

Vernon Howell and the Seven Seals

Marc A. Breault

Introduction

Anyone who has had significant contact with Vernon Howell (n.k.a. David Koresh), will realize that the seven seals of Revelation are central to his theology. I am often asked what Howell teaches regarding these seals. This document is a response to that question.

Howell's theology is very complex. His Bible studies often last for hours. Thus, a full exposition on the what and why of his theology could probably occupy a number of chapters in a book. Therefore I will try to keep this account brief, concentrating on what Vernon teaches rather than on the "logical" means he uses to arrive at his conclusions. While I will try to include some of that, I am forced to minimize it for purposes of space.

No discussion of Howell and the seals would be complete without first dealing with why Howell believes the seals, and his interpretation of them, are important to him.

Why the Seven Seals?

The seals are central to Howell for two very basic, yet powerful reasons.

1. According to Howell, they point the way to the only path of salvation available to mankind.
2. As the only person who can reveal the meaning of the seven seals, Howell claims this as proof of his divine origin.[1]

Both points listed above lead naturally into one another, and form the basis of Howell's methodology for obtaining converts. The first is used to establish an almost unbearable guilt trip in the potential convert, while the second points the person to Howell, the solution for ridding the person of the intense guilt. In my subsequent research, I have found that many Christian cults operate along these same lines, although their specific methodologies may be different (i.e., they might not stress the seven seals).

Howell develops point #1 above roughly as follows:

Howell points the person back to Jesus Christ of 2,000 years ago. He stresses Christ's perfect character and blameless life.[2] Next, Howell points the person to the incredible work of the twelve apostles and the early Christian church. He points the person to the fact that Christ promised he would send His Spirit to allow the church to perform incredible miracles and to resist sin.[3]

After showing the person the "perfect" state of Christ, and the early church, Howell then moves on to demonstrate that Christ expects no less from us today. By using such scriptures as:

MAT 5:48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.
(KJV)[4]

and others, Howell hammers in the idea that God the Father, and Christ expect perfect Christianity. Matthew 5:45 is but one scripture used.[5]

Now if the reader is like 99.9% of the human population, he falls short of perfect Christianity. He sins, like everyone else. But Howell hammers this point to his listener for hours at a time until the listener is left without any hope. The listener compares himself against the perfect standard of Jesus Christ, and the supposedly perfect early church, and loses all hope. This is precisely where Howell wants to lead him.

Finally, Howell points out that the Spirit of God wrote the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16, 17; 1 Peter 1:19-21). Thus, by rejecting the Bible, the world, along with the listener, has rejected or blasphemed the Holy Ghost, thus committing the unpardonable sin.[6]

By this time, our listener is convinced he is going to hell. He sees no way out. Not only has he slighted the name of Christ by exhibiting less than perfect Christianity, on top of this, he has committed the unpardonable sin by rejecting the Bible, which tells him he needs to be perfect.

Enter Revelation 4 and 5!!!

Howell also uses Revelation chapters one through three to hammer home this point. Just at the point when the listener is ready to give up altogether, Howell brings him to Revelation 4 and 5, which is where he has wanted to lead them all along. By using this scripture:

(Revelation 4:1-2 KJV)

(1) After this I looked, and, behold, a door {was} opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard {was} as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will

shew thee things which must be hereafter. (2) And immediately I was **in the spirit:** and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and {one} sat on the throne.[7]

Vernon demonstrates that not all hope is lost. The Spirit is still trying to show us something. We have only committed the unpardonable sin if the Spirit stops speaking. So although we have blown it so far, if we listen to what the Spirit is trying to reveal in Revelation 4 and 5, we can still go to heaven.

If you take the time to read Revelation 4 and 5, you will notice that a certain book or scroll becomes important. In chapter 5, however, the problem is that no one was found worthy to open the book.

Revelation 5:2-4 KJV)

(2) And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? (3) And no man in heave, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. (4) And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.

According to Howell, the Spirit is giving us the last chance for salvation. That chance is contained in the scroll or book. But no one can open the book. In Vernonite theology, whatever is contained in the book is the only chance we have. If the book remains closed, we might as well commit suicide since we are doomed and lost anyway.

But wait! Just as Howell brings his listener once again to the brink of despair, behold, the Lamb is able to open the book. The listener sighs with relief. There is still hope.

If you read Revelation 5, you will learn many things about the Lamb, two important ones are:

1. He is the only one worthy and able to open the book.
2. Because of this, he is worthy of honor, riches power etc.

At this stage, Howell does not come out and say he is the Lamb. He drums into the listener the fact that only the Lamb can open the book. Then Howell goes on to his exposition of the seven seals. He spends hours explaining the meaning behind the symbols contained in the seven seals. Howell's logic is simple.

