Relations between human beings turn sour. The phenomenon of war came into existence on earth with the appearance of human beings. The first four human beings were Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel. Cain murdered Abel. So, because there were only four people at that time, one fourth of the population of the world was murdered. Since the time of the first murder committed by Cain, there have been thousands of wars recorded in human history. Perhaps one may question what is new about this. Do the prophecy of Christ and this prophecy of John the Evangelist and Theologian add anything to the issue of war, because war has existed since the time that humans were created? Do we gain anything new from this prophecy when war is so very familiar to us, so intensely frequent?

Initially, and please be attentive here, war is mentioned as prophecy, so that

² This is the “concessionary will of God” and not the perfect will; it allows the preservation of man’s free will. Man can choose to distance himself, disobey, and even deny God, although it is not to his benefit. Man’s free will is an irrevocable gift and an integral part of God’s image in him.

some of the faithful will not presume that the preaching of the gospel in the world will cause peace on earth according to the angelic hymn. The faithful people especially must put aside the false perception that with the arrival of the gospel the Christian people, at least the people who know the gospel, would not have wars from then on. Assuredly, this self-deception finds relevance even within a smaller geographical area, as for example, within a populace when we strive to elect Christian governments. There is no objection that Christian government officials could offer rich benefits to society. However, do not believe that we will avoid wars and disorder in this way. War and disorder occur because people are corrupt.

As we progress in time towards the final days we, the Christian people, will not have a better Christian spirit, but a deteriorated one. Since we will have this deterioration, this corruption, we can only have wars. So peace will *not* prevail on earth. First of all, this prophecy has merit in that people should not presume that from now on there will be ages of bliss. Do not go too far here. Doesn't Chiliasm, the religion of the Jehovah's Witnesses, believe this? Certainly when we arrive, God willing, to the excerpt that refers to the one thousand years we will see there the true meaning of the word of God. This mentality of a blissful future world is a deception. Do not presume that the deceived Chiliasts have no effect on their environment and on Christian people as they profess that they await a blissful epoch on earth when people will eat from gold and silver spoons. Their printed material and advertisements include pretty little pictures, like sketches of well-fed and smiling people, pretty gardens, all the fruits of the earth laid upon a table, someone playing guitar, another person singing, and children playing. This is how they interpret the verse that says, *The lion and the bear will graze with the lamb* (Isaiah 11:6). This interpretation does not exist in Scripture and Tradition. This is *not* a correct interpretation.

Thus, the position of this prophecy is that we *will* have wars and not peace. If this prophecy refers to wars alone, it is still a more than sufficient reason to justify its existence. However, there is something more. When the Lord speaks of wars, these are not wars in the usual sense; rather, these are extraordinary and terrible wars. Of course there have been great wars in the past, merciless slaughter throughout history. The history of mankind is nothing but wars, nothing else from the beginning to the end. The story of humanity is a history of war. Even though there have been terrible wars in the past, there will be exceedingly and unimaginably more terrible wars in the future. These terrible wars were never even imagined by the human mind. Man has never imagined terrible wars to the degree of those that are going to be realized. It is apparent that this is only the beginning.

Read the entire history of man; nowhere will you find a characterization of a world war, nowhere. Yet, in our century alone we have had two of them; one was worse than the other. Now you may know from reading the newspapers and hearing in the news roughly what it would mean to have a third world war. I will only say what the Lord said, *nation will rise up against nation* (Matthew 24:7, Mark 13:8, Luke 21:10). This indicates a world war. This is so, because today it is not just one nation who will fight against another nation with a third country entering as an

ally to help either the first or second. Today, we truly have conditions for a world war. Today we can understand the expression of the Lord, *nation will rise up against nation*. It is about world war.

