

The Revelation to John
Chapter Six
God's Judgment Begins
The Breaking of Six Seals

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We now address the first six seals that will be broken. The seventh seal will be addressed in chapter eight. The book is the deed to the world given to the One who earned it: Jesus Christ. Be sure to note that Jesus breaks every seal. In breaking these seals He is releasing the wrath of God onto the world's system in a great judgment. We now get into the area where different interpretations yield different readings of the material. It is my opinion that what we will see is some of what has already happened and some of what will happen at the end time. My theology has changed over the years since I first wrote an article on the end times in 1991. That end-times paper is still on my web site: <http://livingtheology.com/EndTimes.htm> and I still recommend it for information about one method of end-times interpretation. I mainly just do not know what will happen specifically at the "real" end. I do know that now I am commanded to participate in the sanctification process being led by the Holy Spirit in my life. My end time could come at any time and I need to be ready, as do you. But now let's proceed.

We are going to hear of great tribulations in the world as the seals are opened. There have been such wars and devastations throughout the history of the world and they will continue and even intensify until the end. God is sovereign but all He has to do is just let sin take its course and the wars and devastations will precede for evil comes from the heart of man:

Matt 15:18 "But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man.

Matt 15:19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders."

Although Christians can sin also, as long as the percentage of real Christians to the lost remains small, wars and conflicts will continue unless God intervenes. In fact we will read that God will also cause even more devastation as He begins to pour out His wrath upon the sinful world. We Christians have been victims of the actions of sinful man and we will continue to be such victims, but we can rejoice in knowing that we will be saved whatever the tribulation. As noted previously, ten million Christians and 1,900 Catholic priests were murdered, massacred, raped, starved, burned and humiliated during World War II. They were not spared the tremendous persecution during that time but those who were true Christians were glorified in heaven. We will read about some of the rewards for those who persevere.

So there is no promise of our being spared some of the horror that will still come on earth as a result of sin in the hearts of man, but there is a promise of salvation from the

personal wrath of God upon individual people who are not His children. As we continue our studies of this book let us all be encouraged that we are in the book of life.

The first four seals show the self-defeating nature of sin. The next two seals deal with activities in heaven and the treatment of the final seal is discussed in chapter eight. The pattern of four, two, and one is repeated in the trumpet sections.

First Seal

Rev 6:1 “And I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, “Come.”

Rev 6:2 And I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him; and he went out conquering, and to conquer.”

John continues to see the vision as it is revealed to him. He sees the Lord Jesus break one of the seals and he then hears one of the beings say with a loud, confident voice for the horseman to continue. We might expect that, when the seal was broken, we would hear someone read from the book. Upon opening the book, and after the being makes his command, we have action instead of words. The first four seals are going to reveal the actions of four horsemen and much has been discussed about them. Some have said that the rider on the white horse was Jesus but that is unlikely for the sequence of riders is a unity and He is not a rider but the One who broke the seals. The white horse is usually a symbol of a conqueror. The bow is not a weapon of the Roman soldier so it is not a reference to a Roman conqueror. The bow would be representative of distant warfare rather than strictly one-on-one battles. The bow was used as a prelude to hand-to-hand combat in historical battles using bows. Similarly we use rockets and bombers to bombard an area before troops go into battle. The crown is our usual crown like a wreath so it is a reward for a particular victory. We notice that this crown is given to him as God is still sovereign. We then read that this horseman continued to conquer. This scene then is telling us that war will continue throughout the history of man and even will escalate in the end times. As the church reads this book they would undoubtedly have realized that the scenes are similar to those predicted by Jesus as recorded in Matt 24.

Second Seal

Rev 6:3 “And when He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, “Come.”

Rev 6:4 And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men should slay one another; and a great sword was given to him.”

The scene of the second seal proceeds similarly to that of the first seal as Jesus breaks the second seal and the being initiates action by commanding the next rider to proceed. This time the horse is red. Again we see that God is sovereign so He grants the work of the second rider just as He gave victories to the first rider. Throughout the Old Testament time we read of God using ungodly nations and people to discipline His chosen people. There is no reason to suppose that such tactics do not continue in our era. This rider takes peace away by war and the men slaughter each other, as meant by the word

translated “slay”. Although this rider was given a great sword he was not commanded to kill with it. This rider was then the leader of great wars rather than one who killed people himself and would be reminiscent of a general leading great wars but who was not directly involved in the destruction. The second seal illustrates personal hand-to-hand combat in which many people were slain. In our history we have seen many such battles as depicted by the first and second seal.

