

Revelation Chapter 6

Revelation 6 (NKJV)

¹ 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."

² 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.

³ When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come and see."

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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."

⁷ When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come and see."

⁸ 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.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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?"

¹¹ 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.

¹² 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.

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place.

¹⁵ 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,

¹⁶ 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!

¹⁷ For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

John now begins to describe the first half of Daniel's 70th week found in Daniel chapter 9 verse 27:

Daniel 9:27 (NKJV)

²⁷ Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, Even until the consummation, which is determined, Is poured out on the desolate.”

This is the seven-year period of tribulation. The Lamb has taken the sealed book (His title deed to creation); He is about to open the seals and declare war on the godless world. With the opening of each seal in heaven, an important event will take place on earth.

Something to Remember:

The imagery of the four horseman in Revelation 6:2-8 comes from Zechariah 1:8-17, and 6:1-8. In the Old Testament, horses were rarely used for peaceful purposes; they suggested war to the Jewish mind. This is interesting to note, because how did Jesus ride into Jerusalem before He was crucified? He rode in on a donkey and not on a horse. The donkey symbolizes peace. The first time Jesus came, He came to make peace – peace with God. The second time He comes He will come riding on a horse.

Revelation 19:11 (NKJV)

¹¹ Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him *was* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war.

Ok enough with my babbling. Let's move on and look at each of the seals as found in Revelation chapter 6.

Section One: The Four Horseman

I. The First Seal: Antichrist Rises to Power (6:1–2)

¹ 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.”

² 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.

Verse to compare:

Matthew 24:4-5 (NKJV)

⁴ And Jesus answered and said to them: “Take heed that no one deceives you.

⁵ For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.

With the opening of the first four seals, one of the four living creatures before the throne (4:6–11) calls for the rider and horse to “Come!” The first horse is white, and his rider is given a bow and a crown. Do not confuse this scene with that described in Rev. 19:11, where we see Christ riding in conquest. No, the rider here is Antichrist, the false Christ, beginning his conquest on earth. **The fact that he has a bow, but no arrows, indicates that he conquers the nations peacefully.** There will be a false peace temporarily, for he will unite Europe and make his pact with the Jews.

|| **1 Thessalonians 5:2-3 (NKJV)**

² For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.

³ For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.

This passage parallels Matt. 24:5 and fulfills Christ’s prophecy in John 5:43.

|| **Matthew 24:5 (NKJV)**

⁵ For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.

|| **John 5:43 (NKJV)**

⁴³ I have come in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive.

This horseman, riding the white horse of victory, certainly symbolizes the spirit of conquest and can further be identified with the “man of sin” of 2 Thess. 2:3, 4. There is also the similarity among all four horsemen and the Lord’s description of the Tribulation in Matt. 24. The white horseman may also be identified with the second beast of ch. 13, the Antichrist. The timetable of his promises of peace and prosperity may be determined through the examination of the parallel passage concerning the Great Tribulation in Dan. 9. Daniel’s Seventieth Week is divided into two periods of three and one-half years each. The first three and one-half years is the period of promise, in which the initial horseman conquers primarily through peaceful means and promise. The purpose of the Great Tribulation includes the following: (1) the exhibition of the characteristics of the wrath and judgment of God; (2) the awakening of Israel’s longing for her Messiah and Deliverer, Jesus; and (3) the final preparation for the return and intervention of Jesus. During the seven devastating years of the Tribulation, life will be characterized by cataclysmic natural upheavals (vv. 12–17), warfare, and general sorrows (vv. 5–8).¹

Because the first rider is on a **white horse** and is **conquering**, some take it to be Christ (19:11). If so, His full conquest is considerably delayed (19:11—20:6). Other widely held views are that this is the Antichrist, or a spirit of conquest and delusion (Matt. 24:3–6). The **bow** indicates that the rider is a warrior. The **crown** suggests that he is a ruler. The bow without the arrow could point to peaceful political conquest founded on military

¹ *Believer's Study Bible*. electronic ed. Nashville : Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1995, S. Re 6:2

might. The emergence of this first rider most likely occurs at the beginning of the seventieth week of Daniel (Dan. 9:25–27).²

II. The Second Seal: War (6:3–4)

³ When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, “Come and see.”

⁴ 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.

Verse to compare:

Matthew 24:6-7 (NKJV)

⁶ And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all *these things* must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

⁷ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom...

The second living creature summoned the second rider to come forth. This one carried a **great sword** and rode on a **horse** which was **fiery red**. A **sword** is used in hand to hand combat. Thus the second seal contemplates invading armies in fierce person to person warfare. The second rider takes **peace from the earth**.³

This worldwide peace will not last long, for while men are saying “Peace and safety,” terrible wars will break loose. This parallels Matt. 24:6–7.