Seventy years ago people would not have thought of a world war. They could not have imagined it. It was just not possible. A prelude to the First World War was the Crimean War. The Crimean War was a precursor of a world war, a starting point. Although not precisely a world war, many nations took part in the Crimean War. Today's war capabilities likely would not have been foreseen. It would not have been considered possible that there could be a nuclear war that could very easily, within twenty-four hours or less, kill one fourth of the world population. It was inconceivable. Could anyone ever imagine that two hundred million soldiers could participate in a war? No one could ever have imagined this.³

Yet, in Revelation (9:16), you will see that there are three armies that participate: the red, the yellow, and the blue. I will not discuss its full meaning yet. When we reach that chapter, we will interpret everything. The war will happen in Mesopotamia, or as the text says, between the rivers Euphrates and Tigris in Persia. Again, what does all this mean? These things were written two thousand years ago, so it was inconceivable that armies involved could be two hundred million strong. Take into consideration that today China alone could put together an army of two hundred million people. China has a population of one billion people.⁴ If one in five were fit for military service, and this is a rough estimate, as I'm certainly not a specialist, the army would be enormous. Was this conceivable a century or two centuries ago? No. This prophecy concerning wars has a realistic basis, a strong basis, and it has great value because it does not speak of ordinary wars, but of special, terrible, and frightful wars.

In the same manner, our earth has always been scourged by famine. However, this particular phenomenon of the fourth seal is a result of the apostasy. This famine would never occur had the people not denied God. When the Lord speaks about famine, and Saint John does so in the excerpt from the fourth seal, the Lord is essentially prophesying rebellion or apostasy. The result of this apostasy will be wars and famines. Even though famines always existed on earth, this concerns extraordinary, unforeseeable, and unusual famines. This is because previously, the famines that occurred were primarily confined to a particular geographical area.

Luke the Evangelist refers to such a famine prophesied by Agabus (Acts 11:28). We have always had famines, either from adverse weather conditions or from war-like conditions. In 1941-1942, during WWII, we did not have a famine in Greece because of weather conditions but because of the German occupation. Those conditions were of a local character, while this verse of the Apocalypse (6:8), speaks of famine that will have a worldwide dimension. One might think that a drought in Europe will be isolated and also think that it will rain in Africa or

³ This lesson was taught on November 1, 1981.

⁴ In 2014 the population of China is 1,390,510,630

America, but these famines are not isolated; they are of worldwide dimensions.

Let us look at what Revelation says. You will see that I take parallel elements from different chapters so that we may have a full picture of the entire book, even though as we arrive we will see these points in more detail. *And a third of the waters turned into wormwood* (8:11). [Wormwood is *absinthos* in Greek - *absinthian* in English]. As you know this is the herb rue. I do not know if you are aware that the herb *rue absinthian* is a poisonous plant that has an extremely bitter, very pungent odor. Its leaves are grayish-green with tiny grains which, when ground in your hands will make them smell dreadful.⁵ *A third of the waters became wormwood*. They became bitter, as wormwood is bitter, as rue is bitter.

And many men died from the water because it was made bitter (8:11). Why then would waters turn bitter? We cannot say for sure if this one-third is literal or figurative. However, I suspect that it is not figurative. It is a specific number. It is not allegorical. The same train of thought could be applied to the army of two hundred million (9:16). This number would have been inconceivable to the Evangelist's contemporary readers. An army of two hundred million could not have been demographically supported a thousand years ago, so that would necessitate an allegorical interpretation. However, based on today's demographics, an army of two hundred million people does not prohibit a literal interpretation.

In the same way people today may ask if it is possible for *one third of the waters* to become infected, bitter, and thus unfit to drink and unfit for irrigation. If one takes into consideration the extent of the oceans and compares it to the rest of the earth, it is much greater, isn't it? What would we say about one-third of the rivers, waters, and oceans becoming unfit? We would say that the number one-third must be a set number. Again, two thousand years ago people could not envision such numbers. Today, with the advent of nuclear energy and the pollution of the environment, not only could *one third of the waters* be infected, but also the entire ocean and all the rivers can be polluted. Comparing and analyzing these two numerical issues, an army two hundred million strong and one third of the waters, is why I suspect, and I don't know if I am correct, that the *one third of the waters* that will be infected is not a figurative number. I believe it is a literal and specific number.

