

# Love Community Baptist Church

## Wednesday Night Virtual Bible Study

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## Revelation – Chapter 6

### THE UNLOCKING OF THE SEALS

#### THE FIRST SIX SEALS

##### A. The first four seals of the scroll bring four horsemen.

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, or simply the Four Horsemen, are described in Revelation chapter 6, verses 1–8. The Four Horsemen are symbolic depictions of different events that will take place in the end times. As an example of the Bible's influence on culture at large, the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse have been referenced many times in literature, paintings, movies, and other media, often as portents of an imminent cataclysm or the means by which a disaster comes to pass.

##### (Revelation 6:1-2) The white horse brings a man of conquest.

*Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, "Come and see." And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.*

**I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals:** From the previous chapter, we understand this scroll is the history and destiny of mankind and creation, and only Jesus — the Lamb — had the right to loosen the seals on this scroll of the culmination of history.

- If the scroll details the culmination of history, then the things associated with the removal of the seals must happen before the scroll is opened. This is not the fulfillment of history itself, but the preparation for it. The actual culmination will be detailed in Revelation 19.

And I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, "Come and see." Each seal is associated with a living creature (zoa, one of the cherubim of Ezekiel 1 and 10) who called out "come" (or, it could be translated "go forth") to each horseman.

If one were to take their interpretive clues more from cowboy movies than from the Bible, it would be easy to believe the rider on the white horse is Jesus. Jesus does return on a white horse in Revelation 19:11-16; but this is a satanic dictator who imitates Jesus.

- He rules (a crown was given); he rules with a bow, not a sword; and he exercises dominion over the earth (went out conquering and to conquer). But the results of his rule, as described in the following verses, show clearly that this is not the reign of Jesus.
- The first Horseman likely refers to the Antichrist. He is the false imitator of the true Christ, who is also associated with a white horse (Revelation 19:11–16). At the beginning of the tribulation, the Antichrist will be given authority ("a crown"), and he will wage war ("a bow"), conquering all who oppose him. This description agrees with Daniel's vision of the "little horn" that rises to power and is bent on conquest: "This horn was waging war against the holy people and defeating them" (Daniel 7:21; cf. Revelation 13:7).

*Here we reach an interpretive crossroads of the Book of Revelation. You can tell much about how a person understands this book and God's prophetic plan by seeing how they understand this first rider. Those who think Revelation is mostly a book of history believe that this rider is Jesus, the apostles, or the Roman emperors. Those who believe that this is a prophetic passage, yet to be fulfilled, often account this rider to be the antichrist.*

**He went out conquering and to conquer:** Taking this to be the final satanic dictator over men, we see that he will be more terrible than all previous dictators were. He will rule over men as a false messiah, and lead man in organized rebellion against God, in the pattern of Nimrod, his first predecessor. He is the one often called the antichrist.

**Come and see:** The modern political and social scene is certainly set for the emergence of such a political leader. All that waits is for the Lord to allow it in His timing after He takes His church from this earth.

- And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. (2 Thessalonians 2:6-7)

Significantly, the first seal opened brings this dictator to prominence. We understand that the seventieth week of Daniel 9 begins when this dictator will confirm a covenant with [the] many, referring to the Jewish people.

Many wonder if these four horsemen of Revelation 6 are connected with the seventieth week of Daniel and the great tribulation itself, or with the course of history up until that time. This initial emergence of the antichrist, connected with what we know about this leader from Daniel 9 shows that these four horsemen are connected with Daniel's seventieth week and the great tribulation.

#### **(Revelation 6:3-4) The red horse brings war and conflict.**

***When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come and see." Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword.***

This rider didn't need to bring war and destruction. All he needed to do was take peace from the earth. Once this peace — God's gift to man — was taken, men quickly rush in with war and destruction.

- Peace between men and among nations is a gift from God. It is not the natural state of relations between men.

This authority was granted to the horseman. This is, directly or indirectly, the judgment of God.

Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other. To him was given a large sword" (Revelation 6:4). The second Horseman refers to terrible warfare that will break out in the end times. Those wars will include the Antichrist's rise to power, which requires the downfall of three other kings (Daniel 7:8), and possibly the Battle of Gog and Magog (Ezekiel 38—39).

**That people should kill one another:** Our modern age is marked by war and conflict. Since World War II, there have been more than 150 wars of some kind in the world, and at any given time there may be some three dozen armed conflicts taking thousands of lives yearly. The nations of the world often spend more than \$1 trillion on military expenditures a year.

#### **(Revelation 6:5-6) The black horse brings scarcity and inequity.**

***When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come and see." So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine."***

The scales symbolized the need to carefully measure and ration food. This speaks of a time of scarcity.

**A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius:** These prices are about twelve times higher than normal. It means that it would cost a day's wage to buy the ingredients for a loaf of bread. This describes "a time of famine when life will be reduced to the barest necessities." (Walvoord)

We often see great famine in the world today, yet fewer people suffer from hunger today than 100 years ago. However, understanding the world's precarious ecological balance, it would not take much to plunge many into the kind of scarcity and inequity mentioned here.

