

CHAPTER 6

INTRODUCTION TO REVELATION 6

This chapter contains the vision of the opening six of the seals of the sealed book, by the Lamb, and of the events following thereupon. The preparation to the vision of the first seal is in (~~Ⓞ~~ Revelation 6:1); the Lamb opens it, John hears a noise like thunder, and one of the living creatures bids him come and see; upon which he saw a horse, of a white colour, and a rider on it, who is described by a bow and crown given him, and by the victory he obtained, (~~Ⓞ~~ Revelation 6:2); at the opening of the second seal, the second living creature invites him as before; and he sees a horse, of a red colour, with a rider on it, described by his power, to take peace from the earth, and suffer men to kill one another, and by a great sword given him, (~~Ⓞ~~ Revelation 6:3,4); at the opening of the third seal, the third living creature addresses him in like manner as the other; and he sees a horse, of a black colour, and a rider on it, with a pair of balances in his hands; and hears a voice from among the four living creatures, expressing dearness of provisions, and a charge not to hurt the oil and wine, (~~Ⓞ~~ Revelation 6:5,6); at the opening of the fourth seal, the fourth living creature speaks to John, as the rest; and he sees a horse, of a pale colour, and a rider on it, described by his name, Death, by his follower, hell, or the grave, and by his power to destroy a fourth part of the earth with the sword, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts, (~~Ⓞ~~ Revelation 6:7,8); at the opening of the fifth seal, John saw the souls of the martyrs, under the altar; hears their cry for vengeance; observes that white robes were given them, and that they were bid to be quiet until the slaying and suffering time of their brethren was over, (~~Ⓞ~~ Revelation 6:9-11); at the opening of the sixth seal follow an earthquake, strange changes in the heavens, the sun becomes black as sackcloth, the moon becomes as blood, the stars fall, and the heaven itself departs, and every island and mountain are moved out of their places, (~~Ⓞ~~ Revelation 6:12-14), the kings and great men of the earth, and even all sorts, of men, upon this, fly to the rocks and mountains to hide them from the face of God the Father, that sits upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, the opener of the sealed book; giving this as a reason for it, that

the time of his great wrath was come, and none could stand before him, (⁶⁶⁵Revelation 6:15-17).

Ver. 1. *And I saw, when the Lamb opened one of the seals,* etc.] Of the sealed book; one of the seven seals of it, as read the Alexandrian copy, the Vulgate Latin, and the Oriental versions, and the Complutensian edition; that is, the first; so “one” is used for first in (⁰⁰⁰⁵Genesis 1:5 ⁴⁰⁰Matthew 28:1); and as appears from the following seals being called second, third, fourth, etc. These seals express events to be fulfilled; and therefore cannot respect the steps towards, and the signs of Jerusalem's destruction, and that itself, which had been accomplished some years before the vision of the seals; and which vision would have been needless: and these are called seals, because they were sealed among God's treasure, or were resolved on, and decreed by him; and because they were hidden and unknown until they came to pass; and when they were come to pass, they were pledges of what God would do in the destruction of Rome Papal, as here in the destruction of Rome Pagan: for these seals, at least the first six of them, concern the Pagan empire, and the state of the church in it; and are so many gradual steps to the ruin of it, and to the advancing and increasing of the kingdom of Christ; and these, with the seven trumpets, which the last seal introduces, reach from the times of the apostles to the end of time, as appears from (⁶⁰⁰Revelation 10:6,7). Now the opening of these seals is the revealing of the events signified by them, and expressed in the hieroglyphics here made use of, and the fulfilment of them;

and I heard as it were the noise of thunder; a voice very loud and sonorous, exciting the attention of John:

one of the four beasts saying, come and see; this was the of the four living creatures, for the word one is used in the same sense as in the foregoing clause; and this creature was like to a lion, (⁶⁰⁰Revelation 4:7); wherefore his voice was loud, as when a lion roars, (⁶⁰⁰Revelation 10:3), and is fitly compared to thunder: there is no need to look out for any particular person, as intended by this living creature; or to conclude him to be Peter, as Grotius, who was dead before this seal was opened; or Quadratus, Aristides, and Justin Martyr, who courageously appeared in the Christian cause, and made very excellent apologies for it, with success, since these lived under the second seal; it is enough in general to understand the ministers of the Gospel, who, as sons of thunder, loudly and publicly preached the Gospel, and, as lions, boldly and bravely defended, and took

notice of the power and providence of God in succeeding their ministry, and in weakening the kingdom of Satan in the Gentile world, and particularly in the Roman empire; and therefore are represented as calling to John to “come and see”; observe and take notice of the following hieroglyphic, representing the success of the Gospel ministry, *yzj at*, “come and see”, is a phrase often used by the Jews, to stir up attention to what is about to be said; (see Gill on “~~4046~~John 1:46”).

Ver. 2. *And I saw, and behold a white horse*, etc.] Representing the ministration of the Gospel in the times of the apostles, which were just now finishing, John being the last of them, who saw this vision; and the “horse” being a swift, majestic, and warlike creature, and fearless of opposition and war, may design the swift progress of the Gospel in the world, the majesty, power, and authority with which it came, and opposition it met with, and which was bore down before it; and its “white” colour may denote the purity of Gospel truths, the peace it proclaims, the joy brings, and the triumph that attends it, on account of victories obtained by it, and which is afterwards suggested: white horses were used in triumphs, in token of victory ^{f157}; a white horse, in a dream, is a good sign with the Jews ^{f158}; and Astrampsyclus says ^{f159}, a vision of white horses is an apparition of angels; and so one of those angels which the Jews suppose to have the care of men, and the preservation of them, is said ^{f160} to ride by him, and at his right hand, upon a white horse; but the rider here is not an angel, but the head of all principality and power:

