

# Revelation Chapter 6

[The Seven Seal Judgments]

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The Bible teaches that the earth is headed toward numerous worldwide, cataclysmic events that will end with a series of battles at Armageddon [Rev. 16:14-16]. While many seek for peace and unity, in reality the earth is deteriorating into a world of chaos, confusion and sin. As Christ's second coming draws nigh, wars, crimes, economic upheavals and unprecedented natural disasters [Matt. 24:6-8] will escalate. All these things will mark the unfolding of God's wrath on a sinful, rebellious world [both Jews - Jer. 30:7 and Gentiles -Isa. 34:1-4].

Starting in chapter 6, the scene changes from heaven to earth. The Lamb now begins to open the seven-sealed scroll given to Him by the Father. This marks the beginning of God's wrath and judgment on an unbelieving world [Rev. 3:10]. Although victory was won at the cross, Jesus is ready to take back creation from the usurper, Satan.

Each seal represents a specific divine judgment. The seal judgments encompass the entire Tribulation period and increase in intensity until the return of Christ. The Lord's chronology of Tribulation events in Matthew 24 parallel the unfolding of the seven seals.

See chart below:

|            | <u>Seal</u> | <u>World Condition</u>      | <u>Reference</u> | <u>Tribulation Period</u>              |
|------------|-------------|-----------------------------|------------------|--|
| <b>THE</b> |             |                             |                  |  |
|            | 1           | Worldwide peace             | Matt. 24:4-5     | 1 <sup>st</sup> half                   |
|            | 2           | War                         | Matt. 24:6-7     | 1 <sup>st</sup> half                   |
|            | 3           | Famine                      | Matt. 24:7       | 1 <sup>st</sup> half                   |
|            | 4           | Death                       | Matt. 24:7       | 1 <sup>st</sup> half                   |
|            | 5           | Prayers                     | Matt. 24:9       | 1 <sup>st</sup> - 2 <sup>nd</sup> half |
|            | 6           | Physical disturbances       | Matt. 24:29      | 2 <sup>nd</sup> half                   |
|            | 7           | Final cataclysmic judgments | Matt. 24:37ff    | 2 <sup>nd</sup> half                   |

## FIRST FOUR SEALS: THE FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE

The first four seals depict horses and their riders. Each represent world conditions not individual personalities – worldwide peace, war, famine and death. As each of these four seals are broken a divine judgment falls on the earth. But if we look closely, we will discover a picture of man’s inhumanity.

In Revelation 6:1 we find the Lamb opening each of these seals up – Jesus Christ (cf. 6:3, 5, 7, 9, 12, 8:1).

“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.”

What is written in the scroll is not read but is acted out on earth. It is interesting to note that each of the four living ones [angels/beasts] are active in the first four seal judgments

(cf. 6:1b – “one of the four beasts saying, Come and see” v. 3 – “I heard the second beast say, Come and see”; v. 5 “I heard the third beast say, Come and see”; v. 6 – “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”; v. 7 – “I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see”).

## THE FIRST SEAL [REV. 6:1-2]

“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.”

### • The First Horsemen

Responding to the summons of one of the living ones [cherubim], a horse comes forth bearing a rider. **Although this horse represents a world condition – worldwide peace – the one who ushers it in is none other than the Antichrist.**

➤ **It is a false peace** that is short-lived and is shattered by the second seal, the force of war.

#### ○ He is riding a white horse

He is pictured as a victorious rider who will usher in worldwide peace. However, it is a deceptive peace that will lure the world into a false sense of security for soon on its heels we find war, famine and death.

○ **The world’s desire for international peace will serve as the bait for this satanic trap.**

➤ **He carries a bow with no arrows**

The Antichrist will usher in worldwide peace through peaceful means. He will deceive most of the world, including Israel by making a 7-year peace treaty “with many.” i.e. with Israel and others, perhaps to identify Israel’s borders and secure peace with Israel’s neighbors. It will be a peace won by agreement not by conflict [Dan. 9:27].

