

## GOD'S PREVIEW OF THE GREAT APOSTASY

**Introduction** Someone has imagined the amazement and alarm of Peter and Paul if they came to life today and made a survey of much that now passes as Christianity. The only yardstick the Apostles would know would be "the faith once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3), as described in the New Testament. As they compared many of the popular modern churches with the original Christian Church, it is certain that their hearts would be "stirred within them" as Paul's was when he passed along the streets of Athens (Acts 17:16).

Consider just a few of the strange, new officials, new objects and new practices they would find in the modern church, which were unheard of in the Early Church.

In the Modern Church	In the Early Church
<i>Popes, priests, cardinals, monks and nuns</i>	<i>Absolutely unknown</i>
<i>Monasteries, palaces, cathedrals</i>	<i>Absolutely unknown</i>
<i>Thrones, robes, crowns, mitres, jewels, pomp and pageantry</i>	<i>Absolutely unknown</i>
<i>Relics, images, holy water, beads, charms, medals, holy pictures</i>	<i>Absolutely unknown</i>

Outraged and indignant, the Apostles would cry: "What has happened to the simplicity and purity of the early Church? Who has been responsible for these unscriptural changes? Have God's watchmen been asleep, to allow the enemy to sow these tares?"

These questions are answered in the prophecy of the Seven Seals, found in Revelation 5 and 6. This is God's preview of the Great Apostasy.

**Discussion** This vision actually begins in chapter 4:1, 2, where John is given a view of the throne of God in Heaven. In chapter 5 he sees a mysterious book of seven sealed scrolls in the hand of God (v 1). This book is taken by the Lord Jesus Christ and, one by one, the seals of mystery are broken (vv 5-7).

### THE FIRST SEAL — REV. 6:1, 2

*(See Chart No. 15—First Horseman)*

The rider on the white horse presents a picture of the purity, enthusiasm and victory of the early Christian Church. The bow is the symbol of aggressive warfare. The white horse and the crown are symbols of triumph, and were used by Roman Emperors in the celebration of their victories.

So amazing was the initial "explosion" of Christianity that, within seventy years after the Crucifixion, the heralds of the Cross had carried the Gospel to the boundaries of the then-known world (Rom. 1:8; Col. 1:23). Historians estimate that by A.D. 100, 5 million converts had been won to Christ. During this period the Church was marked by purity of life and doctrine; evangelistic fervour; and uncompromising separation from the world.

*NOTE: Inasmuch as no indication is given of the precise dates or events associated with the opening of the seals, we should avoid dogmatism here. The emphasis in each case is upon THE CHANGING CHARACTER OF THE CHURCH, rather than upon arbitrary periods of time. In general terms, the first seal would extend from Pentecost to the end of the first century. Furthermore, once opened, the seals are NEVER CLOSED, so the attitudes and qualities dramatized by each seal persist, with greater or less potency, throughout the entire Christian age.*