and he that sat on him had a bow; with arrows; the bow is the word of the Gospel, and the arrows the doctrines of it; (see ~~3800~~Habakkuk 3:9 ~~4955~~Psalms 45:5); so called for their swift motion, sudden and secret striking, piercing, and penetrating nature, reaching to the very hearts of men; laying open the secret thoughts and iniquity thereof; wounding, and causing them to fall, and submit themselves to the sceptre of Christ's kingdom:

and a crown was given unto him; by God the Father; expressive of Christ's regal power and authority, of his honour and dignity, and of his victories and conquests:

and he went forth, conquering and to conquer; in the ministration of the Gospel, which went forth, as did all the first ministers of it, from Jerusalem, to the several parts of the world; from the east, on which side of the throne was the first living creature, who called upon John to come and see this

sight, as the standard of the tribe of Judah, which had a lion upon it, was on the east side of the camp of Israel; and out of Zion went forth the word of the Lord, which was very victorious, both among Jews and Gentiles, to the conversion of thousands of them, and to the planting of a multitude of churches among them, and to the setting up and advancing the kingdom of Christ; but inasmuch as yet all things are not made subject to him, he is represented as going forth in the Gospel, still conquering, and to conquer, what remain to be conquered: that Christ is designed by him that sat on the white horse, and is thus described, is evident from (~~691~~ Revelation 19:11-13); with which compare (~~195B~~ Psalm 45:3,4), though as this emblem may respect the Roman empire, the white horse may be an emblem of the strong, warlike, and conquering state of it; and the rider which a bow and crown may design Vespasian, whom Christ made use of as an instrument to conquer his enemies the Jews, and who, in consequence thereof, had the imperial crown put upon him; and it may be further observed, that though his conquest of them was a very great one, yet they afterwards rose up in the empire, in great numbers, rebelled, and did much mischief, when they were entirely conquered by Trajan and Hadrian, who seem to be intended in the next seal.

Ver. 3. *And when he had opened the second seal*, etc.] Of the sealed book; that is, the Lamb, as before:

I heard the second beast say, come and see; this living creature was the ox, whose situation was on the west side of the throne, as the standard of Ephraim, on which was an ox, was on the west of the camp of Israel; no mention is made of the noise of thunder, as before, the voice of the ox being lower than that of the lion; and this perhaps may point out a decrease in the Gospel ministry; to fix on any particular person, as, with Grotius, the Evangelist Matthew, because he says, (~~1247~~ Matthew 24:7), nation shall rise against nation, which carries in it some likeness to what is said at the opening of this seal; or, as with Brightman, Justin Martyr, whose second apology was not regarded by the emperor, is mere conjecture; the ministers of the Gospel are intended who lived under this seal, who, though they might not be strong and courageous like the lion, or their predecessors, yet were like the ox, laborious in preaching, and patient in suffering; and these are represented in this vision as inviting John to behold and observe the following hieroglyphic.

Ver. 4. *And there went out another horse, [that was] red,* etc.] Which may be an emblem either of the suffering state of the church, being answerable to the Smyrnaean one, as the purity and power of the Gospel, represented in the former seal, may answer to the Ephesine church; or else of those contentions and divisions occasioned among men through the Gospel, which, though of a peaceable nature, yet, through the corruption and depravity of men, brings not peace, but a sword; or rather of those bloody wars within the period of time signified by this seal, which came as punishments on the enemies of the Gospel:

and [power] was given to him that sat thereon; not the Lord Jesus Christ, who is said to ride on a red horse, (³⁰⁰⁸Zechariah 1:8); though indeed he presides over his church and people, and takes the care of them when the most desolating judgments are in the earth, and causes all things to work together for good; nor Satan, the red dragon, who was a murderer from the beginning, and delights in effusion of blood, and in stirring up of men to destroy one another, whenever he is permitted; but Trajan the Roman emperor, in whose reign John died; and who came from the west, and was a Spaniard, as was Hadrian his successor, who may be joined with him; which was the side, or quarter, on which the living creature was that spoke to John; and in the times of these emperors were very bloody and civil wars: wherefore power is said to be given him,

to take peace from the earth; that is, from the Roman empire, which is sometimes called the whole world; and which could not have been done, if power had not been given from him who makes peace, and creates evil:

and that they should kill one another: which refers not to the havoc and slaughter which the Jews made one of another at the destruction of Jerusalem, but to the Jews murdering of the Greeks and Romans, and the Romans the Jews, in the times of the above emperors. In Trajan's time, the Jews who dwelt about Cyrene, under the conduct of one Andrew, fell upon the Romans and Greeks, and killed many, fed on their flesh, ate their bowels, besmeared themselves with their blood, and covered themselves with their skins; many of them they sawed asunder, from the crown of the head down to the middle; many of them they threw to the wild beasts, and many of them they forced to fight among themselves, till they had destroyed above two hundred and twenty thousand men; in Egypt and Cyprus they committed the same kind of outrages, their leader being one Artemion, where two hundred and forty thousand men perished^{f161}; Lybia

was almost emptied of men by them; so that Hadrian, the successor of Trajan, was obliged to send colonies to repeople the places they had made desolate. But at length they were overcome by Lupus, governor of Egypt, and by Marcius Turbo, and by Lucius, whom Trajan sent against them ^{f162}, and destroyed great numbers of them; and for the space of about fourteen years they were quiet; but in Hadrian's time they rose again, and set one Bar Cochab, a false Messiah, at the head of them, whom they proclaimed king: when Hadrian sent forces against them, and with great difficulty subdued them, took the city Bither, where they were, and destroyed at times five hundred and eighty thousand of them ^{f163}; the Jews say, that he put men, women, and children to death in such numbers, that their blood ran down into the main sea, yea, that a horse might go up to his nose in blood ^{f164}; they say that he destroyed in Bither double the number of those that came out of Egypt, even twelve hundred thousand men ^{f165}; some of their accounts are very extravagant, and exceed all bounds ^{f166}; however, the slaughter was very great, that it may well be said,

and there was given unto him a great sword; to slay men with; though Hadrian on his death bed, amidst his pains, would fain have had a sword given to him to have dispatched his own life, and could not obtain one ^{f167}; the Jews say he destroyed all the land of Judea ^{f168}.

