

## Revelation Chapter 5 - 6:2

### An Interpretation

Charles Dailey © 2015

Revision of 4/2015 NASB Printed 1/10/2026

#### Introduction:

##### Willie Wallace Speck:

The episode of the sealed book is one of the most sublime imageries in this book of exalted grandeur and pageantry and is very meaningful to Christians. After describing the glory, authority, and power of the rule of heaven and the worship there, John's attention is drawn to a sealed book in the hand of him who sits on the throne. It probably was a scroll, like the books of that era, but of seven parts; each portion was locked with a separate seal. This was the book of the future and being in the hand of God and completely covered with writing indicates the future is under God's control and fully known to him.

**(1) I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals.**

- William Barclay:

When a roll was finished, it was fastened with threads and the threads were sealed at the knots. The one ordinary document **sealed with seven seals** was a will. Under Roman law the seven witnesses to a will sealed it with their seals, and it could only be opened when all seven, or their legal representatives, were present. The roll may be what we might describe as God's will, his final settlement of the affairs of the universe.



**Discuss:** How does the artwork match verse 1?

**(2) And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?"**



- Barclay:  
In this case the **angel** had to be **strong** so that the challenge of his **voice** might reach throughout the universe. His summons was that anyone **worthy** of the task should come forward and **open the book**.
- When we are seeking to interpret this idea, it is well to remember that it is vision and poetry. It would be a great mistake to take it literally. It does not mean that everything is settled long ago and that we are in the grip of an inescapable fate. What it does mean is that God has a plan for the universe; and that the purpose of God will be in the end worked out. No need to fret.

**(3) And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it.**

- Only Deity can **open the book** of the future. There was no **one** on **earth**. There were no angels in **heaven**. There were no spirits in some other domain. Such a disappointment because John had been invited into the visionary scene to learn about the future.

**Discuss:** Are ways of learning about the future generally forbidden for believers?

**(4) Then I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it; (5) and one of the elders said to me, "Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals."**

- John knew full well that he was writing these visions for his suffering brethren on the mainland. Weren't they going to learn about the future of their persecution? This possibility brought profuse tears to the prophet.
- Some of our tears are because we do not see the larger picture. So with John. Jesus was the answer.
- Jesus was and is **the Lion**, the King of the forest and his heritage was anchored in the **tribe of Judah**. His lineage was from **David** the King and the Messiah had been promised to David's line. This is the message of Matthew, chapter 1.
- This **Lion** had won battles with evil in the past. John 16:33. Now He has earned the right to reveal the future.

(6) And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth.

- In the very center of the heavenly vision appeared a **Lamb**. John had identified this **Lamb** during his ministry. John 1:29,36. There was something about it that reminded John of a previous death.
- **Horns** on an animal symbolize its power and this **Lamb** had **seven horns** - perfect power. **Eyes** related to knowledge and insight and this **Lamb** also had total insight. No learning curve was necessary. Connection is also made to the **Spirit** of **God** and His totality.

(7) And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.

- We have encountered a problem with the symbols that John is reporting. What is this Lamb doing taking a scroll? **Albert Barnes** explains it with this interpretation:

“And I looked, and lo there was one in the midst of the space occupied by the throne, by the living creatures, and by the elders, who, in aspect, and in the emblems that represented his work on the earth, was spotless, meek, and innocent as a lamb; one with marks on his person which brought to remembrance the fact that he had been slain for the sins of the world, and yet one who had most striking symbols of power and intelligence, and who was therefore worthy to approach and take the book from the hand of Him that sat on the throne.”

(8) When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

- **B.W. Johnson:**

The deliverance to him of the book was a signal for the four living creatures and the elders to fall before the Lamb, as they had fallen before the throne. They recognize in the fact that he has the book "that all power in heaven and earth is given into his hands." Hence, they offer him homage as Divine.

- The **harp** here is a 10 stringed instrument. The Greek word is related to our English guitar. Its figurative use here signifies praise being offered to God. The **bowls** represent the **prayers of the saints** back on the mainland of Asia and around the world. **Prayer** and praise.

**Discuss:** How important are our prayers to the Lord as seen in this verse?

**(9) And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.**

- The *old songs* of 4:8 and 4:11 were about the eternal nature of God and his power to create. The **new song** is about the Lamb's ability to open the seals because of his sacrifice and total world redemption.

**(10) "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."**

- **Hinds:**

As certainly as the church existed at the time John was writing, just that certain had it been made a kingdom. The saved in the church had also been made priests. Since the church is described as a tabernacle or temple, those who render service in it are called priests. That relationship was in existence then. (1 Peter 2: 5.) This is not denied.

**(11) Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, (12) saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing."**

- **Barnes:**

The inhabitants of heaven unite with the representatives of the redeemed church in ascribing honor to the Lamb of God. The design is to show that there is universal sympathy and harmony in heaven, and that all worlds will unite in ascribing honor to the Lamb of God.

- It goes without saying that the headcount is not to be taken literally. It's like saying that the number could not be counted. There were 100 million plus a few more thousands of thousands not included in the original number.
- **Barclay:**  
The song of the living creatures and of the elders told of the work of Christ in his death; now the angels sing of the possessions of Christ in his glory. Seven great possessions belong to the Risen Lord.
- Power, riches, wisdom, might, honor, glory and blessing. What category is left?