Matthew 24:6-7 (NKJV)

⁶ And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all *these things* must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

⁷ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places.

Red is a color associated with terror and carnage. In Revelation we have the red horse of war (6:3–4), the red dragon (12:3), and the red beast (17:3). Note that God gives Antichrist authority to take peace from the earth; this is all a part of the divine plan. Antichrist exchanges his arrowless bow for a great sword, and men begin to kill each other. This indicates clearly that methods of international agreement and diplomacy will not bring lasting peace.

²Radmacher, Earl D. ; Allen, Ronald Barclay ; House, H. Wayne: *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*. Nashville : T. Nelson Publishers, 1999, S. Re 6:1-2

³MacDonald, William ; Farstad, Arthur: *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1995, S. Re 6:3

With the breaking of **the second seal** a **red horse** appeared with a **rider** empowered to **take peace from the earth** (cf. “the red dragon,” 12:3; the “scarlet beast,” 17:3). In contrast with the first rider who has a bow without an arrow this second rider carried a **large sword**. This again was a picture of political power with the rider as the world ruler.⁴

III. The Third Seal: Famine (6:5–6)

⁵ 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.
⁶ 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.”

Verse to compare:

Matthew 24:7 (NKJV)

⁷ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places.

Note that Famine and war often go together. The color black makes one think of famine; see Jer. 14:1–2 and Lam. 5:10.

The **black horse** apparently symbolizes famine, since the prices for the **wheat** and **barley** are extraordinarily high, as they would be in a time of extreme drought.⁵

The rider (still Antichrist) holds a pair of balances, indicating that his government has established control of food. A measure of wheat was about a quart; and a penny was a day’s wages for a worker. In other words, food will be so scarce it will take a person all day to earn enough wages for just a quart of grain! But note that there is no scarcity of oil and wine for the rich. The rich get richer and enjoy their luxuries, while the poor get poorer and can hardly get enough to eat. This indicates that all man-made schemes to give people even the necessities of life will fail. It is worth noting that grain, oil, and wine were the key products of Israel (Hosea 2:8). Since Antichrist has made his covenant with Israel, he would want to protect its resources.

With the opening of **the third seal** a **black horse** was revealed with a **rider** carrying a **pair of scales in his hand**. At the same time a **voice** was heard from **among the four living creatures saying, A quart of wheat for a day’s wages, and three quarts of**

cf. *confer*, compare

⁴Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:947

⁵Radmacher, Earl D. ; Allen, Ronald Barclay ; House, H. Wayne: *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*. Nashville : T. Nelson Publishers, 1999, S. Re 6:5-6

barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine! "A day's wages" refers to a silver coin, the Roman denarius, worth about 15 cents, which was the normal wage for a worker for an entire day. So this passage is saying that in that food shortage an entire day's work would be required to buy either a quart of wheat or three quarts of barley. If one bought wheat, it would be enough for one good meal; if he bought barley, it would be enough for three good meals but nothing would be left for buying oil or wine. Famine is the inevitable aftermath of war. This will be a major cause of death in the Great Tribulation. The black color of the horse speaks of famine and death.⁶

The "scales" indicate rationing, or at least the caution of merchants to get every cent the food is worth. Barley and wheat were basic staples. Because a quart of wheat was a day's sustenance, and a denarius was a day's wage, a man with a family would have to buy the cheaper barley instead. Even then, three quarts of barley was hardly enough daily food for a whole family to subsist on; in the many peasant families with large numbers of children, several children would die. The famine also created a high inflation rate: this wheat costs more than ten times the average price of wheat.

Oil and wine were widely used, but not essential like wheat or barley. Oil was especially used for anointing the head, washing the body and lighting lamps; wine was mixed with water (one part wine for two to three parts water) for meals. The selective continuance of such items of relatively secondary importance while staples were barely obtainable would reinforce the reality of divine judgment. Because inflation was high at the end of the first century and some readers were no doubt aware of Domitian's unpopular restriction of land for vineyards in the provinces, readers would have readily resonated with the terror such prophecies implied. Asia Minor was hit especially hard by economic troubles during Domitian's reign.⁷

IV. The Fourth Seal: Death (6:7-8)

⁷ When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come and see."

⁸ 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.

Verse to Compare:

Matthew 24:9-12 (NKJV)

⁹ "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake.

⁶Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:948

⁷Keener, Craig S. ; InterVarsity Press: *The IVP Bible Background Commentary : New Testament*. Downers Grove, Ill. : InterVarsity Press, 1993, S. Re 6:5

- ¹⁰ And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another.
¹¹ Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.
¹² And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.