Ver. 5. *And when he had opened the third seal*, etc.] Of the sealed book:

I heard the third beast say, come and see; this living creature was that which was like a man, who was on the south side of the throne, as the standard of Reuben, which had the figure of a man, was on the south side of the camp of Israel; this was not the Apostle Paul, as Grotius thinks, to whom was made a prophecy of a famine in the days of Claudius Caesar; nor Tertullian, who made an apology for the Christians in the times of this seal, as Brightman conjectures; but the ministers of the Gospel, whose voice was neither the voice of the lion nor of the ox, but of a man, which was still lower, but yet they retained their humanity, reasoning prudence, and wisdom; and these are represented as calling upon John to come and see, and take notice of the following hieroglyphic:

and I beheld, and lo a black horse; an emblem either of the afflicted state of the church, still answering to the Smyrnaean one, being black with persecutions, schisms, errors, and heresies, which were many; or particularly of the heresies and heretics of those times, who might be compared to a horse for their pride and ambition, speaking great swelling

words of vanity, and to a black one, for their hidden things of dishonesty, and works of darkness, for the darkness in themselves, and which they spread over others; or rather of a famine, not in a spiritual sense, of hearing of the word, but in a literal sense; (see ~~2007~~ Lamentations 4:7,8 5:10); not what was at the siege of Jerusalem, or in the times of Claudius Caesar, (~~4118~~ Acts 11:28); but in the times of the Emperor Severus, and others, as the historians of those times ^{f169}, and the writings of Tertullian show; when the Heathens ascribed the scarcity that was among them to the wickedness of the Christians ^{f170}, whereas it was a judgment upon them for their persecution of them:

and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand; by whom is meant not some noted heretic, or heretics, who had balances of deceit in their hands to prove their tenets by, such as spurious writings, etc. or who made pretensions to the Scriptures, the balance of the sanctuary, to weigh doctrines in; nor Christ, whose name heretics shrouded themselves under, and professed, and who overruled and made use of their heresies for the good of his people, that they might be made manifest. Mr. Mede thinks that Septimius Severus, the Roman emperor, who came from Africa, from the south, on which side was the living creature that spoke to John, is intended, and in which country black horses were in great esteem; and he was the only African that ever was emperor of Rome before ^{f171}: and the same author thinks, that his having a pair of balances in his hand expresses the strict justice that emperor was famous for; but rather it signifies famine, and such a scarcity as that bread is delivered out by weight to men; (see ~~1836~~ Leviticus 26:26).

Ver. 6. *And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say*, etc.] Not the voice of Agabus to the Apostle Paul, (~~4418~~ Acts 11:28); but rather of Christ, who was in the midst of them, (~~4886~~ Revelation 5:6); the Ethiopic version adds, “as the voice of an eagle”:

a measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; “Choenix”, the measure here used, signifies as much as was sufficient for a man for one day, as a penny was the usual hire of a labourer for a day, (~~4212~~ Matthew 20:2); so a choenix of corn was allowed to each man in Xerxes's army for a day, according to Herodotus ^{f172}; the same quantity for a day was given by the Romans to their shepherds and servants, and is generally said to be about two pounds; according to Agricola it was two pounds and a quarter ^{f173}. This measure was very different; the Attic

choenix was a measure that held three pounds, the Italic choenix four pounds, and the military choenix five pounds, and answers to the Hebrew Kab^{f174}; and in the Septuagint version of (²⁶⁸⁰Ezekiel 45:10,11); it answers to the Bath; and some make it to be the fourth part of a bushel, and others half a bushel^{f175}; the first account of its being about two pounds, and the allowance of a man for a day, seems best to agree with this place: so that this phrase expresses such a scarcity, as that a man's daily wages would be but just enough to buy himself bread, without any thing to eat with it; and when he would have nothing left for clothes, and other things, nor anything for his wife and children:

and [see] that thou hurt not the oil and wine; signifying that this scarcity should fall not upon the superfluities, such as oil and wine, which may be spared, and men can live without; but upon the necessities of life, particularly bread: some render the words, “and be not unjust in the oil and wine”; and so think they refer to the laws of the Roman emperors, in relation to wine and oil, and to the just execution of them, that there might be plenty of them; and others understand them in an allegorical sense, of the principal doctrines of the Gospel, comparable to oil and wine, and which Christ takes care of, that they shall not be hurt and destroyed by heretics and false teachers, even when they prevail the most, and bring on a famine of the word, and when the church is blackened and darkened with them; and indeed these may much better be applied to the Gospel, than, as they are by the Jews, to the law; who frequently say^{f176} that the law is called “oil”, and speak of *hrwt l ç hnyy*, “the wine of the law”^{f177}:

Ver. 7. *And when he had opened the fourth seal*, etc.] Of the seven seals of the sealed book; that is, when the Lamb had opened it, or took it off, as in (⁶⁶⁸⁸Revelation 6:1);

I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, come and see; this living creature was that which was like an eagle, and was on the north side of the throne, answerable to the standard of Dan, which was on the north of the camp of Israel, and had the figure of an eagle upon it; and the opening of this seal begins with Maximinus the Roman emperor, who came from Thrace, far north. This living creature was not James, the brother of our Lord, who had been dead long ago, as Grotius imagines; nor Cyprian, as Brightman thinks, though he lived under this seal; but the ministers of the Gospel in general in the times referred to are intended: and it may denote some decline in the Gospel ministry, that they had not the courage and strength

of the lion, as the first Gospel preachers; nor the patience and laboriousness of the ox, the next set of ministers; nor the solidity and prudence of the man, the ministers that followed them; and yet they retained some degree of light and knowledge, sagacity and penetration, and contempt of the world, signified by the eagle; these invite John in a visionary way to come and see the following hieroglyphic.

