

Revelation Series: Part 8
"Opening the Seven Seals"
Revelation, Chapter 6
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Text: Revelation 6

Today, we are partakers of John's great adventure in the throne room of God. Through his written witness in Revelation, Chapter 6, we "see" Jesus the Lamb of God opening the seals of the book that he has taken out of the hand of God.

He opens them one by one, and each seal represents a judgment upon the people who have merited God's wrath due to unrepented sin. At the opening of each of the first four seals, one of the four living creatures called out loudly, "Come!" At that invitation, a horse with a rider would come out, and their mission would be proclaimed.

The first horse was white, and its rider carried a bow. It should be noted that no arrow was mentioned. Since the word "bow" could have multiple meanings, including the sense of being a halo, some commentaries explore the idea of the first horse and rider being symbolic of the evangelistic movement that began in the first century and continues around the world. The white robe that this rider wears would symbolize the cleansed state of those Christian witnesses who are carrying the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ to the world. In this sense, "conquering" would mean to empower sinners to overcome sin through the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ.

The giving of a crown to the rider on the white horse was typical of the rewarding of crowns given to human beings who have overcome tribulations on earth and merited a crown in heaven. Since angels typically are not said to be wearing or given crowns, and Jesus himself already had many crowns, this first rider appears to symbolize a human being who is in either a spiritual battle against the forces of evil or a natural battle conquering nations. The absence of an arrow with the bow may signify either a limitation to his power or the fact that it is a spiritual battle.

Other commentaries understand the first horse and rider as describing an international war in which one nation is conquering perhaps a large region that encompasses several nations. This is contrasted with the next seal in which there appears to be a civil war in which the people kill each other.

Tim Lahaye and Timothy Parker, in their book *The Book of Revelation Made Clear*, suggest that the rider on the white horse is the Antichrist. They wrote:

"The bow indicates he is a warrior, but it is telling that he has no arrow, indicating that he will use diplomacy to take over control of this war-weary world. A world that is so tired of wars and rumors of war that they will trade national sovereignty and personal freedom for the offer of 'peace' if they let him be the leader of the world...So now we have, with the opening of the first seal, the Antichrist heading to earth and the onset of the seven-year Tribulation." (Lahaye and Parker, *The Book of Revelation Made Clear*, Nelson Books, 2014, p 58)

Lahaye and Parker note that Second Thessalonians 2:9 "reveals that the Antichrist gets his power and authority from Satan: 'The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders.'" The Antichrist is described in verse 3 as the man of sin and the son of perdition. (Lahaye and Parker, p. 59)

Second Thessalonians 2:3 warns, "Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come unless the rebellion [falling away] comes first, and the lawless one [man of sin] is revealed, the one destined for destruction [the son of perdition]." (2Thessalonians 2:3, NRSV)

In Paul's second letter to the church of the Thessalonians, he asks the Christians there not to be alarmed about the coming of Jesus Christ, but to be aware of how it will happen, so as to avoid being deceived. Paul wrote, "For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, but only until the one who now restrains it is removed. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will destroy with the breath of his mouth, annihilating him by the manifestation of his coming. The coming of the lawless one is apparent in the working of Satan, who uses all power, signs, lying wonders, and every kind of wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion, leading them to believe what is false, so that all who have not believed the truth but took pleasure in unrighteousness will be condemned." (2Thessalonians 2:7-12)

When Jesus opened the second seal, the second living creature around the throne of God called out, "Come!" and a bright red horse came out. Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people would slaughter

one another. He was given a great sword. Taking peace from the earth entails more than just the physical act of war. It is a removal of the "shalom" that is a sense of safety, security, order, justice, and freedom from fear of oppression. To remove these things is to create an atmosphere of anxiety and restlessness. Living in fear, whether physical war is present or not, is already a hellish existence. But, to add the physical combat that is indicated by the rider being given a sword, solidifies that fear into a terror that is confirmed in bloodshed and carnage.

The use of the word "slaughter" to describe the act of taking life harkens back to the altar sacrifices in which certain animals were sacrificed to God near the entrance of the Tabernacle. The rider on the red horse takes the peace away from the earth, and the result is that people slaughter one another. It is a mutual slaughter, perhaps done thinking that God is being served. One possibility for interpretation is that the slaughter takes place among those that have some form of connection, whether they live in the same nation, state, city, village or family. They "sacrifice" each other not only through slander and hatred, but also through neglect, injustice, and even physical murder. These are all "swords" that kill.

Tim Lahaye suggests in his commentary that the peace that is removed is a "false peace that results for a short time after the Antichrist signs a covenant with Israel for seven years. (Daniel 9:7)" (Lahaye, p. 59) The Antichrist later breaks his word, and Israel is plunged into war.

When Jesus opened the third seal, the third living creature called out, "Come!" Then, a black horse came out, and its rider carried a pair of scales. John heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a day's pay, and three quarts of barley for a day's pay, and do not damage the oil and the wine." (Rev. 6:5-6)

The black horse represents famine and scarcity. Food shortages cause market prices to be artificially inflated.