I repeat the information that I gave in the introduction to emphasize the horrible tribulations that have already happened on earth. Approximately 5.4 million people were killed in the Vietnam War including 58,148 Americans. During World War II the Allies lost about 61 million people, and the Axis lost 11 million for a total number of human deaths of about 72 million including about 416,800 Americans. Over 40 million casualties resulted from World War I, including approximately 20 million military and civilian deaths. Many people have also been killed by infectious agents. Overall, the Spanish flu of 1918-1919 killed between 20 and 40 million people. The effect of the influenza epidemic was so severe that the average life span in the US was depressed by 10 years. So from 1918 until 1944, about 150 million people have been killed by major wars and epidemics. Many millions more have been killed in other wars and calamities. So, to us today, our history is a very bloody one and such could have been included in this vision given to John. Of course, even more calamities await us. But God is sovereign and those of us who persevere will receive our peace and rewards.

Third Seal

Rev 6:5 “And when He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, “Come.” And I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand.

Rev 6:6 And I heard as it were a voice in the center 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 initiation of this vision is the same as the other two as we see Jesus break the third seal. This time we see that a black horse is involved. Zechariah also gives us a vision of horses of different colors:

Zech 6:1 “Now I lifted up my eyes again and looked, and behold, four chariots were coming forth from between the two mountains; and the mountains were bronze mountains.

Zech 6:2 With the first chariot were red horses, with the second chariot black horses,

Zech 6:3 with the third chariot white horses, and with the fourth chariot strong dappled horses.

Zech 6:4 Then I spoke and said to the angel who was speaking with me, “What are these, my lord?”

Zech 6:5 And the angel answered and said to me, “These are the four spirits of heaven, going forth after standing before the Lord of all the earth,

Zech 6:6 with one of which the black horses are going forth to the north country; and the white ones go forth after them, while the dappled ones go forth to the south country.”

These horses and chariots were bringing the judgment of God upon the enemies of Israel and later on Israel. The black horse was going toward the Babylonian kingdom to bring famine and death to those enemies of Israel and the dappled ones were going to the Egyptian area. Comparing these two books of the Bible and what follows in this section, we can say in the Revelation account that this section deals also with bringing famine and death. Jesus also predicted famine in this time:

Matt 24:7 "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes."

In the KJV, we also read of black associated with famine:

Lam 5:10 "Our skin was black like an oven because of the terrible famine."

What John hears is a sound as if it were a voice. That the sound comes from within the beings means that the voice is of God sitting on the throne. The scales would represent a way of giving out only specific amounts of food to the inhabitants. During famines, other references also tell of the doling out of food by measure:

Lev 26:26 "When I break your staff of bread, ten women will bake your bread in one oven, and they will bring back your bread in rationed amounts, so that you will eat and not be satisfied."

Almost invariably severe famine follows war. Although a child, I clearly remember sugar and gas rationing during and after World War II. Mom received a bit larger ration than some because Dad was fighting in the Pacific Theater. The amount each person receives is minimal for survival. The denarius is a full day's wage so these people were getting an amount suitable for one meal for the money earned for a full day's work if they accept wheat. However, this amount was suitable for just one person so the worker's family could not be feed completely even for one meal. For the same amount of money, they will receive enough barley for three meals so there would be enough for the family to eat but only enough for one meal for each of three people. The barley also does not have the nutritional equivalent of wheat so although each person in the family could eat some barley it would not be sufficient for good health. The wheat and the barley are the food of the poor. The oil and the wine are for the more prosperous people so we see that the famine primarily affects the poor people, which is a common occurrence today also.

Fourth Seal

Rev 6:7 "And when He broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come."

Rev 6:8 And I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. And authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth."

Again we see that the event is initiated by the command of one of the beings and that Jesus breaks the fourth seal. Now John sees an ashen horse. The word “ashen” is used here to translate the Greek word “chloros”, from which we get the word “chlorine”. Ashen is a good translation for the color would be that of a dead person. The rider does not have a bow, sword, or scales but this rider needs no such emblem. The name of the rider gives us the clear meaning of what is to follow in his wake. We are not told how Hades is traveling but it is obvious that the meaning is that the people killed will be cast into Hades. John tells us that God gives them the authority needed to carry out their task. They are to kill one fourth of the people on the earth with sword, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts. Pestilence also always follows a severe war and famine but this event will be extreme. Pestilence can refer to disease but also could mean some sort of chemical cause of death. Since the beasts that could kill man are not thought of as being present all over the world, the reference could refer to rats that in the past have caused widespread illness and death. In the fourteenth century over one fourth of the population of Europe were killed by bubonic plague spread by rats. All four of these elements of killing are also mentioned in Ezekiel 14:12-21. John here sees death on a huge scale and by four different sources all of which were released at the command of God.

Fifth Seal

Rev 6:9 “And when He broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained;

Rev 6:10 and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

Rev 6:11 And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, should be completed also.”