Now, if it is the case that *one third of the waters* will be affected, how will we be able to live or provide irrigation for our crops? This is why famines are approaching. Let me give you a small perfectly local example from here in our town in Stomio, Larisa, here in Greece. Stomio has many mollusks, many indeed. The reefs are covered with beautiful mussels. I assure you that we like them very much. Moreover, from time to time we would go out and collect mussels. Friends of ours

⁵ Absinthe is liquor made from, among other things, wormwood (rue). It is said to have a bitter, licorice flavor and is greenish/chartreuse in color. Wormwood was used for making liquor that had narcotic properties. The consumption of Absinthe was associated with hallucinations, delirium, madness and even death. It was outlawed in the United States in 1912, but it has since been legalized.

from the village gave us mussels that we ate with great appreciation. Of course, from time to time people would tell me, "Ah Father, do not eat the mussels because they have one hundred times more lead in them than the fish." They are even considered measuring gauges of lead in the water as they have become contaminated by the pollution that falls into the Thermaikos Gulf.

At some point, I read that the Thermaikos Gulf is indeed extremely polluted and that mussels are very dangerous to eat. Then, someone brought us five kilos of mussels, as fresh and as appetizing as they could be. We looked at them - we stared at them - we felt like the mythical Midas. Yet, we said that we could not eat them and we threw them away! Do you believe this? We saw them, we craved them, but we threw them away. This is what we will suffer. We will not be able to put anything into our mouths because everything will be contaminated. This is terrible. Here is how the new famines may come upon us. I think now that this is rather easy to understand. Many famines have occurred throughout history. This particular type of famine, with our contemporary conditions of environmental contamination, was never experienced by previous generations. This is precisely what has been prophesied, and I believe it is worthy of prophecy.

In addition, the text refers to death as a natural consequence of starvation and hunger, such as the pestilence of Black Death. Of course, humanity has always had infectious diseases, pestilence and plagues, e.g., epidemics of influenza, like the "Spanish" flu of 1917. The Spanish Flu, by the way, claimed more lives than WWI. [Some current estimates of deaths due to "Spanish" flu range from 50-100 million.] Certainly, we have had many such deadly plagues, rampant epidemics, which mankind cannot control. Why then does the Lord prophesy here specifically about plagues? It seems that the question points to heretofore impossible illnesses that humanity had never thought possible which would be prevalent on earth.⁶ It also seems as if many of these illnesses and the world wars began in the twentieth century. Although many illnesses are infectious, they seem to sweep through our country and then end. Then we read that the same illnesses pass through Africa and Asia and then end. These bouts last roughly two years, I believe, annihilating many and then fade away. Afterwards, people have no illnesses except the common ones.

The first of these apocalyptic illnesses most common in the twentieth century is neurosis or nervous debility. There is a special prophecy of this disease in Deuteronomy, *You will become frantic, mad*. Look at this phrase, *And you shall grope at noonday, as a blind man gropes in darkness (28:28)*.⁷ The second most common illnesses are heart-related and the third are cancers. I was astonished to read that out of three

⁶ These new diseases can very well be the outcome of our scientific "progress" in the recent success of recombinant DNA, providing the ability to alter the pathogenicity of viruses and contribute to human mortality via biological weapons. Biological weapons (BWs) deliver toxins and microorganisms such as viruses and bacteria, so as to deliberately inflict disease among people, animals, and agriculture. Biological attacks can result in destruction of crops, temporarily discomforting a small community, killing large numbers of people, or other outcomes.

⁷ This is characteristic of advanced cases of Parkinson's and Alzheimer diseases most prevalent in the twentieth century.

Africans, two have some form of cancer such as skin cancer, which is not really that deadly, unless I am mistaken because I'm not a doctor. If we have doctors here in this audience, may they forgive me if I say something that is imprecise. However, I believe there are some forms of cancer that are benign. They do not necessarily kill a person. I mean to say that in this realm, we have the spreading of diseases such as these that we cannot control in spite of the progress that science has made. Could the people of previous generations have imagined the spread of nervous and psychological disorders to this extent? Could they have meditated on or pondered this? Thus, we could also say here that this prophecy stands firmly justified when the Lord speaks of illnesses.⁸

To continue, the opening of the fourth seal refers to the beasts of the earth as the fourth menace. Of course, the beasts of the earth have always existed. However, the point in question here is an extraordinary one. By beasts of the earth, do we mean that lions, bears, tigers, and snakes will abound in numbers, enter our cities to bite and kill us? We must keep in mind that the beasts are sent because of apostasy or rebellion against God. This is a plague. In fact, animals turn against men even though they were created to serve men; this is a plague in itself.