➤ **He wears a crown given to him**

The Greek word for “crown” στέφανος. It means a crown won as a prize. This will be given to him by the world, probably for his great achievements in working toward world peace. As the world looks for a world leader to usher in peace, this Antichrist will rise to power not by military means but by cunning and deceit [2 Thess. 2:9-11].

“*Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,* <sup>10</sup> And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. <sup>11</sup> And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie”

### **THE SECOND SEAL [REV. 6:3-4]**

“And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see. <sup>4</sup> 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.”

Here the world conditions turn ugly and stays that way until Christ returns at His second coming. The world peace ushered in by the first horse will abruptly end by the second horse.

- **The second living creature summons the second horse** – the world turns to war.

**The horse’s color is red.** It depicts the color of fire and blood. The short time of peace is now turned into a bloody holocaust.

Power was granted to this horseman to take peace from the earth. This power comes from God and everything is under God’s sovereign rule. It is not the wrath of men or Satan but the wrath of God. [Matt. 24:6-8].

➤ **“They should kill one another”**

Murder and killings will be commonplace during this time. It will be a time of unprecedented devastation.

➤ **“There was given unto him a great sword”**

The Greek word for “sword” μάχαιρα (*machaira*). It refers to the short, stabbing sword of a Roman soldier carried into battle. It is also used by assassins and terrorists. It depicts a time of great massacre, rebellion, assassination and revolt.

### **THE THIRD SEAL [REV. 6:5-6]**

“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. <sup>6</sup> 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.*”

The third living one beckons the third horse and calls John to “come and see.” They immediately came forth. John uses the word *behold* to show his shock at the rider’s ominous appearance.

**The color of this horse is black which is associated with famine** [Lam. 5:10]. As war devastates the earth, food supplies are destroyed and those who are involved in food production are killed, famine comes upon the earth.

It will be the most devastating famine in all of history. God has used famine in the past as a means of judgment [Deut. 32:24; Ps.105:16; Jer. 16:4].

#### **The pair of scales**

This pictures the rationing that will result due to war. It pictures the scarcity of food. Many people will stand in food rationing lines; however, there will not be enough food to go around as revealed in the fourth seal.

#### **A voice speaks regarding the famine.**

A voice in the center of the four living ones reveals how awful this famine will be. It will be the most devastating famine in all of history. God has used famine in the past as a means of judgment [Deut. 32:24; Ps. 105:16; Jer. 16:4].

### **“A measure of wheat for a penny”**

A penny, a denarius [a Roman silver coin], normally had the purchasing power of 10 qts. However, during this time, a daily wage will barely buy food for one person, who will have to share it with his family.

### **“Three measures of barley for a penny”**

This same coin bought 30 quarts of barley in better days. During the Tribulation, a person’s wage will barely feed three people with low quality food; it is much lower in nutritional value than wheat. In either case, both represent starvation wages in severe famine conditions.

### **“See thou hurt not the oil and the wine”**

This famine is so severe that God warns them not to waste the oil and wine. Basic food staples will be priceless luxuries. Olive oil and wine are used in the preparation and cooking of food. Wine is also used in the purification of water.

## **THE FOURTH SEAL [REV. 6:7-8]**

“And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see. <sup>8</sup> 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.”

As is the pattern of the first three seal judgments, the Lamb breaks this seal and the fourth living one summoned the fourth horse and its rider, whose name was Death. Hell [Hades] followed death [Rev. 1:18; 20:13,14].

- **The color of the horse is ashen – a sickly, pale, yellow-green color.** It vividly describes the **pale-green pallor of a decomposed body**. **Death** is a consequence of war and famine, and Hell [represents the grave of the unsaved], which claims the souls in one single judgment.

#### ➤ **The extent of death’s victims**

One fourth of the world’s population will be destroyed. In an age of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, this is very plausible.

#### ➤ **Authority was given to Death and Hell**

The authority comes from God as He brings judgment on an unbelieving, rebellious world.

▪ **Four elements of death**

a. **The sword** [war] and famine. These were already discussed in the second and third seal.

b. **Death**

The word for pestilence comes from the Greek word θανάτω (*thanatos*) and is translated “death” in verse 8.

