

7. The Lamb Opens Six of Seven Seals (Revelation 6)

In this section, the Lamb opens six of the seven seals. The Lamb reserves seventh seal for chapter 8 where as the eighth seal opens and the seven angels prepare to sound seven trumpets. The trumpet soundings open up other sequences of events – some past, some present, and some future.

The Lamb opened the first of the seven seals, and with the opening one of the living creatures, in a voice like thunder, said, "Come." As a command, "Come" shows that the living creatures control the horsemen. The King James Version and the New King James Version translate this, "Come and see," making John the recipient of the command. However, "and see" is inserted by the translators. The Greek text agrees with the NIV and all American Standard versions. Either "Go!" or "Come!" are acceptable; however the words, "and see," are doubtful, and generally rejected by critics. The living creature, therefore commanded the four horsemen.

Thus, the living creatures have authority over the four horsemen and their symbolic representations. Although God allows the forces of evil and natural calamity to exist across the earth, He still is over all and above all, allowing them to exist only as He wills it. Paul wrote in Eph 4:5-6, "One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

As in chapter 4:1, John immediately saw what was happening before him. As the seals open, notice that the events are parallel. Each proceeds through time until the great and final day of the Lord. The first four scenes will involve horses with riders. The horse is never a beast of burden in the Bible. The Bible used the phrase workhorse in one place. In all, there are 37 references to the word horse and 126 references to the word horses. It is an animal of war and conquest. Job 39:19-25, in the oldest book of the Bible, describes the might, power, and beauty of the horse:

19 "Do you give the horse his strength
or clothe his neck with a flowing mane?
20 Do you make him leap like a locust,
striking terror with his proud snorting?
21 He paws fiercely, rejoicing in his strength,
and charges into the fray.
22 He laughs at fear, afraid of nothing;
he does not shy away from the sword. 23
The quiver rattles against his side,
along with the flashing spear and lance.
24 In frenzied excitement he eats up the ground;
he cannot stand still when the trumpet sounds.
25 At the blast of the trumpet he snorts, 'Aha!'
He catches the scent of battle from afar,
the shout of commanders and the battle cry.

Revelation uses the words horse and horses 16 times making it an important image, and central to the scenes of struggle in God's revelation.

The allusion to the horses in Revelation 6 is to Zechariah 1:8-13 and 6:1-8 where it is clear that they are under the control of God who sent them out through the world to serve His purposes:

8 During the night I had a vision - and there before me was a man riding a red horse! He was standing among the myrtle trees in a ravine. Behind him were red, brown, and white horses.

9 I asked, "What are these, my lord?"

The angel who was talking with me answered, "I will show you what they are."

10 Then the man standing among the myrtle trees explained, "They are the ones the Lord has sent to go throughout the earth."

11 And they reported to the angel of the LORD, who was standing among the myrtle trees, "We have gone throughout the earth and found the whole world at rest and in peace."

12 Then the angel of the LORD said, "LORD Almighty, how long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and from the towns of Judah, which you have been angry with these seventy years?" 13 So the LORD spoke kind and comforting words to the angel who talked with me. Zechariah 1:8-13

Here the angel of the Lord understood that only the Lord has the power to destroy or grant mercy or withhold it. In Zechariah 6:1ff, the angel of the Lord calls the four spirits of the Lord going out to the whole world:

6:1 I looked up again - and there before me were four chariots coming out from between two mountains - mountains of bronze! 2 The first chariot had red horses, the second black, 3 the third white, and the fourth dappled - all of them powerful. 4 I asked the angel who was speaking to me, "What are these, my lord?"

5 The angel answered me, "These are the four spirits of heaven, going out from standing in the presence of the Lord of the whole world. 6 The one with the black horses is going toward the north country, the one with the white horses toward the west, and the one with the dappled horses toward the south."

7 When the powerful horses went out, they were straining to go throughout the earth. And he said, "Go throughout the earth!" So they went throughout the earth.

8 Then he called to me, "Look, those going toward the north country have given my Spirit rest in the land of the north." Zechariah 6:1-8

The First Seal—Conqueror on White Horse (Revelation 6:1-2)

6:1 I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, "Come!" 2 I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest.

With the opening of the first seal, John sees the white horse and the rider had a bow and crown and rode out bent on conquest. Notice the contrast between this weak imagery of the horseman and the powerful and mighty imagery of the Christ in Revelation 19:11-15:

11 I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice, he judges and makes war. 12 His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. 13 He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. 14 The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.

In the context of the other horses and horsemen, and in the war-like and conquering symbolism, this horseman on the white horse, like the others, is conquering humankind. What force appears in white, yet assaults the children of God? After all, Revelation uses white in to describe God, the Son of God, and the righteous acts of the saints. The answer is clear.