And I will send upon you, says God, the wild beasts of the earth and they will devour you. And your own animals will destroy you. I will make you few in number, because of these beasts, and your streets will become desolate. (Leviticus 26:22). A verse of the prophet Ezekiel sheds much light on the nature of these apocalyptic beasts. *For thus says the Lord God, How much more when I send upon Jerusalem my fourscore acts of judgment, sword, famine, evil beasts, and pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast! (Ezekiel 14:21)* Since both humans and animals will be destroyed, it seems that these will not be only the known beasts of the forests, the lion, the tiger, and so on. These *evil beasts* are far worse than lions. As an initial step, let us consider the great increase in various insects such as flies and mosquitoes. These insects are carriers of diseases and can truly be characterized as *beasts*.⁹ They can truly deliver a nasty blow to humanity. These insects also destroy agriculture and livestock.

There are other types of evil beasts to consider, as I believe that the terrible beasts sent by God are microbes and germs. Who created germs? Microbes and germs did not come into existence only recently. Microbes existed from the time that God created all things. These are microorganisms, but He reserved them for the punishment of the transgressors and apostates of His law. Remember Saint Peter says, *God is keeping fire inside of matter (2 Peter 3:10-18)*. This is important, be attentive here: God is keeping fire inside of matter that will be released to destroy the ungodly. The heavens and the earth are kept in store, reserved for fire until the

⁸ In 2014 we hear of millions of children (+/-6.4) being given Ritalin (methylphenidate), and other drugs, similar to "speed" to control their ADD/ADHD (their behavior). Parents also take these medicines. Some users sell their personal prescriptions to others who then use these drugs (including by crushing the capsule and snorting it) to get "high" and to achieve higher test results, etc.

⁹ Viruses like Lyme Disease, West Nile Virus, Malaria, Yellow, Typhoid and Valley Fever to name a few.

Day of Judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

If we were to analyze Saint Peter's second letter we would be amazed because it clearly points to the use of thermonuclear energy.¹⁰ Today we know that matter contains energy, tremendous energy. It seems that God will remove this energy that is inherent within matter and stored there. He will use it to punish the ungodly. As Revelation, Isaiah the prophet, and others say, all of creation will change and become brand new at the same time, from the old heavens to the new heavens, from the old earth to the new earth. So the verb *keep, has kept*, can also be used for bacteria, which of course, God created. Bacteria have been kept in store for the punishment of the disrespectful, the unfaithful, and the apostates of God's will. Initially, they were not commanded to harm or punish mankind, but now God Himself issues that command.

Other types of evil beasts that cannot be seen with the naked eye are also microorganisms. Today we call them viruses. They are almost invisible. Please forgive me if I make some mistakes because I am not a microbiologist but as viruses are not visible we are curious and after we've been ill we ask each other: "What happened to you? - The doctor said I had a virus." Now, what does a virus mean? It is not a trivial question at all. By experimenting, we find some helpful medicine, but we do not know exactly what these microorganisms are. Now these viruses come attack us, and worst of all, these things seem to wrestle us to the ground. What a smack for some of our arrogant egoists who stood up on the toes of their feet and lifted up their necks to declare to heaven that there is no God. What irony! Arrogant mankind drops down dead, killed by an invisible speck of a beast called a bacteria or a virus. My friends, it seems that this matter is a subject of prophecy as well.

We must also mention that it is no coincidence that in the opening of the fourth seal, there is a plague that makes increasing use of the number four: fourth seal, fourth living creature, four plagues, one-fourth of mankind will perish. This is not accidental. Again, I will repeat what we have emphasized from the very beginning, that the fulfillment of the four plagues is cyclical, with intensification towards the final times. Moreover, it seems that the twentieth century is the beginning of this intensification. For this reason, let us be forever vigilant, lest we are at the beginning of these very dreadful events.