This may refer to disease as the primary cause of death [Rev. 2:23; 18:8] but can also encompass natural disasters like earthquakes and floods, even nuclear, biological and chemical disasters.

c. **Wild Beasts**

It could mean that during this time of disaster and famine even the wild beasts will be looking for food. Others say it can refer to rats, the deadliest creature of all, that is able to live in all populated areas and have been known for spreading deadly disease to millions of people.

“The first four seals clearly describe awe-inspiring, frightening judgments without parallel in human history. . . Nothing this devastating has happened, yet these first four seal judgments are just the beginning of the horrific, worldwide woes that the sinful, rebellious world will experience.

Far worse is still to come in the remainder of the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls . . . There will be no escape for impenitent unbelievers from the terrors of the Tribulation, or from the infinitely worse terrors of hell.

In the words of the writer of Hebrews, ‘How will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?’” (Heb. 2:3). *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Revelation 1-11 by John MacArthur, p. 185.*

## **THE FIFTH SEAL [REV. 6:9–11]**

We live in a world where people worship and create gods in whatever form pleases them and accommodates their sinful lifestyles [Ps. 50:21]. God is He who has revealed Himself through Scripture not what people imagine Him to be. He is a loving, merciful, gracious Savior but He is also a God of vengeance against those who reject His Son [Matt. 4:1-2; 2 Thess. 1:6-9]. In this future day, grace will end, and judgment will come.

### **The fifth seal marks the midpoint of the Tribulation period.**

It bridges the gap between the beginning of God's wrath in the first 3 ½ years and the fury of God's wrath in the last half of the Tribulation. It is the Lamb that breaks the seal for He only has the authority to take back the universe. This chapter divides into three sections: the people, the petition, and the promise.

### **THE PEOPLE [Rev. 6:9]**

“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: <sup>10</sup> 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? <sup>11</sup> 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.”

#### • **“The souls of those who had been slain”**

These are martyrs who were killed – some by the first four seal judgments and some through the persecution of believers. Persecution will greatly increase at the time of the “abomination of desolation” [Matt. 24:15].

With most of the world worshiping the Antichrist as God, believers will be considered blasphemers for opposing Antichrist [Matt. 24:16-22]. John gives two reasons for their deaths:

##### ➤ **“For the Word of God”**

Believers will correctly interpret what they see around them through the light of Scripture. They will see the need to stand for Christ and tell people to repent and believe the gospel.

##### ➤ **“For the testimony, which they held”**

This refers to their loyalty to Jesus Christ [Rev. 1:2,9; 12:17; 19:10; 20:4]. This is demonstrated through proclaiming of the Word at the risk of their lives. Without the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit, many believers will be murdered for their testimony of Christ.

## **THEIR PETITIONS [REV. 6:10]**

This is the imprecatory prayers of the Tribulation saints.

Just as the first four seals represent a force, this seal represents the power of prayers. Prayers will play an important role in the outpouring of God's judgment on earth.

- A prayer of pardon is appropriate in a time of grace; **however, when grace is finished and judgment comes, prayers for divine, holy retribution are in order.**
- It is not prayers of revenge but a protest against all that is sinful, unholy, dishonoring to God and destructive to His creation. They appeal for vengeance and justice based on two of God's attributes.

“O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” - Rev. 6:10

### a. God is Holy

Because God is pure and sinless; He must judge sin [Ps. 5:4-5; Hab. 1:13; Rom. 2:16; 3:6].

### b. God is True

He must be faithful to His Word and keep His promises [Num. 23:19; Luke 21:33].

## **Their question “How long . . .”**

- “How long . . .”

The question by those martyred is not one of personal vendetta but a sincere desire to see Satan and Antichrist destroyed, sin abolished, the wicked judged and Jesus Christ reigning on the earth.

- “Them that dwell on the earth”

Throughout Revelation, this term refers to the ungodly [3:10; 8:13:



11:10; 13:8, 12; 17:2,8].

## **THE PROMISE [REV. 6:11]**

Two things given in this passage makes up God's promise to His martyred saints:

### **A symbolic gift**

To each one in heaven was given a white robe – a symbol of God's righteousness and all the glory they will enjoy in heaven.