False prophets are dressed in the white of sheep: "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves." Matthew 7:15. In the great deceit of

humankind, disguise is an important tool of the evil one: "And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. 15 It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve." 2 Corinthians 11:14-15.

Not only is evil cloaked in white, but the deeds of evil are also deceitful: "The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved." 2 Thessalonians 2:9-11. In the writings, of John this agent of evil upon the earth is the antichrist. The rider on the white horse is the false prophet who along with Satan himself and the beast become a triad of evil as the revelation unfolds.

- 18 Dear children, this is the last hour and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. 1 John 2:18.
- 1 John 2:21-23: 22 Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son.
- 1 John 4:3: 3 but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.
- 2 John 7: 7 Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.

The deceit of evil is so successful because it mimics the Christ in appearance but not in word and thought. Later, John sees the true Christ.

The Second Seal—War (Revelation 6:3-4)

3 When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come" 4 Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. 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.

At the opening of the second seal, the second living creature, just as the first, said, "Come." The horse is the red horse of war, having been given the right to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other. The Lord taught, and our experience agrees, that war will go out across the world:

4 Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. 5 For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. 6 You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 7 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. 8 All these are the beginning of birth pains. Matthew 24:4-8.

This description appears in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Civil peace in this present world is unattainable. Ezekiel described peace as a flimsy, whitewashed wall that falls after the first hard rain: "Because they lead my people astray, saying, 'Peace,' when there is no peace, and because, when a flimsy wall is built, they cover it with whitewash." Ezekiel 13:10-11.

The Lord did not come to abolish war, which God allows to exist, but to bring spiritual peace to us: "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." Matthew 10:34-36. This spiritual peace comes only to the righteous in the Lord: The promise was clear from the prophets on:

"Peace, peace, to those far and near,"

says the LORD. And I will heal them."

20 But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest,
whose waves cast up mire and mud.

21 "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked." Isaiah 57:19-21

The red horse illustrates that war will be upon the earth and the true peace is the peace in Christ. Paul describes this true peace in Philippians 4:7: "7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

God's control of war extends to the rulers who serve only by his grace: "13:1 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. . . 4 For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing." Romans 13:1-4.

The Third Seal—Famine: (6:5-6)

5 When the Lamb opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a black horse! Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand. 6 Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures, saying, "A quart of wheat for a day's wages, and three quarts of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!"

The rider of the black horse carries a pair of scales. The cost was great. A quart of wheat for a day's wages, and three quarts of barley for a day's wages. There are no luxuries, for famine withholds oil and wine. Our present world has many examples of famine. Starving children abound in places stricken like Africa. There is not even a quart of wheat for those families. Desperate as famine-stricken people may be, they will not receive relief in this life. However, Jesus promised all the world in Matthew 5:6 that he would fill them spiritually: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."

Just as with false religion and war, God allows famine to go throughout the world.

The Fourth Seal—Death: (Revelation 6:7-8)

7 When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!" 8 I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.

With war, famine, and disease, there comes Death and Hades. Personified here, Death is the rider of the pale horse. Hades, the realm of the dead follows close behind him. For reasons that are evident in verses 6:9-11, at the death of Christ, he overcame Hades and the righteous dead are no longer there. Vine includes this idea in his definition: "Hades: 6, 'the region of departed spirits of the lost' (but including the blessed dead in periods preceding the ascension of Christ)."

A summary of the uses attributed to Hades by Vine will be helpful to understand what follows:

- The word is used four times in the Gospels, and always by the Lord, Matthew 11:23; 16:18; Luke 10:15; 16:23.
- It is used with reference to the soul of Christ, Acts 2:27, 31.
- Christ declares that He has the keys of it, Revelation 1:18.
- In Revelation 6:8 it is personified, with the signification of the temporary destiny of the doomed.

- It is to give up those who are therein, 20:13, and is to be cast into the lake of fire, v. 14.

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Death is the more dominant of the two in this passage and the rider of the pale horse. While Christ now holds the keys to Hades, he has yet to overcome Death. In 1 Corinthians 15:25-26, Paul declared, "For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy that he will destroy is death. "In 1 Corinthians 15:54-57, he added:

4 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

55 "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Man's long struggle against death spans all dispensations (Hosea 13:14; Isaiah 25:8) and the overcoming of death is one part of the eternal struggle.

The instruments of physical death are war, famine, plague and disease, and the wild beasts of the earth. God—the alpha and omega—subjects all these to His will, controlling them through the four living creatures. The instrument of spiritual death is the false prophet, disguised in righteousness, but still control by God—the alpha and the omega.

The Fifth Seal—Souls of Those Slain for the Word of God: (Revelation 6:9-11)

9 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. 10 They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" 11 Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.