Ver. 8. *And I looked, and behold a pale horse*, etc.] An emblem either of the state of the church, pale not with persecution, as some think, for through that it was red; but with the hypocrisy and superstition of many of its members, who were paving the way for the man of sin, and on account of whom the church was grown sickly and dying; or rather this is an emblem of the sickly and dying state of the Pagan Roman empire, through a complication of judgments upon it, hereafter mentioned, as war, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts:

and his name that sat on him was Death; not Satan, who has the power of death, but death itself; who is represented as a person, as he elsewhere is, sometimes as a king, (~~4614~~ Romans 5:14); and as an enemy, (~~4625~~ 1 Corinthians 15:25); (see ~~2385~~ Isaiah 28:15); and this was a very ancient way of speaking of death among the Heathens; in the theology of the Phoenicians, according to Sanchoniathon^{f178}, who wrote before the Trojan wars, a son of Saturn by Rhea was called Muth, whom the Phoenicians sometimes called Death, and sometimes Pluto; which is manifestly the same with the Hebrew word **twm**, “death”; the name of the rider of this horse may well be called Death, both with respect to the various kinds of death under this seal, and with respect to the short lives of the emperors; for in less than fifty years' time, which is the period of this seal, namely, from Maximinus, A. D. 235, or 237, to Dioclesian, A. D. 284, or 286, there were more than twenty emperors, and who most of them were cut off by violent deaths; besides the thirty tyrants who sprung up under one of them, as so many mushrooms, and were soon destroyed. This is the only rider that has a name given him; and from hence we may learn what to call the rest, as the rider of the white horse “Truth”, or Christ, who is truth itself; the rider of the red horse “War”; and the rider of the black horse “Famine”; and because both the last, with other judgments, meet together under this seal, the rider of this horse is emphatically called “Death”:

and hell followed with him: that is, the grave, which attended on death, or followed after him, and was a sort of an undertaker, to bury the dead killed by death; so these two are put together, (^{f118}Revelation 1:18 20:13,14);

and power was given unto them; to death and hell, or the grave, or rather to death only, for the Vulgate Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions, read, “to him”: and the power that was given him reached

over the fourth part of the earth; not of the church, which is never called the earth in this book, but is distinguished from it, (^{f126}Revelation 12:16); nor the land of Judea, but the Roman empire; some understand it of Europe, the fourth part of the world:

to kill with the sword; Maximinus, with whom this seal begins, was of a very barbarous disposition, and a more cruel creature, it is said, was not upon earth; and besides his persecution of the Christians, he acted a most inhuman part to the Pagan Romans themselves, so that the senate dreaded him; and the women and children at Rome, having heard of his barbarities, deprecated his ever seeing that city; and he was called by the names of the worst of tyrants; more than four thousand men he killed without any charge or judicial process against them, and yet his blood thirsty mind was not satisfied ^{f179}: Gallienus, another emperor after him, emptied many cities entirely of men, and killed three or four thousand a day of his own soldiers, whom he understood had thoughts of a new emperor ^{f180}; under him thirty tyrants sprung up together in the empire, who made great havoc before they were cut off; and in his time the Alemanni (a people in Germany) having wasted France, broke into Italy; Dacia, which beyond the Danube was added by Trajan (to the Roman empire) was lost; Greece, Macedonia, Pontus, and Asia, were destroyed by the Goths; Pannonia was depopulated by (the people called) Sarmatae and Quadi; the Germans penetrated into Spain, and took the famous city of Tarracon; the Parthians having seized Mesopotamia, began to claim Syria to themselves; so that, as the Roman historian observes ^{f181}, things were now desperate, and the Roman empire was almost destroyed: not to take notice of the multitudes that were killed in after wars and persecutions, under other emperors, during this seal:

and with hunger; or famine; there was a grievous famine in the times of Gallus and Volusianus, which Dionysius bishop of Alexandria makes mention of ^{f182}; and Cyprian, who lived under this seal, also speaks of famine, and indeed of all these three, war, famine, and pestilence, as then

imputed to the Christians, and to their irreligion, which charge he removes ^{f183}.

and with death; that is, with the pestilence, which, by the Targumist ^{f184}, and other Jewish writers ^{f185}, is commonly called *antwm*, “death”, because it sweeps away and carries off such large numbers with it: now in the reign of the last mentioned emperors was a very noisome pestilence, which raged most cruelly; the Roman historian says ^{f186}, that their reign is only known, or was famous, for the pestilence, diseases, and sicknesses; Hostilianus, who was created emperor by the senate, died of it ^{f187}; Dionysius of Alexandria has given a most shocking account of it, who lived at the same time ^{f188}; it began in Ethiopia, and went through the east, and through all parts of the Roman empire, and lasted fifteen years; to which perhaps, for its large extent and long duration, there never was the like:

and with the beasts of the earth; by which many of the Christians were destroyed in the persecutions of those times; and is also one of God's four judgments, and which goes about with the sword, famine, and pestilence, (⁻³⁴⁰⁻Ezekiel 14:21), and may be literally understood of destruction by wild beasts, as Arnobius, who lived at this time, observes ^{f189}; or allegorically, of men comparable to wild beasts, as Herod is called a fox, and Nero a lion; and such savage creatures were most of the Roman emperors, and particularly the thirty tyrants under Gallienus: so the Targum on (⁻³⁴⁰⁻Jeremiah 3:12); interprets “the beasts of the field”, *aymm[ykl m*, “the kings of the nations”. The Alexandrian copy reads, “and upon the fourth part of the beasts”, as if the power of death reached to them as well as to men. Under this seal all the judgments of God on Rome Pagan meet together; and it is observable that Maximinus, a Roman emperor, and one of the last of the Pagans, boasted, that for worshipping of the gods, and persecuting Of the Christians, neither pestilence, famine, nor war, were in his times, when on a sudden all these three came together at once ^{f190}; to which may be added the following observation, that though the several steps and methods which God took to punish, weaken, and destroy the Roman Pagan empire, were remarkably seen in the distinct periods to which these first four seals belong, yet they must not be entirely restrained and limited to these periods, as if they were not made use of in others; so though the Gospel proceeded with remarkable success under the first seal, in the times of the apostles, to the subduing of multitudes in the Roman empire, it was also preached with great success under the following seals;

and though there were most grievous wars under the second seal, in the times of Trajan and Adrian, so there were also in after times; that was not the only period of war, though it was remarkably so; likewise there was a famine in the times of Claudius, under the first seal, (^{<4112>}Acts 11:28); and in the time of Trajan, under the second seal ^{f191}, and of Commodus ^{f192} as well as under the third; and there were pestilences also in those times, as well as under the fourth seal; and because God did by each of these weaken, break, and at last bring to ruin that empire, they are showed to John one after another.

Ver. 9. *And when he had opened the fifth seal*, etc.] Of the seven seals of the sealed book; here is no beast speaking here, nor horse and rider presented to view; it was now a very dark time both with respect to the church of God and ministry of the word, and the Roman empire. This seal refers to the times of Dioclesian, and the persecution under him; and instead of the voice of one of the living creatures, John hears the voice of martyrs:

I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain; these include not only all the martyrs that were put to death in the persecution of Dioclesian, but all those that suffered in all the persecutions preceding; for this, being the last, involves them all. “Souls”, being immaterial and incorporeal, are invisible to the bodily eye; these therefore were either clothed with corporeal forms, as angels sometimes are, or rather John saw them in a visionary way, as he saw the angels: and these were the souls of such as “were slain”; their bodies were dead, but their souls were alive; which shows the immortality of souls, and that they die not with their bodies, and that they live after them in a separate state: *yl wj qd ^ytmçn*, “the souls of them that are slain”, is a phrase used by Jewish writers ^{f193}, and who have a notion that the souls of those that are slain are kept in certain palaces, under the care of one appointed by God ^{f194}: and these were seen “under the altar”; either this is said in allusion to the blood of the sacrifices, which was poured out at the bottom of the altar, (^{<4047>}Leviticus 4:7 5:9), in which the life and soul of the creature is; or because that martyrdom is a sacrifice of men's lives, and an offering of them in the cause of God and truth, (^{<3807>}Philippians 2:17 ^{<3807>}2 Timothy 4:7); or with some reference to a common notion of the Jews, that the souls of the righteous are treasured up under the throne of glory ^{f195} they have also a saying, everyone that is buried in the land of Israel is as if he was buried “under the altar” ^{f196}; for they think that being buried there expiates their sins ^{f197}; to which they add,

that whoever is buried “under the altar”, is as if he was buried under the throne of glory^{f198}; yea, they talk of an altar above, upon which Michael the high priest causes the souls of the righteous to ascend^{f199}. Christ may be meant by the altar here, as he is in (³⁸¹⁰Hebrews 13:10), who is both altar, sacrifice, and priest, and is the altar that sanctifies the gift, and from off which every sacrifice of prayer and praise comes up with acceptance before God; and the souls of the martyrs being under this altar, denotes their being in the presence of Christ, and enjoying communion with him, and being in his hands, into whose hands they commit their souls at death, as Stephen did, and being under his care and protection until the resurrection morn, when they shall be reunited to their bodies which sleep in Jesus: and they were slain

for the word of God; both for the essential Word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, whose faith they professed; and for the written word, they made the rule of their faith and practice, and which Dioclesian forbid the reading of, and sought utterly to destroy; and for the Gospel principally, which is contained in it:

and for the testimony which they held; the Syriac and Arabic versions read, “for the testimony of the Lamb”; and so the Complutensian edition; either for the Gospel, which is a testimony of the person, office, and grace of Christ, the Lamb, which they embraced, professed, and held fast; or for the witness they bore to him, and the profession which they made thereof, and in which they continued.

Ver. 10. *And they cried with a loud voice*, etc.] With great ardour and fervency, being very pressing and importunate; and which shows that they were awake, and not asleep, and that the soul does not sleep with the body in the grave, or is after the death of that in a state of insensibility and inactivity, as some imagine:

saying, how long, O Lord, holy and true; the person they address is either the Lamb in the midst of the throne, with whom they were, and under the shelter of whom they were safe and happy; or God the Father, who sat upon the throne, whom they call “holy”, because being so in his nature, and as appears in all his works, he could not but hate, and so revenge the evil that was done to them by their cruel persecutors; and whereas he is “true” to all his threatenings, as well as his promises, and faithful to every word of his, they doubted not but he would judge and avenge them of their

enemies; but they seem desirous to know how long it would be first: saying,

dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? the men of the world, idolatrous persons, earthly princes, who had shed their blood; and which they desire not out of any sinful or malicious affection, but that the holiness and justice of God might appear, and also his truth and faithfulness in his promises to them, and threatenings to his enemies; and that God in all things might be glorified, and his church and people on earth might be supported and delivered; (see ^{<182412>}Job 24:12).