**Do not harm the oil and the wine:** Yet, the nicer things will be available for those who can afford them. There will still be the oil and the wine that should not be harmed.

**(Revelation 6:7-8) The pale horse brings death.**

***When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come and see." So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth.***

This last rider shows that there will be a tremendous death toll from the dictatorship, war, famine and other calamities described by the previous three horsemen.

Our modern age has seen hundreds of millions killed by dictators, war, and famine. Yet all that will pale in comparison to the death toll coming in the wake of this ultimate dictator. No wonder Jesus said of this time For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. (Matthew 24:21)

Power was given to the horseman, and given by God. Though all hell breaks loose on the earth, God is very much in control. He still holds the scroll and opens the seals.

The fourth Horseman of the Apocalypse is symbolic of death and devastation. The horse's pale color (in the original language, it's literally "pale green" or "yellowish green") denotes sickness and biliousness. The fourth Horseman of the Apocalypse will bring further warfare and terrible famines along with awful plagues, diseases, and attacks by wild animals. A fourth of the world's population will die.

What is most amazing, or perhaps terrifying, is that the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse are just precursors of even worse judgments that come later in the tribulation (Revelation chapters 8—9 and 16). For all the horror brought by the Four Horsemen, there is much more to come.

**B. The fifth and sixth seals of the scroll are opened.**

**(Revelation 6:9-11) The fifth seal brings forth the cry of the martyrs.**

***When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should***

***rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.***

That these souls were under the altar emphasizes that their life blood was poured out as an offering to God. The idea is drawn from Leviticus 4:7: And he shall pour the remaining blood at the base of the altar of the burnt offering.

It is probably best to see this as the cry of all martyrs for God's truth, not merely believers persecuted by the coming world leader, the first horseman of Revelation 6:1-2.

These souls in heaven cried out for vengeance (until You judge and avenge our blood). We usually don't think of God's people crying out for vengeance, but here they made their cry to God, and leave the matter with Him.

- When God's people are persecuted, He will set it right. It isn't wrong for God's people to ask Him to do what He promised to do. In this way the blood of Abel cried out from the ground for vengeance (Genesis 4:10), as did the blood of unavenged murders in the land of Israel (Numbers 35:33).

These saints were instructed to wait. How long must they wait? Until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed. This may mean that they should wait until all God's appointed martyrs are killed.

- Or, because the words the number of are supplied by the translators, not the text, it may mean that they wait until the character of the remaining martyrs on earth is perfected and complete. It is character — the way that one lives — that makes a martyr, not the way that one dies.

**(Revelation 6:12-17) The opening of the sixth seal brings cosmic disruption.**

***I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"***

In the Bible, celestial disturbances are often connected with the coming of the Messiah. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel, Zephaniah and Jesus Himself all described such things.

- A passage from Zephaniah is an example: The great day of the LORD is near; it is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the LORD is bitter; there the mighty men shall cry out. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet and alarm against the fortified cities and against the high towers. (Zephaniah 1:14-16)
- Or, as in Joel 2:10-11: The sun and moon grow dark, and stars diminish their brightness... for the day of the LORD is great and terrible; who can endure it?
- Those who regard these events as history have to greatly spiritualize them. One example is Adam Clarke, who said this great earthquake was "A most stupendous change in the civil and religious constitution of the world. If it refer to Constantine the Great, the change that was made by his conversion to Christianity might be very properly represented under the emblem of an earthquake."

**The sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth:** It is best to regard these pictures as real, but poetic. John did not use technically precise scientific language, but he simply described what he saw.

**And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves:** All people are equally brought low by God's wrath. The judgment is all the more profound because it is the wrath of the Lamb.

### **Observations: How do the seals fit in God's prophetic plan?**

1. There are many different opinions, but it seems best to say that the seals, trumpets, and bowls that will be described later are not strictly sequential events. It could be said that chronologically, the trumpets do not follow the seals and the bowls do not follow the trumpets in a strict order.

2. Do the seals represent conditions immediately before the end, or more general conditions prevailing over a more extended period, up until the return of Jesus?

- There is a sense in which we can say that they represent both — dictators, war, famine, death and persecution have been familiar throughout all history, but not to the magnitude and the severity with which they will be present in the Great Tribulation.
- As far as the seals are concerned, they will be an intense amplification of bad conditions often experienced through history. God will give mankind over to his fallen nature — and more!

3. The sixth seal concludes with a valid question: Who is able to stand? Only the believer can stand before this great judgment, the one who is justified by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

- Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand. (Romans 5:1-2)
- I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which you also received and in which you stand. (1 Corinthians 15:1)
- Testifying that this is the true grace of God in which you stand. (1 Peter 5:12)
- The believer can stand in the face of this great wrath of God because Jesus already bore the wrath the believer deserved.