The scene now shifts away from earth to heaven and Jesus breaks the fifth seal. We see here the company of all those people who were martyred because of their unrelenting testimony of the truth of Jesus Christ. There were two altars in the Jewish faith, the altar of sacrifice and the altar of incense. Jesus completed the sacrificial aspects so the remaining altar is of incense so that the martyrs offer pleasing incense to God because of their perseverance. God is the giver of perseverance and these souls are representative of His blessings on them. Their depiction as being under the altar probably means total protection and provision by God. These saints ask God how long He will wait to bring justice on the people who killed them. It is important to notice that they are asking for justice as only God is the Judge who can deal properly in justice. The white robe may be thought of in terms of justification since it is given by God rather than earned by man. Also white is a symbol of victory and may also mean that the people receive a mark of victory from God in their death for Him. The people who killed Jesus and these martyrs thought that they had dealt defeat to those people, but in the eyes of God each was a victory.

Each of these saints were told to rest some more for all of plan A has not been completed. It is not that God is waiting for some fixed number of people to be martyred but rather the total plan is being unfolded and more people are to give their lives for the Gospel. But since they are told that their brothers in Christ are to be killed certainly there are still Christians on earth during these horrible times. Upon completion of the plan, God will measure out justice to those who are not His children. Praise the Lord, we receive mercy rather than the justice we deserve based upon our own works.

Sixth Seal

Rev 6:12 “And I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood;

Rev 6:13 and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind.

Rev 6:14 And the sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

Rev 6:15 And the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains;

Rev 6:16 and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb;

Rev 6:17 for the great day of their wrath has come; and who is able to stand? ””

The scene shifts back to the earth with more vengeance to be poured forth as Jesus breaks the sixth seal. Jesus has already predicted this type of destruction in the last days so the readers would probably have been familiar with His predictions that are now being enacted. Joel had also made a similar prediction:

Joel 2:31 “The sun will be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.”

We do have to be very careful in our interpretation of these events. We can know that the events are symbolic rather than literal for the earthquake itself cannot be worldwide for there are mountains, islands and cities present after this event. This revelation must refer to the breakup of society and the religious orders. The sun is the source of light and life as we know it. Our Lord Jesus has been referred to it also as Malachi did in his telling of the second coming of Jesus:

Mal 4:2 “But for you who fear My name the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall.”

To see a vision in which the sun is now black would mean that the light of the Lord is no longer shining on the earth. This can then mean that He has been rejected as the Christ and His words are despised. The loss of the light of the sun would also mean the loss of any derived authority and the moon receives its light from the sun so for it to become like

blood would mean its death. Thus this period of time would be when the world has rejected the teaching and authority of Jesus and all of His followers.

In chapter two the stars were referred to as the elders of the churches so the continuing use of the same symbols would mean that the religious leaders would fall from their former places of respect in the world. The same symbols are used in Daniel:

Dan 12:3 “And those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.”

Job also referred to the power of God in such matters:

Job 9:5 “It is God who removes the mountains, they know not how, When He overturns them in His anger;

Job 9:6 Who shakes the earth out of its place, And its pillars tremble;

Job 9:7 Who commands the sun not to shine, And sets a seal upon the stars;

Job 9:8 Who alone stretches out the heavens, And tramples down the waves of the sea;”

The falling of these “stars” to the earth may mean the leaders of the false church. The dispensationalists use this interpretation as they think that the true disciples of Jesus will already have been raptured at this time. However it is not necessary to believe in the rapture to have this interpretation of false apostles that Paul warned us about in earlier writings:

2Cor 11:13 “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.

2Cor 11:14 And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

2Cor 11:15 Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds.”

We have seen many such false teachers in the churches today. There are church leaders teaching prosperity theology, religious “tolerance”, and other such concepts in the “emerging church”. These churches are very popular and continue to grow in attendance as people are hearing what they want to hear:

2Tim 4:3 “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires;

2Tim 4:4 and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths.”

We see all of these events happening in 2008 and the true church is still here so there is no need to postulate rapture before these events occur. But when all of these false leaders are deposed the world will be shaken to its core for it has swallowed the teachings of these leaders and based their life upon the false foundation. When the world sees that these people were not true prophets they will see the very foundation of their lives roll up

like a used carpet. Verse fourteen continues to say that the mountains and islands were moved out of their places but in the next verse people are hiding in them so they are not meant to have been destroyed.

When people see that their false doctrines are exposed they will then cry out to God for help but there is no repentance so they are just reacting to the severe conditions and hoping that there is a god who will help them. They will be like the people in the time of Paul's trip to Ephesus when they had idols for all gods and even one to an unknown god in case they missed one.

The breaking of the seventh seal is not discussed until chapter eight.