Ver. 11. *And white robes were given to everyone of them,* etc.] The Alexandrian copy, and some others, read in the singular number, “a white robe”, and so does the Syriac version; as a token of their innocence, that they did not suffer, or were slain, for any capital crime or immorality they were guilty of; and of their purity and perfection they now enjoyed; as also of that spiritual delight and pleasure, which was unspeakable and full of glory, they now had in the presence of God and Christ; and in short, of that happiness and glory which souls in a separate state, before the resurrection morn, are partakers of; who besides the righteousness of Christ, comparable to fine linen clean and white, walk with Christ in white, in the shining robes of bliss and glory:

and it was said unto them, that they should rest; or have rest; eternal rest from all their toil and labour, from all their sorrows and sufferings of every kind, which rest remains for the people of God, and into which these were now entered; or that they should cease from expostulating and inquiring after the above manner, and rest satisfied and contented, exercising the graces of faith, hope, and patience, believing, looking, and waiting:

yet for a little season; either until the end of this persecution by Dioclesian, when vengeance would be taken of the Roman empire, and it would be no more as Pagan; or until the day of judgment, when full vengeance will be inflicted on the persecutors of the saints; and which is but a little while with God, with whom a thousand years is as one day, and in comparison of that eternity of blessedness glorified saints are partakers of:

until their fellow servants also, and their brethren, that should be killed as they [were], should be fulfilled; meaning either the rest of the saints that should suffer martyrdom in the: following part of this persecution; or those who should suffer under the Arian persecution, when the empire would

become Christian; or under Rome Papal, and in all the persecutions of the apostasy, unto the end of that state: these are called “fellow servants” and “brethren” of the saints in heaven; for they all worship and serve the same God, and belong to the same family, in heaven and in earth; and the selfsame reason that is made use of to animate the saints below to courage, faith, and patience in suffering, (^{<118>}1 Peter 5:9), is used to keep up the expectation of the saints in heaven, of that vengeance that will be executed on their enemies, and to point out the time when it will be; and it may be observed, that the number of martyrs, or of those that shall suffer and die in the cause of Christ, and for his Gospel, is fixed and determined by God; and that number shall be perfected and completed, and when that is done, he will pour out all his wrath on them that have persecuted them and put them to death: and so the Arabic version renders it, “that the number of their companions and brethren, and of those who are to be killed as they have been killed, is fulfilled”; In the Apocrypha is written:

“39 Which are departed from the shadow of the world, and have received glorious garments of the Lord. 40 Take thy number, O Sion, and shut up those of thine that are clothed in white, which have fulfilled the law of the Lord. 41 The number of thy children, whom thou longedst for, is fulfilled: beseech the power of the Lord, that thy people, which have been called from the beginning, may be hallowed.” (2 Esdras 2)

Now though this seal does not introduce any judgment to be executed on the Roman empire, as the others do; yet since it introduces all the martyrs with one united voice requiring vengeance on their blood, it may very well be considered as a step towards, and as making way for, the utter ruin of that empire: and which the next seal being opened brings on, and is a full answer to the cry of these souls.

Ver. 12. *And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal,* etc.] Of the sealed book which the Lamb took out of the hand of him that sat upon the throne, in order to open it, and unloose its seals. About this seal interpreters much differ; some refer this to the destruction of Jerusalem, because of the likeness of expressions here used, and in (^{<124>}Matthew 24:7,29 ^{<125>}Luke 21:25,26 23:29,30); but this was past many years before this seal was opened; and besides, though that time was a day of wrath to the uttermost upon the Jewish people, and it was the Lamb's day of wrath, taking vengeance on them for their unbelief and rejection of him as the

Messiah; yet they had no sense of the Lamb, nor any apprehension of his wrath at that time, nor have they now, but imputed their calamity to their divisions and quarrels among themselves. Others think this seal belongs to the destruction of the Roman empire by the Goths, Huns, Vandals, etc. but it should be observed, that the empire stood some hundreds of years after the end of the fifth seal and the opening of this; and it was after the seventh seal, and at the sounding of the trumpets, that that destruction came on; moreover, that calamity was by the savageness of some barbarous nations which overrun the empire, but this here spoken of comes from the wrath of the Lamb; add to which, that that calamity distressed the Christians in the empire, and them chiefly, whereas this falls only upon the enemies of the Lamb, and the persecutors of his people. Others are of opinion that this has respect to the strange change of affairs in the church of Christ, through the rise, power, and tyranny of antichrist; by “the earthquake” they suppose is meant the shaking of both church and state by the man of sin; who shook the doctrines, ordinances, and discipline of the church, and threw all into confusion, and introduced a new face of things; and also shook the kingdoms of the earth, and the thrones and crowns of princes: by the “sun” becoming “black”, they think is meant the sun of righteousness, Jesus Christ, who was obscured in the doctrines concerning him, as the one and only Mediator, and justification by his righteousness, and pardon through his blood, by introducing the mediation of angels and saints, the doctrine of justification by works, and the doctrine of merit, works of supererogation, indulgences, pardons, penance, and purgatory: by the “moon” they understand the church, which receives all its light, grace, righteousness, and holiness, from Christ, and which, like the moon, is changeable as to its outward form and circumstances; and this became “as blood”, through the persecutions, massacres, and cruelties of the Romish antichrist, who has been made drunk with the blood of the saints and martyrs of Jesus: the “stars” they take to be the ministers of the word; either hypocritical ones, who were like unripe figs, destitute of true grace, and so were easily shaken with the wind of Papal power, and fell into the earth, and apostatized from the faith, and conformed to the corruptions of antichrist; or the true ministers of the Gospel, who were put to death, and that to an untimely and violent one, signified by the shaking of untimely figs by a mighty wind: by the “heaven” departing as a scroll rolled up, they suppose is designed either the church, which fled into the wilderness, and remained invisible during the Papal power and cruelty; or else the Scriptures, which the pope made himself sole judge and interpreter of and shut up from the