**Discuss:** Try to describe each the seven categories listed.

**(13) And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." (14) And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped.**

- **Willie Wallace Speck:**

The cherubim and elders lead off in praise and adoration to our Redeemer. The new song they sang is redemption's sweet story. It is a song that will be forever new and sung anew in each heart that experiences so great a salvation, a song the redeemed thousands of every nation will never tire of singing around the great white throne.

The beautifully dramatic action of chapter five is such as to cause tears of gratitude to well up in the eyes of him who has experienced salvation. The One on the throne holds in his right hand the book containing the future; the proclamation of the strong angel to find one worthy to break the seals of the book; John weeping because of his anxiety concerning the future; the comforting assurance that One had prevailed as a conqueror against great odds to open the book; the appearance of the Lamb bearing the marks of slaughter and the symbols of omnipotence and omniscience, taking the book from the hand of him who sat on the throne; the prostration in attitudes of adoration of those nearest the throne singing the wonderful story of

man's salvation followed by countless thousands of angels singing doxologies in praise of Christ's victory. John heard every creature in heaven, on the earth, and under the earth join in the praise of him who had earned the right to rule the destiny of man.

## **End of Chapter 5**

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE PROPHECIES**

Many of our fulfillments to this portion of Revelation are drawn from the magnificent, six volume work of historian Edward Gibbon. By reading his Wikipedia entry, it should be easy to see that he was not a special friend of Christianity. We have drawn from his work on *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1789) because it so closely parallels what commentators of the Historicist school of interpretation see as the meaning of the Biblical text.

#### **Willie Wallace Speck writes:**

Albert Barnes frequently suggests when making application of a symbol that if Gibbon had designed to write a commentary on the book of Revelation, he could not have written the facts of history to describe John's symbols better, or if John had lived after the period of time described by his symbols and had desired to represent it by an expressive symbol, he could not have chosen them to characterize the times more clearly.

Who is to say that God has not used Gibbon as he did Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander the Great, and many others through the ages to render service unwittingly in carrying out his plan?

Our method here has been to excerpt those sections from Gibbon that vividly mesh with John's visions.

### **THE FIRST SEAL**

**(6:1) Then I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, "Come."**

- The Lamb began opening the scroll of the future, one section at a time. One of the big four thundered **Come**. Pay attention, John!



(2) I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.

● **B.W. Johnson:**

(1) The horse was reserved for war. Hence this symbol points to a period of war. . . .

(2) The white color. Whenever a Roman General was given a triumph his chariot was drawn by milk white horses. Commentators are agreed that the white horse signifies prosperous, victorious wars.

(3) The rider. His significance is due to his crown and the white horse he rides. It is enough to state here that he represents either some conqueror, or a conquering age.

(4) The crown is the "garland crown" (stephanos), given as a reward for victory in battle, for great achievements or for victory in games.

**Discussion:** What items in the artwork match the text we are reading?

● **Gibbon the secular historian:**

In the second century of the Christian era, the empire of Rome comprehended the fairest part of the earth, and the most civilized portion of mankind. The frontiers of that extensive monarchy were guarded by ancient

renown and disciplined valor. The gentle but powerful influence of laws and manners had gradually cemented the union of the provinces. Their peaceful inhabitants enjoyed and abused the advantages of wealth and luxury. The image of a free constitution was preserved with decent reverence: the Roman senate appeared to possess the sovereign authority, and devolved on the emperors all the executive powers of government. During a happy period of more than fourscore years, the public administration was conducted by the virtue and abilities of Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, and the two Antonines.

If a man were called to fix the period in the history of the world, during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would, without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus. The vast extent of the Roman empire was governed by absolute power, under the guidance of virtue and wisdom.

The armies were restrained by the firm but gentle hand of four successive emperors, whose characters and authority commanded involuntary respect. The forms of the civil administration were carefully preserved by Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, and the Antonines, who delighted in the image of liberty, and were pleased with considering themselves as the accountable ministers of the laws.

- Commentator **Fred Miller** summarizes the events:

The period immediately following Domitian introduces a century of peace called the *Pax Romana* or translated the *Peace of Rome*. The emperors of the period are known in history books as the "Five Good Emperors." Marcus Aurelius was a philosopher whose doctrines approached the ethics of Christianity.

The name of emperor Antoninus Pius indicates his inclinations. This period, from 98 to 180 is also characterized by the additions of large border regions to the empire and expansion to the greatest limits ever. If God wanted to picture the period he could not have chosen a better symbol than a white horse and conquest.



The Roman Empire in A.D. 116

**Questions:**

1. The book with seven seals was a wedding certificate. (Verse 1)
2. God the Father was on the throne. (1)
3. John wept because there was no one to open the book. (4)
4. We don't know who the Lion was. (5)
5. How was the lamb slain. Not in text. (6)
6. Prayer and praise were offered to the Lamb. (8)
7. The harp was like a 10 stringed instrument. (8)
8. Salvation at this point was for the Jews only. (9)
9. There was a small and orderly group at the throne. (11)
10. All creatures praised the Father and the Son. (13)
11. The first horse represented victorious war. (6:2)
12. The suggested date of this white horse period is A.D. 98-180 (2)