The word “pale” suggests a leprous color (Lev. 13:49, “greenish”). Death rides this horse, and “Hades” (not hell) rides with him. Death claims the body, Hades the soul. God gives them authority to kill one-fourth of the earth’s population! Four methods are used: the sword (violence and war); hunger (famine); death, or pestilence (disease accompanies war and famine); and beasts (nature takes over when civilization falls apart). Read Ezek. 14:21 for a parallel. Even the wild beasts will be hungry and attack humans! What terrible judgments await the Christ-rejecting world after the church is taken to heaven! See Matt. 24:7.

John saw two personages: Death riding a pale horse and Hades (the realm of the dead) following him. Christ has the keys of death and Hades (Rev. 1:18), and both will one day be cast into hell (Rev. 20:14). Death claims the body while Hades claims the soul of the dead (Rev. 20:13). John saw these enemies going forth to claim their prey, armed with weapons of the sword, hunger, pestilence (death), and wild beasts. In ancient times, hunger, pestilence, and the ravages of beasts would be expected to accompany war (note also Jer. 15:2; 24:10; Ezek. 14:21).

Conquering tyrants who bring the world war, famine, and pestilence are certainly nothing new. Suffering people from the days of the Roman Empire to the most recent war can easily recognize anticipations of these four dreaded horsemen. This is why the Book of Revelation has been a source of encouragement to suffering believers throughout history. As they see the Lamb opening the seals, they realize that God is in control and that His purposes will be accomplished.⁸

Word Focus

Hades

(Gk. *hadēs*) (6:8; 20:13, 14; Luke 16:23; Acts 2:27, 31) Strong’s #86: The Greek term means “the place of the unseen.” It designates the invisible world of the dead, as does the Hebrew word *sheol*. All people who die go to Hades because all pass from the visible world to the invisible. The association between Death and Hades is therefore a natural one. Unfortunately, this word has often been associated with hell, a place of eternal punishment. But there is a different Greek word for *hell*; it is *gehenna* (see Mark 9:43–45). We cannot avoid Hades, but we can avoid hell, by believing in Jesus and receiving eternal life.⁹

⁸Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Re 6:1

⁹Radmacher, Earl D. ; Allen, Ronald Barclay ; House, H. Wayne: *The Nelson Study Bible : New King James Version*. Nashville : T. Nelson Publishers, 1997, S. Re 6:9

Section 2: The Response

V. The Fifth Seal: The Martyrs (6:9–11)

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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?”

¹¹ 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.

When the Old Testament priest presented an animal sacrifice, the victim’s blood was poured out at the base of the brazen altar (Lev. 4:7, 18, 25, 30). In Old Testament imagery, blood represents life (Lev. 17:11). So, here in Revelation, the souls of the martyrs “under the altar” indicates that their lives were given sacrificially to the glory of God. The Apostle Paul had the same idea in mind when he wrote Philippians 2:17 and 2 Timothy 4:6.

The Greek word *martus*, which gives us our English word *martyr*, simply means “a witness” (see Rev. 2:13; 17:6). These saints were slain by the enemy because of their witness to the truth of God and the message of Jesus Christ. The forces of Antichrist do not accept the truth, because Satan wants them to be deceived and accept his lies (see Rev. 19:20; 20:10; also 2 Thes. 2:9–12).

Since their murderers are still alive on earth, these martyrs are apparently from the early part of the Tribulation. But they represent all who have laid down their lives for Jesus Christ and the cause of God’s truth, and they are an encouragement to all today who may be called to follow them. They assure us that the souls of the martyrs are in heaven, awaiting the resurrection (Rev. 20:4), and that they are at rest, robed in heavenly glory.

But is it “Christian” for these martyred saints to pray for vengeance on their murderers? After all, both Jesus and Stephen prayed that God would forgive those who killed them. I have no doubt that, when they were slain on earth, these martyrs also prayed for their slayers; and this is the right thing to do (Matt. 5:10–12, 43–48).

The great question, however, was not whether their enemies would be judged, but when. “How long, O Lord?” has been the cry of God’s suffering people throughout the ages (see Pss. 74:9–10; 79:5; 94:3–4; also Hab. 1:2). The saints in heaven know that God will eventually judge sin and establish righteousness in the earth, but they do not know God’s exact schedule. It is not personal revenge that they seek, but vindication of God’s holiness and the establishment of God’s justice. Every believer today who sincerely prays, “Thy kingdom come!” is echoing their petition.