Now we arrive, with God's help, at the fifth seal. The fifth seal is in the sixth chapter (9-11). The opening of the first four seals seems to have given the impression that the just and pious people have perished. Do you remember the first horse that goes out joyfully to spread the gospel throughout the earth, followed by those opposed to God and the ungodly forces that come to make war against the gospel? Within all this turmoil, confusion, and infliction of plagues, the impression

¹⁰ *Waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God because of which the heavens being on fire will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire!* (2 Peter 3:12). Normal fire does not melt mountains or evaporate bodies of water. The elder associates this meltdown in 2 Peter with the total release of nuclear energy embedded in all elements which will bring about the complete destruction and renewal of the universe.

is given that the just and pious have been defeated and obliterated. Indeed, where are the holy ones today? Where are the Christians?¹¹

It is the perception of the present and secular world that just and pious people are undesirable. Yet, my friends, it is perhaps the just and pious who suffer hardships, endure persecution and suffer martyrdom – even to the point of spilling their blood – all the while living in joyful exhilaration in paradise! In fact, this is captured beautifully in the second and third chapters of the Wisdom of Solomon. Consider this very small and indicative portion. *The souls of the just are in God's hand and hardships will not approach them. In the eyes of the foolish and of disrespectful people, it seemed as though they died and their departure was considered an evil. Their journey from this life was considered destruction and yet they are in peace (3:1-3).* How beautiful. It is exactly this truth that we are given in the Wisdom of Solomon that we are also given at the opening of the fifth seal in the sixth chapter.

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 that they held. 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?" 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 (5:8-14).

This is the opening of the fifth seal. There is a noticeable difference in the opening of the fifth seal compared to the openings of the first four and the last two seals. The opening of the sixth and seventh seals will return to the pattern established by the first four, but the opening of the fifth seal serves as an intermission, or interlude, to help the reader catch his breath from the images of gloom portrayed by the opening of the previous seals. This is called a diapsalm and is common in the Psalms. I will give you an example in order to make this clear to those of you who watch television, and you do watch television, don't you? I believe you do.¹² While watching a film, or program on television, suddenly there is an interruption and several advertisements are inserted. Then the advertisements stop and the film continues. These interruptions, the advertisements, have nothing to do with the theme of the main story. In literary form, this is called a diapsalm and in music, it is called an intermezzo, a musical interlude that has nothing to do with the main piece. In the same way, the opening of the fifth seal bears no relation to the previous seals. It is some kind of an intermission, or interlude.

Having said all this, there is a slight but important difference in Revelation. It certainly provides a respite because the reader or listener, when reading or hearing

¹¹ People's perception of Christianity has been methodically altered in this media-controlled century. Christians are portrayed as narrow-minded fundamentalists or as inflexible, useless and undesirable according to the paradigm of the new age. In this environment the just and pious suffer hardships and persecutions.

¹² There is a tone of loving reproach here from the elder who repeatedly admonished his audience to do away with television. Of course he was not very successful in this area since most of our Christians are very much attached to their television.

the opening of the four seals can become discouraged. One may wonder what evil thing awaits us next. Where is the apex of evil anyway? However, the next moment the scenery suddenly changes. The subject changes and the reader or the listener sees or hears something that offers much relief. It is the appearance of the martyrs those who sacrificed themselves for Christ and who now ask something of Christ. Regardless of the definition of the interlude as something unrelated to the main subject, the appearance of the martyrs is not totally irrelevant to the first four seals. This is because an answer is given to them regarding what will happen. They are told that others will be added to those who have been martyred, and that they will be justified. This interlude is primarily a response to the previous martyrs. They are told that the gospel was preached, that although those opposing the gospel took their earthly life, they are not to be afraid! Behold, you are in paradise, you have nothing to be afraid of. The holy ones, the just and pious, are never lost. They are forever present.

The fifth seal is related to the previous four seals by the brilliant witness of Christian martyrdom. I don't know what kind of hymn could adequately provide an accurate tribute to the ideal of Christian martyrdom. Only the Holy Spirit can offer a hymn worthy of Christian martyrdom. Saint Paul offers us such a hymn in Hebrews (Chapter 11) where he interweaves an unparalleled encomium of faith and martyrdom. Nevertheless, the Lord preannounced the reality of martyrdom. *Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad for great is your reward in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you* (Matthew 5: 11-12). Martyrdom is a reality. It is an essential identifying characteristic of the true gospel.

