

The First Six Seals of the Scroll Opened by the Lamb of God

Revelation 6

Revelation 6 - *"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.*

Second Seal: Conflict on Earth

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.

Third Seal: Scarcity on Earth

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.'

Fourth Seal: Widespread Death on Earth

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.

Fifth Seal: The Cry of the Martyrs

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.

Sixth Seal: Cosmic Disturbances

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?"

Background Notes

In Revelation 5 we saw that the seven-sealed scroll was symbolic of God's judgment that will come upon this earth in the future. We saw that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, was the only one in the entire universe who was worthy to open this Book of Judgment. We believe these future judgments will take place during the Tribulation Period that is to come upon this earth after the Rapture of the Church. After the messages to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3, and after John the writer was caught up into heaven at the beginning of chapter 4 (possibly implying the Rapture), the Church is not seen on this earth throughout the rest of the Book of Revelation. The Church is not mentioned as being on earth while these judgments are taking place, so we believe that the Church will be taken home to heaven before the judgments of the Tribulation take place on this earth.

Our Lord's Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24 and 25) is about the end times. There are many parallels between what our Lord predicted in the Olivet Discourse and the "Seal Judgments" of Revelation 6. We believe that they are the same events. In Matthew 24:21 the Lord said that all these events would involve great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time -- no, nor ever shall be! Matthew 24:29 indicates that the return of the Lord to this earth in judgment will immediately follow this time of great tribulation. We believe that the Seal Judgments of Revelation 6 have not yet taken place in history. They were not fulfilled during the Roman persecutions of the Church during the 1st and 2nd centuries, as some people have suggested. They are yet future, and will occur during the Tribulation Period on this earth, following the Rapture of the Church.

We will have one doctrinal point with six sub-points, covering the six Seal Judgments in this chapter.

Doctrinal Point

The seven seals represent judgments of the Tribulation Period.

1. The first seal involves cold war.

Verse 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."*

No actual bloodshed will take place under this seal. The bow, capable of shooting arrows from a distance, may represent the threat of missile warfare.

Who is the rider on the white horse? It's easy to jump to the conclusion that this is the Lord Himself, because when the Lord returns to this earth (Revelation 19) He is seen coming out of heaven riding on a white horse. However, from the rest of Revelation and other prophetic passages of Scripture we know that during the Tribulation Period a notorious world leader will emerge on the world stage. At first he will appear to be a man of peace. He will even be able to pull off an international peace treaty or covenant. We believe that this first Horseman of the Apocalypse is that notorious world leader.

2. The second seal involves open warfare.

Verses 3-4: *"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."*

The second seal involves open warfare. Under the second seal, the false peace will suddenly be taken from the earth. Concerning this time, we read in 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3, *“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.”* As a result of this warfare much death will take place, as represented by the great sword in the hand of this second Horseman of the Apocalypse.

3. The third seal involves famine.

Verses 5-6: *“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.”*

The third seal will involve famine. Famine inevitably follows war and often it causes even more death, as represented by the black horse. Both the pair of scales and the prohibitive prices for grains emphasize the severity of the famine. A denarius was a whole day's wage in John's time! The command not to harm the oil and the wine may mean that the wheat and barley would be so expensive that only the rich could afford the carefully hoarded oil and wine.

4. The fourth seal involves much death.

Verses 7-8: *“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.”*

The fourth seal will involve much death. Under this seal, many people will die as a result of more war and famine and plagues -- and even wild animals on the loose! A quarter of the earth's population will be killed under this Seal Judgment. Think of the thousands of people who are killed yearly by wars and natural disasters such as earthquakes and tsunamis;

these figures are nothing compared to the death of well over a billion people under the fourth Seal Judgment. We see that the name of the fourth Horseman of the Apocalypse is Death, and Hades follows Death. Death has to do with the body, Hades has to do with the soul and spirit.

5. The fifth seal involves martyred saints.

Verses 9-11: *“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.”*

Under this fifth seal, the scene in the vision changed. Under an altar in heaven John saw the souls of believers who are yet to be martyred. Who are these martyred believers? They are the believers of the Tribulation Period who will be killed for their faithful testimony.

"But," you may say, "I thought that all Christians will leave this earth at the time of the Rapture!" They will! However, some people will become believers during the Tribulation Period. There will be 144,000 saved Jewish evangelists who will go around the world and preach the gospel of Jesus Christ's coming kingdom (revelation 7). Many Jews and Gentiles who have never rejected Jesus up to this time will turn to Him and believe in Him. Many of these faithful believers will be martyred because of their belief in Jesus. Their white robes represent their imputed righteousness as believers. The martyred saints of the Tribulation Period are the believers who were seen by John with the opening of the fifth seal. In the vision, they were told that their deaths would be avenged after the deaths of the remaining martyrs. We know that the promise of this judgment will be fulfilled at the end of the Tribulation Period, when the Lord returns to this earth in judgment.

6. The sixth seal involves cosmic and geologic disturbances.

Verses 12-14: *"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."*

The sixth seal will involve cosmic and geologic disturbances. In His Olivet Discourse, the Lord predicted earthquakes and cosmological disturbances at the end of the Tribulation Period. Cosmological disturbances are also predicted in the Old Testament prophecies, such as Isaiah 34:4 - *"All the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll; All their host shall fall down as the leaf falls from the vine, and as fruit falling from a fig tree."*

Exactly what is involved in these cosmological disturbances, such as the sky splitting apart like a scroll, is hard to determine. There will be great meteoritic and asteroid collisions with the earth. As to the geological disturbances, verse 14 says, *"every mountain and island was moved out of its place."* That's a **lot** of geological activity -- the Richter scale will have never seen anything like this before! As a result, great fear will come upon the earth's population, because they will realize that this is God's judgment. The seven seals represent judgments of the Tribulation Period.

Practical Application

Believe God's Word now -- or face God's wrath later!

Verses 15-17: *"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?'"*

All classes of people are included in verse 15. Political power, military might, and wealth will not be able to protect anyone from the wrath of God.

Notice that even though the people will realize that these great natural disturbances are the judgment of God, yet they will not repent. Instead, they try to escape by hiding themselves! You can't hide from God and you can't escape His wrath when it's too late for repentance. But it's not too late now. John 3:36 says, *"He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."* Believe God's Word now -- or face God's wrath later!