As the four horsemen—the Antichrist, War, Famine, and Death—reveal, while living this earthly life, we must expect the dangers that are inherent in this present world. However, what of the saints who died because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus? The souls of those thus slain are under the altar in the vision of the heavenly scene. This passage indicates that Hades does not keep the dead in Christ. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus said that the gates of Hades could not overcome his church. Those dead in this passage are clearly not in Hades. In the state represented by opening of the fifth seal, these dead in Christ are under the altar of God, they are given a white robe, and they are told to wait until the number of all those to be killed was completed. This is a dispensational context, which appears to cover from the beginning of the church until the Lamb is victorious. In context, chapter 7 will become an elaboration of the fate of those who have "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

A more traditional thought, based on the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, holds that Abraham's side was a separate place but still a part of Hades. Luke 16:21-24. Revelation treats Christians as being in an immediate state of bliss (paradise in Luke 16) with white robes and in the presence of the Sovereign Lord. The entirety of chapter 7 expands on the status of the Christian dead in Christ.

The question of "Who are the slain?" is important. For this passage to be consistent with the context, *the slain*, just as the *horsemen* must be symbolic. The souls of slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained are all those who have died to Christ. The slaying of all Christians occurs when they put to death the old man and put on Christ. Paul wrote in Gal 3:26-27,

“26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”

Paul described this continue condition in 2 Cor 6:9-10 where he said, “Dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; 10 sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.” When Christians obey the gospel and hold to the testimony of Jesus, they slay the old man of sin. The figure of one slain is also used of Christ as in Rev 5:6, “Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders.” Rev 13:8 also speaks of the slain savior, “All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast – all whose names **have not been written** in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.”

The slaying of all Christians emulates the slaying of the Lord when they obey him. Rom 6:2-4 teaches, “We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? 3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” This death is a dying in Christ—a slaying just as he was slain. Rom 6:8-10 clearly affirms this point, “8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. 10 The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. We will study later in the Revelation that the second death has no power over those thus alive in Christ (Revelation 20:5-6).

Our life is a new one in Christ. Paul taught in 2 Cor 5:14-18:

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. 16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

Further, in Col 2:20-21, the scripture teaches, “Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules.” And even more emphatically, in Col 3:3-4, we learn, “For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

2 Tim 2:11-13 summarizes the teaching on the death of Christians:

11 Here is a trustworthy saying:
If we died with him,
we will also live with him;
12 if we endure,
we will also reign with him.
If we disown him,
he will also disown us;
13 if we are faithless,
he will remain faithful,
for he cannot disown himself.

The point that all the righteous that hold to the testimony of the Lamb are those slain for the Lamb follows consistently throughout the revelation. This study will return to the subject in Rev 20:4:

4 I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and

because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands.

For now, this point concludes with Paul's glorious statement in Gal 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." The slain in Christ are not the martyrs strewn through the pages of history during times of persecution. They are the uncountable multitudes of believers who die with Christ to sin every hour of every day through out all time and for all time.

The Sixth Seal—Terror for the Evil Ones and a Sealing for the Servants of God (Revelation 6:12-7:17)

This passage begins a thought with three divisions: *Terror to the Evil Doers (6:12-17)*, *144,000 Sealed (7:1-8)*, and *the Great Multitudes in White Robes (7:9-17)*. Many view chapter 7 as an interlude; however, we shall consider that chapter as a central part of the whole in the next lessons where as the day approaches, and the Lord deals justly with the good. For now, John's vision turns to the evil doers.

Terror to the Evil Doers

12 I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, 13 and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. 14 The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.

15 Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. 16 They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! 17 For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

The vision portrayed under the opening of the sixth seal brings us right up to the great, awesome, and mighty day of the Lord. It is a prelude to that great day revealed in later chapters of Revelation. These images and the terror that they cause are simultaneous events poured out on the wicked:

- There was a great earthquake.
- The sun turned black,
- The whole moon turned to blood.
- The stars in the sky fell.
- The sky recedes like a scroll,
- Every mountain and island was removed from its place.

The scene takes us right up to the destruction of the world with the fervent, final appearance of the wrath of the Lamb. The context indicates that these terrible events will occur for a long enough time for the recipients to discuss their terror and to suffer at its appearance.

Metaphorically all worldly men—the rich, poor, mighty, and weak,—will respond with the same terror, hiding and even calling for the mountains to fall on them: "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! 17 For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

This scene is a preamble to what follows for evil people. The passage follows the characteristics and features of the Lord's own prediction in Matthew 24:29-44:

29 "Immediately after the distress of those days

"the sun will be darkened,

and the moon will not give its light;

the stars will fall from the sky,

and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.

30 " At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. 31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

32 "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. 33 Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. 34 I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

36 "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 37 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; 39 and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 40 Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. 41 Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

42 "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. 43 But understand this: if the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. 44 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

The wrath of God and the Lamb is upon us. Now, the scene shifts to the status of the servants of God during this very event.