common people in an unknown language, and forbid the laity the reading of them: by “mountains” they think are intended the kings and princes of the earth, who were obliged to submit to the Romish antichrist, and give their kingdoms to him, and receive their crowns and kingdoms from him, and be his vassals: and by “the islands”, the people their subjects, who were forced to acknowledge him as the supreme head, and receive his mark in their right hand or forehead, or they could not buy and sell: and by all ranks and degrees of men, as “kings”, etc. hiding themselves in rocks and mountains, and calling upon them to fall on them and cover them, they apply either to their invoking the virgin Mary, and other saints, to intercede for them, and screen them from the wrath of God and Christ, on account of their sins; or else to the persecutors of the saints, of every rank and in every age, and to the punishments that shall fall upon them. But however feasible this interpretation may seem to be, it is certain that this was not the face of things at the close of the fifth seal, or the Dioclesian persecution, and at the opening of the sixth, when Constantine came to the imperial throne, for then the church appeared as she is described in (~~Rev~~ Revelation 12:1); which is just the reverse of this. There are others, who because of the very awful things here spoken of, and the very awful language in which they are expressed, conclude that this seal respects the day of judgment; not considering that the fifth seal ends about the year 313, at the close of the last of the ten persecutions, and that the sixth seal begins where that ends; and though above 1750 years have elapsed since that time, yet the day of judgment is not come, and we know not when it will; besides, here is another seal, a seventh seal, which follows, and introduces punishments on the Roman empire, and seven vials follow, which pour out plagues upon antichrist, all which can never be thought to be after the day of judgment; moreover, the account of the day of judgment stands in its proper place in (~~Rev~~ Revelation 20:12); after the destruction of Babylon, the first resurrection, and the saints' thousand years' reign with Christ. But to proceed; the business which is the subject of this seal is the removing of Paganism, and Pagan governors out of the Roman empire; this was the thing the rider upon the white horse, under the first seal, set out upon to effect, and never ceased until he had accomplished it; and this is what ensued upon the close of the fifth seal, when Pagan persecution ceased, on Constantine, a Christian emperor, having the reins of power in his hands; and it cannot be thought, that so wonderful a change of things as this should be omitted in this prophetic history; and it is easy to observe that changes in kingdoms and governments, both as to the polity and religion of

them, are sometimes expressed in such like figurative terms as here; (see ^{<313>}Isaiah 13:9,10,13,17,19 34:4,5 ^{<312>}Haggai 2:21,22); and which may be accommodated to this event as follows:

and, lo, there was a great earthquake; or “shaking”, both of the heavens and earth, and which, as it denotes in (^{<316>}Haggai 2:6,7); compared with (^{<315>}Hebrews 12:26,27); the removing of Jewish worship and ordinances, in order to make way for the Christian ordinances and institutions, which were to remain; so here it intends the removing of Pagan worship and idolatry, and of Pagan magistrates, that the Christian religion and Christian magistrates might take place. This, with what follows, concerning the darkness of the sun and moon, might be literally true; and it seems by historians, that there were such phenomena about those times; for it is asserted ^{f200}, that a very great earthquake in Syria followed the Dioclesian persecution, which shook and caused to fall the tops of houses at Tyre and Sidon, and killed many thousands; and some such like happened at Rome, and at Spoletum, where above three hundred and fifty Pagans perished, as they were serving their idols. It is also observed ^{f201}, that the moon was turned into blood in the times of Galerius, who succeeded. Dioclesian; and that the sun failed, and the stars shined for four hours, when Licinius was conquered by Constantine; but then these may be considered as symbols of the change in the empire.

And the sun came black as sackcloth of hair; which is made of black hairs; (see ^{<318>}Isaiah 50:3); as when eclipsed. The sun was the chief deity worshipped by the Heathens, under various names, and this becoming black, may design the removing of their principal gods from their honour and glory, or the downfall of idolatry, which the Jews ^{f202} call *hrz hdwb* [*l ç hçmç*, “the sun of idolatry”, which they suppose is meant in (^{<216>}Song of Solomon 1:6). And Satan, the god of this world, who was worshipped in different forms, now fell, as Lucifer, the son of the morning, and as lightning from heaven, and was cast down from all his dignity, influence, and power, to the earth; for the casting out of the red dragon, the old serpent, and Satan, after his combat with Michael and his angels, in (^{<613>}Revelation 12:3,7-9), refers to this very time; likewise the chief magistrate, the Heathen Roman emperor, may be included; and it is remarkable, that Dioclesian the emperor, who had now retired from the imperial government, and was under a cloud, under disgrace, and in

distress, had, in the zenith of his glory, caused himself to be worshipped as a god, and as the brother of the sun and moon.

And the moon became as blood; as when obscured; the Alexandrian copy and some others, the Complutensian edition, the Vulgate Latin, and all the Oriental versions, read, “the whole moon”; this may design the next Heathen deity, or class of deities, for the moon was also worshipped by the Heathens under different names; and may likewise include the Pagan priesthood, which was next, and was annexed to the imperial dignity; and which was disused by, Constantine and his successors; and even the very title, and the robe which was a symbol of it, were laid aside as unworthy of Christian princes; see Mede upon the place.