1. Only the Lamb can open/reveal the meaning of the seven seals.
2. I (Howell) am now revealing the meaning of the seven seals.
3. Therefore I (Howell) must be the Lamb.
4. Because I (Howell) am the Lamb, I am worthy of honor, riches, praise etc. I am also the only one worthy in heaven or on earth. I am the only one who can save you. I am the only one entitled to anything in heaven or on earth. I own everything and everyone. Only through me can you achieve salvation.

And there you have it. This is why the seven seals are so important to Howell. Since conventional Christianity is worthless in his eyes, Howell will only accept, as a possible challenger to his divine right, anyone who can reveal the seven seals. This is Howell's challenge to anyone.

Howell's followers follow him blindly because they fully believe he is the only person with the true interpretation of the seals. Following the four steps of Vernonite logic listed above, his followers give him everything, centering their entire lives around him. What a tragedy.

Vernon Howell And The First Seal

(Revelation 6:1-2 KJV)

(1) And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. (2) And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow: and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.

Howell teaches he is the rider on the white horse. Howell interprets this seal to mean that he (Howell) is the king, Jesus Christ reincarnate. As king, he is entitled to many wives which also includes concubines.[8]

According to Howell, the man on the white horse conquers by getting as many women pregnant as possible. Since Howell holds himself as God, the only righteous one, he reasons that only his children are righteous. He holds that God's plan is to destroy all the wicked children, and populate the world with his.

As I stated above, I do not have time to discuss the logic of Howell's conclusions. This, however, is his interpretation of the first seal.

Scriptures Howell employs to arrive at his conclusion are Psalm 8, 45, 60, 92. Also, see Isaiah chapters 50-54 and the Song of Solomon. The Song of Solomon is used to form Howell's concubine doctrine. On destroying the wicked, see Isaiah 13; Psalm 137, 149; Jeremiah 50, 51; Joel 2; Revelation 19.[9]

Vernon Howell and the Second Seal

Revelation 6:3-4 KJV)

(3) And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see. (4) And there went out another horse {that was} red: and {power} was given to him that sat

thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.

Howell believes there will be a great war centered around Israel. In this, he agrees with many evangelical Christians including myself. If Howell stopped there, he would be fine. But Howell believes he will somehow start this war, or be the center of its focus. Previously, Howell taught he would actually go to Israel to start the whole ball rolling. I have heard he has changed his position lately, however, and I am not sure he still holds to this view.

Howell is, of course, the rider on the red horse. By using Zechariah chapters one through four, Howell uses this as a proof text to show that he is The Lord. This seal was also used when Howell first formulated his "all women belong to me" doctrine. This doctrine was begun on 5 August, 1989.

Howell believes he is the Messiah whose teachings bring peace. But the wicked world will learn about all his women and fight against him out of jealousy and for fear that Howell will seduce or force their wives. This will "take peace from the earth." Nevertheless, Howell will win the war eventually and slaughter all the wicked.

Scriptures Howell uses for this are Zechariah 1-4; Ezekiel 13; 1 Corinthians 7; Job 31; Luke 14:26-33.

Vernon Howell and the Third Seal

(Revelation 6:5-6 KJV).

(5) And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. (6) And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and {see} thou hurt not the oil and the wine.

My information on this seal, relating to Howell, is minimal. Howell believes that the rider is God. God has the balances in His hand. A dangerous result of Howell and the third seal, however, is that Howell believes that God loves to deceive people. Howell uses the following passage to demonstrate this belief.

HOS 12:7 {He is} a merchant, the balances of deceit {are} in his hand: he loveth to oppress. (KJV)[10]

This rendition of this verse allows Howell to righteously deceive anyone. He can lie, cheat or do whatever simply by claiming that this deception is necessary for the person's salvation.

This is what I know for sure regarding Howell's beliefs on the third seal. I suspect from statements Howell and Steve Schneider have made, that Howell uses this to show a grand one world government conspiracy formed from the United Nations, the Roman Catholic Church, Seventh-day Adventists, the United States Government, and the "merchants of the earth." This seal has to do with economy and Howell points to the fact that many rich people stress economy. Therefore they conspire together.

Scriptures Howell uses for this seal are Hosea 12:7. In terms of his conspiracy theory, Howell uses Ezekiel 27, 28; Revelation 18; Psalm 83; Zechariah 14:1.

Vernon Howell and the Fourth Seal

(Revelation 6:7-8 KJV)

(7) And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see. (8) And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and **his name that sat on him was Death**, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.