This usually means that any gospel that is not persecuted is not genuine.¹³ Such a gospel is false. It is not Christian. Persecution and gospel exist together. Any Christian teaching that is disliked, meaning it causes irritation or anger to people who idolize their passions and refuse to repent, is genuine.¹⁴ A teaching that pleases the ears, calms the conscience, and makes people happy creating the impression that everything is wonderful is most likely counterfeit. Saint Paul uses the Greek verb *knitho* to refer to sermons that entertain or are pleasant to the ears.¹⁵ People who talk of peace, suddenly find war and destruction (which is an expression that belongs to the Lord and is not one of mine). *But take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come*

¹³ Such is the new age gospel of syncretism, ecumenism, and inclusivism. The world embraces an abstract god who conforms to its passions.

¹⁴ According to some modernist Orthodox theologians, "A view that claims the only truth is imperialist." But Christ our Lord *did* claim the only truth! He *is* the way! Not one of the ways, or one of truths, or one method that leads to life. For more on these trendy dangerous theologians, read the letter of Metropolitan Pavlos of Glyfada on Contextual or Post Patristic Theology. www.saintnicodemos.org under e-files.

¹⁵ These sermons generally avoid the unpleasanties of Christian struggle, asceticism, the warfare against passions, demons, the possibility of hell, and they stress philanthropy, good ethics, and polity without the constant need of repentance.

upon you suddenly like a snare (Luke 21:34). The prophets did not always say pleasant things. The words of the Lord are not very pleasant when, for example, He said, Why then has this people turned away in perpetual backsliding? They hold fast to deceit, they refuse to return. I have given heed and listened, but they have not spoken aright; no man repents of his wickedness, saying, ‘What have I done?’ Therefore I will give their wives to others and their fields to conquerors, because from the least to the greatest every one is greedy for unjust gain; from prophet to priest every one deals falsely (Jeremiah 8). These are terribly unpleasant words, but it was – and is – a genuine prophecy. Very soon after this prophecy was uttered the Babylonians came and centuries of captivity began for the Israelites.

At the same time, persecution constitutes an eschatological element; it is a sign of the end of times. Persecution and martyrdom will escalate geometrically towards the end of times.¹⁶ Thus, it constitutes an eschatological element. This is why the Lord says, *Then they will deliver you up to tribulation, and put you to death; and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake* (Matthew 24:9). When we refer to the eschatological element we mean that in those last days, we will have a more condensed, a more frequent occurrence of martyrdom. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem writes, “Who then is blessed? The blessed is he who martyrs in piety for the sake of Christ in those days. Greater than all other martyrs, I believe, are the martyrs of those days, who battle against the instruments of Satan and against the Antichrist himself who bears the face of Satan.”¹⁷ Thus, one of the signs of the final days will be a more frequent occurrence of martyrdom.

Christian martyrdom is one of the central themes of the Revelation. If you remove the element of martyrdom from this book, you will no longer have the holy book of the Revelation.¹⁸ Thus, let it be known that with every step we take, we will encounter martyrdom. In the course of their Christian development Christians will encounter martyrdom. If they truly desire to lift the banner of Christ, to bear the cross, the symbol of Christ, they will face martyrdom by a world that idolizes rest, comfort, and carnal pleasure. The cross of Christ is the symbol of martyrdom and the symbol of everyone who wishes to be called a Christian.

¹⁶ The secular and atheist media has been setting the stage for this for a number of decades. There has been a relentless war against prayer, against the Ten Commandments, against Christmas, against Pascha, and against Christianity and Christ in general. The ACLU and other civil liberties groups do not seek freedom from religion. They want to be free of the Christian Gospel.

¹⁷ Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical lecture 15,17. “Who then is the blessed man, that shall at that time devoutly witness for Christ? For I say that the Martyrs of that time excel all martyrs. For the Martyrs hitherto have wrestled with men only; but in the time of Antichrist they shall do battle with Satan in his own person.”

¹⁸ This is the plight of the adherents of the pre-millennial rapture. Christ will somehow air lift them to spare them from the Great Tribulation and the Antichrist. They cannot possibly imagine a gospel of pain and suffering since they have been taught the false gospel of comfort and prosperity from the false prophets of this age.

