

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

SEPTEMBER 7TH-8TH, 2024 // REVELATION

FOUR HORSEMEN (REVELATION 6:1-8)

In chapter 5, the "one seated on the throne" (God the Father) gave the seven-sealed scroll of God's judgment to the "Lamb" (Jesus).

- The scroll is a symbol of God's judgments on humanity leading up to the end of all things, and Jesus is the One Who will carry this out.
- As the Lamb opens the first of the seven seals, one of the living creatures with a voice like thunder (probably the lion) summons a white horse.

TWO VIEWS OF REVELATION 6

1. The 7 seals represent a specific divine judgment that begins the "tribulation" (the 7-year period of God's divine judgment on the earth).
2. What is described is the state of affairs in the world between the 1st and 2nd coming of Christ and leading up to the 2nd coming of Christ and the great tribulation ("birth pangs").

The disciples once asked Jesus to give them the sign that the end was at hand.

- Jesus responded with the famous Olivet Discourse recorded by writers of three gospels (Matt. 24-25, Mark 13, Luke 21).
- In it, Jesus described not the singular sign, but rather the way things will be between His first and second coming leading into the end of all things.

What's shown to John in Revelation 6 as the Lamb breaks open the six seals is remarkably similar to what Jesus described in the Olivet Discourse.

- Some would say that this isn't necessarily the Tribulation (chapters 8-16), it is what comes before it and leads up to it.
- It is okay to disagree on the specifics of WHEN these judgments happen! God will judge the earth and the end will come.

As the first seal was opened, the rider of the white horse, not the horse itself, interested John.

- The rider held a bow, he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror (v. 2).
- Most scholars understand this to symbolize military conquest.
- White represents "peace" & "purity," which is what most military conquerors have promised as they began their campaigns for military dominance.

As the 2nd seal was opened, a red horse was summoned that was permitted to take peace from the earth, "so that people would slaughter one another" (v. 3).

- This rider is warfare, and he follows conquest (the 1st rider).
- The 2nd horse symbolizes the bloodshed and violence that has and will accompany global conquests throughout history.

Where there has been conquest & war, it has always been accompanied by poverty, famine, and starvation.

- As the 3rd seal is broken, a black horse is summoned whose rider holds a pair of measuring scales.
- Two kinds of essential, main-staple foods were mentioned ("wheat and barley"), but their price is inflated by 1,000 to 1,500 percent!

In conquest, war, and political upheaval, prices for basic goods and services become inflated so that it's almost impossible to survive.

- "Oil" and "wine" (commodities and luxuries) are also mentioned as protected items that are only reserved for the wealthy.
- When the 4th seal is opened, a pale ("chloros" = green) horse is summoned with a rider named "Death" and a companion named "Hades."

Wherever the riders of Conquest, Warfare, and Famine/Poverty go, Death is sure to follow.

- Death results from the rider Warfare ("those who are killed by the sword"), Famine/Poverty, and also from natural disasters/disease and by wild beasts of the earth.
- The 4th rider was given authority over 1/4 of the earth: the amount of people throughout history who have died/will die from these judgments.

The breaking of the first four seals represents a group.

- If the number four in Revelation represents the world, then it's right to see these as worldwide judgments.
- These "four horsemen" have thundered down through history and all around the world, but there is coming a time when they will be completely unleashed on a global scale.

THE FIFTH SEAL (REVELATION 6:9-11)

What will it be like for followers of Christ during these judgments?

- The opening of the 5th seal gives the divine answer—they will continue to be slaughtered because of the "word of God" and for the "testimony they had given" (v. 9).
- John records seeing a heavenly altar in v. 9, but it is what he saw under the altar that is important.

Under the altar, John saw the souls (*psyche*= lives) of Christian martyrs.

- At the tabernacle of Israel, the blood of slaughtered animals was drained at the base of the altar, with the blood representing the life (soul) of the animal.
- What's being symbolized is the reality that from God's point of view, the deaths of martyrs are a heavenly sacrifice.

Throughout the centuries (and especially at the time of Revelation's writing), committed Christians have been harassed and killed.

- During Christ's earthly ministry, He taught that a true disciple must "take up his cross" in a willingness to die for Him (Matt. 10:38, 16:24).
- The ultimate testimony and witness of a real faith in Christ is found in a disciple's willingness to lay down their life for their faith.

These martyrs called out in a loud voice for vengeance and retribution.

- In other words, they are shown calling for God to rule that their martyrdom was wicked and unjust.
- Their question is, "How long until you judge... and avenge our blood?" (v.10).
- God is a God of justice, and He promises to bring final justice to His people (Luke 18:7).

Although God is a God of perfect justice, His timing is different than ours.