Vernon Howell has legally changed his name to David Koresh. Koresh comes from the Hebrew rendition of Cyrus. Thus, his name is David Cyrus. According to Howell, another meaning for Koresh is "death." Hence, his name is David Death. As you can see from the scripture above, the name of the pale horse rider is death.[11]

Simply put, Howell uses this seal to justify his killing of his enemies. This can take place before or after God's earthly kingdom. When Howell was in Australia in early 1990, he used this seal to threaten many breakaway or borderline breakaway members. To my knowledge, Howell has never explained what the "fourth part of the earth" means and I admit I am curious as to what his understanding is regarding this phrase. In the old Shepherd's Rod days under Victor Houteff, Houteff maintained that this phrase referred to a 1,500 year period of time, rather than a physical portion of the earth.

I have noticed that when Howell is stuck for an explanation, he often reverts to victor Houteff's understanding.

Scriptures Howell uses in conjunction with this seal are Zechariah 6; Ezekiel 7-12; the story of ancient Israel slaying the Canaanites found throughout the Old Testament, Isaiah 45.

Vernon Howell and the Fifth Seal

(Revelation 6:9-11 KJV)

(9) And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: (10) And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? (11) And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they { were }, should be fulfilled.

This is where the whole suicide story got started. I think it is plain what the seal is saying and how one could interpret it to formulate a mass suicide/martyrdom doctrine. Simply put, God requires a certain number of martyrs before He will come and establish his kingdom.

According to Howell, this fixed number is 200,000,000 (two hundred million). Howell arrives at this number from Revelation 9:13-21. These two hundred million will form His army.[12]

Howell teaches that all of his followers must die. However, there are a few, including conveniently himself, who will not see death but be translated. Those who die help make up the number. Howell holds that with the combined total of early church martyrs, and the Dark Ages contingent of martyrs, the number (whatever it is) is almost made up. I fear that Howell believes that the death of his followers will complete the number.

To further explain the mentality involved, assume that the fifth seal actually teaches that God will not come to save the righteous and set up his kingdom until the full number of martyrs has been made up. Assuming this, BDSDA logic runs something like this.

1. The fifth seal teaches that God will not save the righteous and establish his kingdom until the proper number of martyrs is made up.
2. Obviously, God is not here and his literal physical kingdom is absent. This must mean that the number of martyrs is not yet complete.
3. Since the rest of the world is Babylon (worshipping the dragon, see Revelation 13), and since the BDSDA cult represents the only true informed body of saints on earth, it follows that only BDSDA members can qualify as martyrs.

This seal is extremely dangerous because it shows his followers that they must die in order to usher in God's kingdom. I should point out here that I do not know for certain of the validity of this logic since Howell never fully taught the fifth seal while I was associated with

the group. The above, however, is based on contact with cult members, as well as my knowledge that cult members believe they are the only true, nonbabylonian people on earth. This latter mentality, was taught when I was associated with the group. I personally never fully accepted it, however, as I found it difficult to believe in practical terms.

Scriptures Howell uses in conjunction with this seal are the latter part of Isaiah 5; Isaiah 13; Psalm 79; Revelation 9:13-21; Revelation 11; Daniel 8:9-14; 11:31-39; Zechariah 14; 2 Thessalonians 1, 2. Howell employs many scriptures to show that followers must suffer and die for him. Read Isaiah 51; Psalm 137 and others.

Vernon Howell and the Sixth Seal

The sixth seal covers Revelation 6:12-7:17 and is too large to quote fully in this discussion. I will only quote Revelation 6:12-17.

(Revelation 6: 12-17 KJV)

(12) And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; (13) And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. (14) And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. (15) And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; (16) And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: (17) For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

Simply put, this seal shows the coming of the Lord and the setting up of His Kingdom. Naturally, Howell is the Lamb. Notice the Lamb comes down. Hence, Howell believes that he

is translated before the actual second coming. He goes up to heaven then returns in glory to rescue the saints, and destroy the wicked.

There are many scriptures Howell uses to show that he will save the saints, and destroy the wicked. I have listed some in other seals. Additional passages include Ezekiel 34, 36, 37-39; Psalms 1, 7, 11, 18, 50, 97, 98, 108, 144; Isaiah 34, 35; Joel 2:1-11; Isaiah 13; Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 17; Luke 21; 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17.

Vernon Howell and the Seventh Seal

The Seventh seal reveals the seven trumpets according to Howell's thinking and extends from Revelation 8:1 to the end of the book.

Traditional Seventh-day Adventist thinking holds that the seventh seal covers only Revelation 8:1.[13] Howell holds that the seventh seal extends from Revelation 8:1 to the end of the book.