God made clear to these martyrs that their sacrifice was an appointment, not an accident; and that others would join them. Even in the death of His people, God is in control (Ps. 116:15); so there is nothing to fear.

Many others would be slain for their faith before the Lord would return and establish His kingdom (see Rev. 11:7; 12:11; 14:13; and 20:4–5). Then as today, it appears that the enemy is winning; but God will have the last word. Even in our “enlightened” twentieth century, multiplied thousands of true believers have laid down their lives for Christ; certainly they will receive the crown of life (Rev. 2:10).

VI. The Sixth Seal: World Chaos (6:12–17)

¹² 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.

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place.

¹⁵ 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,

¹⁶ 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!

¹⁷ For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”

This passage parallels Luke 21:25–26;

Luke 21:25-26 (NKJV)

²⁵ “And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring;

²⁶ men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

See also Joel 2:30–31, 3:15 and Isa. 13:9–10, 34:2–4. Three earthquakes are mentioned in Revelation (6:12; 11:13; 16:18–19). There is no doubt that these are literal earthquakes, but along with them will be disturbances on earth and in the heavens that will frighten great and small. Some students think that these verses describe the results of atomic warfare, with the sun and moon blacked out, great land masses moved, and people hiding in holes in the ground to escape atomic radiation. This may be so; but we need to note that the people are hiding from Christ and His wrath in particular, not from some man-made catastrophe.

Verse 15 is a vivid description of what life will be like during the first three and one-half years of tribulation. For one thing, kingdoms will be revived. Today, the movement is toward nationalism and democracy; but this trend will change. See 16:12–14. Antichrist will rule over “the United States of Europe,” the revived Roman Empire, with a number of petty kings following him (17:12–14). Another characteristic of Tribulation days is militarism; there will be “chief captains.” This is a Roman title meaning “military tribunes” and is completely in keeping with the revived Roman Empire of Antichrist. Slavery (“bondmen”) will be present; see 18:13, where

“slaves and the souls of men” are included in the merchandise of Babylon. Great wealth will coexist with great poverty, and this redistribution of wealth will wreck the economies of nations. It seems, then, that the judgment of the sixth seal involves literal physical destruction in the heavens and on earth, as well as a shaking of the economic and political systems of nations. All of this will make it easier for Antichrist to extend his rule.

The peoples of the earth will know then that Christ is sending judgment, but they will not receive Him! They would rather hide in the rocks than in the Rock. The first three and one-half years of the Tribulation are mere preparation for the last three and one-half years, and this latter period is known as “the wrath of God” (see 11:18; 12:12; 14:10; 18:3; etc.). There is a pause, however, between the sixth and seventh seals (as there is also between the sixth and seventh trumpets, 10:1–11:13) for us to see the two great groups of redeemed who will be saved during the Tribulation period.

In summary, note that Antichrist begins his career as a peaceful political conqueror, but then resorts to war and economic controls to dominate other nations. The world will accept his false peace because it has rejected the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ.

Worship or Wrath?

For some people, Christ makes very little difference in how one looks at life. Faith doesn’t really matter. But in Rev. 4–10, John provides us with a peek into the future and the prospect of life or death forever. Clearly, the time we spend on earth is but a brief preamble to something much larger.

This section offers us a bird’s-eye view of the coming apocalypse on earth and the promised joy of heaven (Rev. 4:1). The contrasts are severe. Those who embrace Christ and His provision for sin can anticipate a celebration that exceeds their greatest expectations. Those without Christ have cause to tremble for their refusal to accept His offer of deliverance from the wrath to come. The message is plain: only in Christ is there hope of escaping wrath. That way of escape is offered right now. Waiting to accept Christ’s offer only increases the risk of experiencing adverse judgment. It also deprives one of new life today.

If you have not yet responded to Christ’s offer of eternal life, why not do so right now? There is much more to life than the here and now. The choice you make has eternal consequences.¹⁰

1) What Happens when the Lamb opens each of the first six seals?

Seal 1: _____

Seal 2: _____

Seal 3: _____

Seal 4: _____

¹⁰ *Word in Life Study Bible* . electronic ed. Nashville : Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1996, S. Re 6:1

Seal 5: _____

Seal 6: _____

2) From the description in 6:2-8, what do you think each of the four horsemen represent?

White: _____

Red: _____

Black: _____

Pale: _____

3) Jesus gave a discourse on the end times in Matthew 24:4-51. What does Jesus say about wars and famines in Matthew 24:4-8?

4) In Revelation 6:10 what is the answer to the Martyrs' question?

5) How will people (mighty and lowly) react to the sixth seal's judgment? (Rev. 6:15-17)

6) How is this a warning or encouragement to you?