- All wrongs won't be made right until "the number would be completed of their fellow servants and their brothers ... [would be] killed" (v. 11).
- In other words, God knows how many will give their lives, and then the end will come.
- For John's readers and for us, there's a word of warning that times of martyrdom lie ahead.

But until the time of the final judgment, those who have been killed for their faith are given "white robes" of honor and told to wait a little longer.

- Those already martyred are to enjoy their state of rest and blessing until the day when God finally avenges their deaths in judgment.
- It's difficult to understand why God would prolong justice for His children, but we must remember that God's timing is perfect.

MARTYRDOM & PERSECUTION IN AMERICA?

It's legal to be a Christian, proclaim Christ, and publicly attend a church of your choice.

- However, traditional biblical views on gender, sexuality, and the exclusive claims of Christ are considered "hate speech."
- Things like lawsuits, lost jobs, legal fines, public disdain, and a growing intolerance against Christians are becoming a reality.
- Most professing Christians in America simply aren't ready for the tough times ahead.
- We are weak-minded, flaky, emotionally immature, and pampered consumers addicted to entertainment and worldliness.
- When it becomes difficult to be a Christian in America, those who are "nominal Christians" will fall away.

"...REST A LITTLE WHILE LONGER."

We're going to face hardships, suffering, and injustices for the sake of Christ as we follow Him (2 Tim. 3:12), some of us possibly even to the point of death.

- Are we prepared for this?
- In spite of what it may feel like in the moment, God has promised that all wrongs will be made right, and we're to remain faithful.

THE SIXTH SEAL (REVELATION 6:12-17)

When the 6th seal is opened, John sees a set of phenomena which in prophetic and apocalyptic language is the usual way to describe the end of the world.

- The prophets of the Old Testament often wrote of this using the same kind of language John uses.
- "The sun... turned to darkness" (Joel 2:31), "I [will] shake the heavens" (Haggai 2:6), "the stars of the sky... will not give their light" (Isa. 13:10)

The earth will be affected through a great earthquake, the sun will turn "black like sackcloth", and the moon will turn to blood red (v. 12, maybe volcanic ash?).

- When John writes that he saw the "stars of heaven [falling] to the earth," he is most likely describing meteors falling to the earth.
- He then writes of seeing the sky "being rolled up" and mountains and islands being removed.

Certainly, this is a horrible and terrifying scene. But what does it mean and when does this happen in relation to other prophesied events?

- One interpretation is it's a symbolic description of "world-shaking events" (like a total nuclear war) that will happen leading up to Christ's return.
- One problem with this view is that humanity will credit this disaster to God's doing, not humanity's (v. 17).

Most likely what's being described are divine acts of judgment on the earth that will bring us to the threshold of the actual end of the world.

- In other words, these specific cosmic catastrophes of judgment in the 6th seal are preliminary events that lead up to the breaking of the 7th seal where a complex series of events and judgments take place.
- Why will God do this? What's the point exactly?

This global, cataclysmic judgment of God is intended to bring humanity to repentance and faith before things get even worse.

- This is often God's reason for His judgments—for humanity to turn to Him before it's too late.
- Some will repent and be saved during the Great Tribulation (Rev. 7:14).
- But how will most of humanity respond to these judgments?

John names groups of powerful people: political leaders (kings and princes), military leaders (generals), and economic leaders (the rich, the mighty) and the common man (every slave and free person) representing all of humanity.

- The first global human response will be self-preservation (hid in caves and mountains), and the 2nd will be utter terror ("hide us from the face of the one seated on the throne!")

Some interpreters think that the deeds and words related by people in these verses express repentance. They don't.

- Rather, they're expressions of outrage and blame coupled with self-preservation.
- Many will start to repent to "Mother Earth" and believe this is due to our disrespect to her. Others will find true faith throughout these judgments.

"AND WHO IS ABLE TO STAND?" (V. 17)

- This is a question that begs an answer.
- Hard times of chaos, unrest, and discord have a way of exposing empty lives built on nothing.
- Materialism, consumerism, hedonism, worldliness, and worship of pleasure/entertainment only work when we have material/pleasure to consume and when they serve as distractions from the emptiness of a life without God at the center.
- But what happens when things get completely stripped away and laid bare by God?
- What things are our lives truly built on? What are we truly living for?
- Will we be able to "stand" on our own personal morality? Our wealth/affluence/career? Our stuff? Our hobbies? Our pursuit of pleasure?
- The only one who can ever stand before this great judgment to come is the one who has been justified by grace through faith in Jesus.
- If we've received Christ through repentance of sin and faith in His completed work, we can stand in the face of this great wrath because Jesus already bore the wrath that we deserved.
- What's your house built on? (Matt. 7:24-27)