Because of this, a full exposition of Howell's views on the seventh seal is impossible here. Suffice it to say, however, that Howell "reveals" the seventh seal by expositing upon the rest of the book of Revelation. This includes more detail on such topics as:

1. The seven trumpets
2. The woman of Revelation 12
3. The beasts of Revelation 13
4. The messages of God in Revelation 14
5. The seven last plagues in 15 and 16
6. Babylon (Rev. 17-19)
7. The thousand year period of Revelation 20 and the final destruction of the wicked.
8. The new heavens and the new earth (Rev. 21, 22).

Concluding Remarks

You may have noticed that all biblical quotations in this discussion are taken from the King James Version. Many of Howell's doctrines are built on misunderstandings of KJV passages. Howell discourages and forbids the consultation of modern translations of the Bible, although he himself occasionally uses them.

I must stress again that Howell takes hours upon hours to prove his beliefs with respect to the seals. While most readers would not be able to justify Howell's positions from the brief statements about each seal above, the reader should not forget that followers are subjected to exhausting sessions with Howell, to drum his beliefs into them.

Needless to say, the above exposition on the seals does not reflect my views on the subject.

[1]. From 1983 to 1985 Howell saw himself merely as a prophet, someone whom he termed "the seventh angel's messenger." In 1985, Howell saw himself as Cyrus, the latter day king who would lead God's people until God established His kingdom on earth. In 1988, Howell became the Lamb of God portrayed in Revelation 5. At this stage, Howell believed that the Lamb of Revelation was Cyrus, or the king. During this stage, Howell became the Song of God, but maintained a separate identity than that of Jesus Christ. Finally, in 1989, Howell merged the Lamb of Revelation with Jesus Christ. To him, they became one and the same person.

[2]. The vast majority of Christians today would agree that Jesus Christ was sinless while he walked on this earth. Jesus Christ was and is the perfect high priest. This, in fact, is the orthodox Christian belief.

[3]. The New Testament is full of stories of Christ's followers performing amazing miracles. It also depicts the apostles in a glowing light. Many Christians have taken this to mean that the apostles were perfect men, and that the early church was without flaws or conflict. This is not the biblical picture, however, but many Christians fail to see this. Howell plays on the "perfection" of the church.

[4]. *The Holy Bible King James Version Computer Edition*, NASSCO 1984.. All biblical quotations in this text are taken from the same source.

[5]. Since this discussion is not concerned with a discussion of biblical perfection, I do not have the space to refute Howell's use of this scripture and others. Suffice it to say here that Howell does not correctly understand or interpret the Greek word translated in the KJV as "perfect." Neither does Howell take into consideration the context. For a quick glimpse into biblical understanding of standards, refer to I John 2:1 which states, in paraphrase, that "The purpose of me writing to you is that you don't sin. However, if you sin Jesus Christ the righteous is your advocate with God the Father." Although this is my own paraphrase, examination of this passage should reveal that it conveys the correct meaning.

[6]. Christ Speaks of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as the sin which will not be forgiven. For proof of this, refer to Matthew 12:22.

[7]. I have bolded the parts of the scripture I wish to emphasize. The words contained in braces {}, reflect those words which the KJV places in italics. The King James uses italics to show words which the translators have added, and which are not found in the original manuscripts from which the KJV was translated.

[8]. The word concubine does not evoke much emotion today because most people do not know what it means. Biblically, a concubine was a slave with whom her master had sexual intercourse. She was not considered equal with the master's wife, but still remained a slave. In other words, Howell supports the idea of slavery and puts it into practice with his followers.

[9]. Be warned that 99% of the readers of this document will probably have no idea whatsoever as to how Howell can arrive at the above stated conclusions from these scriptural passages.

[10]. Howell understands this passage as referring to God. That is, God loves to deceive. Reading this verse in a modern translation, however, will reveal that Hosea is here condemning those who falsify weights and measures to make a profit.

[11]. To make knowledge, there is no linguistic justification for equating the name Koresh, with the meaning of "death." In fact, the name probably means "sun" or "shepherd."

[12]. It is possible that Howell holds that the number is 100 million instead of 200 million. This is because Howell has said that each resurrected saint in God's army will be accompanied by an angel. Howell uses Isaiah 13 to show this. Hence, Howell could believe the number is 100 million people, each accompanied by an angel. Howell was never absolutely clear on this point when I was associated with him.

[13]. See Uriah Smith, *The Prophecies of Daniel And The Revelation*, Southern Publishing Association 1994, p. 473. Uriah Smith was a pioneering member of the Seventh-day Adventist church.