Ver. 13. *And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth*, etc.] All the other inferior deities lost their esteem, worship, and honour; for the idol temples being now opened, the idols and statues were exposed to the common people, and were found to be stuffed with hay and straw, which brought them into great contempt ^{f203}. Moreover, as stars sometimes signify the ministers of the Gospel in the Christian church, (~~f113~~ Revelation 1:20), and sometimes the priests in the Jewish church, (~~2080~~ Daniel 8:10); so they may here likewise include the idolatrous priests among the Heathens, who were discharged and removed by Constantine, and had their posts and profits taken away from them; yea, Maximinus, an Heathen emperor, or tyrant, being beaten by Licinius, who was then Constantine's colleague, killed many of the priests and prophets of his gods, which were formerly had in great admiration by him, as deceivers and betrayers of him, by whose oracles he was animated to the war ^{f204}. And in like manner Licinius put to death the priests and prophets of the new idol at Antioch ^{f205}.

Even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind; which figs being young and green, and not fixed, fall off easily, and in great numbers, when a blustering wind beats upon them; and so the rabble of Pagan deities, and idolatrous priests, were easily, and in great numbers, removed through the power of Constantine, which carried all before it.

Ver. 14. *And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together*, etc.] The manner of writing formerly was on rolls of parchment; hence the word volume is used for a book, which, when rolled up, the writing within could not be seen, not a syllable nor letter of it. In like manner the Roman empire, as Pagan, which was like a large sheet, or rather like the expanse

or firmament of the heaven, stretched out over all the earth, was now, as to the Paganism of it, rolled up together, so that there were no more Heathen gods, nor Heathen priests; no more idolatry, and idolatrous worship of that kind were to be seen, and not so much as the names of Heathen gods to be heard of in the empire.

And every mountain and island were moved out of their places; by “every mountain” may be meant the places of idolatrous worship, which were usually upon mountains; (see ^{24R6}Jeremiah 3:6,23); which were now shut up, or demolished, or used for Christian worship; and “every island” being moved also may show, that Paganism was not only rooted out of the provinces of the empire upon the continent, but out of the islands also; and the ecclesiastical history of these times informs us, that there were Christian churches in the isles, which enjoyed the Gospel free of persecution and distress; as in the isles of Cyprus, Crete, the Cyclades, Sardinia, Siciiy, Corsica, and in ours of England, Scotland, and Ireland ^{f206}. Mr. Daubuz thinks, that as “mountains” design the temples of idols, “islands” signify the revenues of them, which were now taken away, and applied to other uses.

Ver. 15. *And the king's of the earth, and the great men*, etc.] The Roman emperors, and other principal magistrates, governors of provinces and cities:

and the rich men; among the commonalty; these three may design perhaps more particularly the emperors, nobles, and senate of Rome: and

the chief captains; or captains of thousands, that had the command of the Roman legions

and the mighty men; the soldiers that were under them, men of strength, courage, and valour;

and every bondman, and every freeman; which takes in all the inhabitants of the Roman empire, of every state and condition, and which was an usual distinction among the Romans: these

hid themselves in the dens, and in the rocks of the mountains; where, through their cruel persecutions, they had forced multitudes of Christians to flee, and therefore, “lex talionis”, the law of retaliation was righteously inflicted on them; and not to take notice of any other, this was remarkably true of their kings or emperors Dioclesian and Herculus Maximianus, who

were emperors together, in the height of their imperial glory and grandeur, the one being at Nicomedia, and the other at Milan, did, on one and the same day, of their own accord, abdicate the empire, and divested themselves of their imperial crown and government, and retired to a private life; pretending in public, that old age, and the weight of business, were the cause, but to their friends they owned, that it was through despair, because they could not extinguish the Christian religion ^{f207}. Some ascribed this to frenzy and madness ^{f208}; but the true reason was, that the wrath of the Lamb was let into their consciences, and which they could not bear, and which obliged them to take this step, to the amazement of the whole world. Maximinus, who succeeded them, being overcome by Licinius, laid aside his imperial habit, and hid himself among the common people, and skulked about in fields and villages ^{f209}. Maxentius, another emperor, fled from Constantine, the instrument of the wrath of the Lamb, and the pouring it out upon his enemies, and fell into the river Tiber, from the Mylvian bridge, where he perished; and which was the very place in which he had laid snares for Constantine ^{f210}.

Ver. 16. *And said to the mountains and rocks, fall on us*, etc.] They chose death rather than life. Dioclesian being invited by Constantine to a marriage feast, excused himself by reason of his old age; but receiving threatening letters, the historian ^{f211} says, in which he was charged with having favoured Maxentius, and with favouring Maximinus, he poisoned himself; and others of the emperors are said to lay violent hands upon themselves:

and hide us from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; thus they owned the proper deity, and almighty power of God, and Christ, which they dreaded; so Maximinus being afflicted with a most horrible disease, of which he died, asked pardon of the God of the Christians, and owned that he suffered justly, for his reproaches of Christ ^{f212}. Licinius, who sometimes pretended to be a Christian, and joined with Constantine, but afterwards revolted and fought against him, being conquered and taken, was put to death; at which time he, and they that suffered death with him, confessed that the God of Constantine was the only true God ^{f213}. This passage shows, that Christ, God's firstborn, is higher than the kings of the earth; yea, that he is equal with him that sits upon the throne, with God his Father, since his wrath is equally dreaded as his; and that, though he is a Lamb, mild, meek, and gentle, yet there is wrath, fury, and indignation in him, against his enemies, which is very dreadful and intolerable; (see ^{<4922>}Psalm 2:12).

Ver. 17. *For the great day of his wrath is come*, etc.] The Vulgate Latin and Syriac versions read, “of their wrath”; both of him that sits upon the throne, and of the Lamb, against the Heathen gods and Heathen persecutors, in answer to the cry of the martyrs in (~~the~~ Revelation 6:9,10).

And who shall be able to stand? against either of them, or in their presence, and so as to bear their wrath and displeasure; all which expresses guilt, shame, fear, and despair.