### **A spoken word**

God tells them to enjoy heaven's rest until God's time of wrath is completed. There is more time to go [3 ½ more years] and more believers must be martyred before the judgments are finished.

## **THE SIXTH SEAL [REV. 6:12-17]**

“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; <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.”

Unlike the first five seals that involves humans, God acts alone in the sixth seal. By this time, the “abomination of desolation” has occurred, and massive persecution of Jews and Christians have taken place. As the sixth seal is opened, it will be so terrifying that there will be no question these judgments are from the hand of God. This is the beginning of the Day of the Lord when God's fury will be displayed in the final 3 ½ year period known as the great tribulation [Matt. 24:21].

The sixth seal unveils the frightening, natural disasters that will precede the Lord's second coming [Joel 2:1-2, 31; 3:16; Zeph. 1:15]. Six natural disasters are given.

### **1) There was a great earthquake**

This earthquake will be more powerful and devastating than any previous earthquake recorded in history. Satan will be exposed and the world's false hopes are shattered by the violent shaking of the earth under their feet [Joel 2:10-11].

## **2) The sun turns black**

The sun will turn as black as a mourner's robe [Isaiah 13:10]. Sackcloth was usually made of black goat's hair and was the rough cloth worn by those who were in mourning.

## **3) The moon became as blood**

Earthquakes will cause volcanic activity. The ash and smoke will rise and cause the moon to look blood red [Joel 2:31]. The normal cycle of daylight and darkness is disrupted, causing the world to panic.

## **4) The stars of the sky will fall to the earth**

The Greek word ἀστέρες (*asters*) can refer to actual stars or describe any heavenly body other than the sun or moon. The stars here probably refer to asteroids or meteor showers hitting the earth, which would cause devastation [Rev. 8:10]. In John's vision, so many were hitting the earth that he likens it to a fig tree losing its figs by a mighty wind. With earth being hit with fiery balls plunging out of darkness, there will be nowhere for people to flee or hide.

## **5) The heavens split open like a scroll**

This refers to the earth's atmosphere. The sky appears to split apart [Isa. 34:4], although the final dissolving of heaven comes later [Rev. 21:1]. Here God strikes a blow at Satan and his domain [Eph. 2:2].

## **6) Every mountain and island were moved out of their places**

The entire unstable crust of the earth begins to move and shift. Although these six natural disasters will be very destructive, there is more intense judgments yet to come under the trumpet and bowl

judgments.

## **THE RESULTS OF THE SEAL JUDGMENTS UPON MANKIND.**

“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; <sup>16</sup> 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: <sup>17</sup> For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” – Rev. 6:15-17

### **The range of fear**

Debilitating fear will affect all. Seven groups of people are mentioned in this portion of Scripture [Rev. 6:15].

1. Kings of the earth – heads of state
2. Great men – high ranking officials
3. Commanders – military leaders
4. The rich – those who control trade and business
5. The strong – the influential
6. The slaves – lower class
7. Free men – common people

### **The reaction of fear [Rev. 6:15-17]**

**It will not bring repentance but panic.** The people of the earth will continue to follow Satan, believe his lies and continue to follow Antichrist. Those who continue to harden their hearts toward God will have their hearts hardened by God [Ex. 11:10; Deut.2:30].

**They will try to hide.** In light of the meteors bombarding the earth, the continuing aftershocks from the great earthquake, the volcanic eruptions and other natural disturbances, people will try to hide from God’s wrath. These caves and rocks will not provide secure hiding places for even they will shake in the presence of God. Who is able to stand?

Chapter 6 closes with this question – **Who shall be able to stand? No one!**

[Nah. 1:6; 1 Thess. 5:3]

Although this chapter is filled with horrifying events, the situation is not hopeless. The Church has been raptured to heaven, and great multitudes of people [both Jews & Gentiles] are saved during the Tribulation period. For those who look to Christ, redemption is near. For those who reject God's Son, eternal judgment is coming. The writer of Hebrews gives a stern warning when he says, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" [Heb. 10:31].