"The scales were used to measure grain by weight. The extremely high costs of grain in these passages are representative of about one-eighth of what could normally be bought for the same amount of money..." Lahaye and Parker, p. 61)

The command to "not harm the oil and the wine could allude to limits God placed on the famine; it cannot be completely devastating. The olive trees that provided olive oil and the vines that produced the grapes for wine both have strong, deep roots that may not be immediately affected by famine

conditions. This famine involves various food shortages, but not a complete lack of it. (Lahaye and Parker, p. 61)

When Jesus opened the fourth seal, the fourth living creature called out, "Come!" When John looked, there was a pale green horse. Its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed with him. They were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, famine, and pestilence and by the wild animals of the earth.

The coming of the pale green horse combines the judgments of the previous three horses that brought unrest, conflict, slaughter, and famine, and adds to them the judgment of pestilence and the deadly attack of wild animals. These judgments were all brought to their extreme in actually causing death. The fact that Hades followed the rider named Death on the pale green horse indicates that at least some of those who were being killed did not repent, and were therefore lost forever and condemned to Hades and eternal punishment.

Hades or hell is a real place where the souls of those who do not repent of their sin and accept Jesus Christ as Savior will go. They are condemned not because they sinned, but because they rejected the only one who could save them, cleanse them from their sin by his precious blood, and give them eternal life in heaven. Because of Jesus Christ, sin can no longer condemn us to judgment, for we can repent and trust in the saving grace of Jesus Christ for our salvation. Jesus is all we need to be saved from eternal damnation. His grace is sufficient for our salvation.

All of judgments symbolized by the pale green horse and its rider named Death, with Hades following with him, effects only one-fourth of the earth, not the entire earth. Lahaye and Parker suggest in their commentary that this death that will come to one-fourth of the earth's population will come during a seven-year period. "Of about seven billion people on earth today, 1.75 billion would be killed, according to Rev. 6:8.

I was curious and asked God where we are in this moment in history relative to the four horses of the apocalypse. God showed me a patch of pale green in the sky, which I took to mean that the pale green horse with Death and Hades has already been loosed. With so many people dying from COVID-19, I looked up the current numbers of those who have died so far from the corona virus. As of February 18, 2021, according to the World Health Organization, that number is 2,370,557. Since we are only at the beginning of the second year of this plague, I can imagine that it would be possible that before it ends, 1.75 billion people, which is one-fourth of the earth's

population, could die within the seven-year period from the end of 2019 to 2026.

Of course, this is only speculation, and is only one possible interpretation. As we know, God is sovereign, and God carries out his will in ways that are beyond our human understanding. No one knows how God will carry out his word, but we can be sure that he will bring what he has proclaimed to us in his word through his faithful prophets to pass.

Our work in all of this is to share the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ with as many people as possible, so as to rescue them from eternal punishment. We are able to extend a lifeline to those around us by just sharing that Jesus can wash away all sin and give to them eternal life, if they would only trust him to do it. This should be good news to everyone, since all have sinned and fallen short of the standard of righteousness. But, there are those who still reject Christ and reject our efforts to lead them to him. We have no control over others, but our intercessory prayers can bring doubters to Christ by the power and work of the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus opened the fifth seal, John saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered for the word of God and for the testimony they had given. They cried out loudly to God, asking how long it would be before God would judge avenge their blood on the inhabitants of the earth. They were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants and of their brothers and sisters, who would be killed as they were, would be complete.

These were the martyrs who had died for their faith from the time of the early church of the first century to the current time. They had endured patiently — many of them, for centuries — waiting for justice to be done for what they had suffered and lost for the sake of Jesus Christ and the gospel.

They were given white robes, because they had been faithful to God to the end of their earthly lives. They were cleansed of their sin, and had a prominent place in the throne room of God. They were given rest in the close proximity of God's presence, under his altar, a place of honor.

They were told that there would be others who would be joining them who also would be killed for their testimony, just as they were. They would be their fellow servants, who served God in the same way as they did, and also their brothers and sisters. This means that the persecution of Christians will continue to the end times. There will always be those who will be faithful and loyal to God even through persecutions and death.

When Jesus opened the sixth seal, there was a great earthquake. The sun became black, and the moon became like blood. The stars of the sky fell to the earth like a fig tree drops its fruit when shaken by a strong wind. The sky vanished like a scroll rolling itself up. Every mountain and island was removed from its place. Everyone, both rich and poor, kings and slaves, hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They asked the mountains to fall on them and hide them from the face of the One seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the day of their wrath had come, and "who is able to stand?"

This sixth seal marks the time when Jesus returns to set up his kingdom and rule. Matthew 24:29-31 gives a parallel account of this event:

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."
(Matt. 24:29-31)

Those who have rejected Jesus will be terrified of him, and will realize their great loss in ignoring his long-extended offer of grace and salvation.

Those who have believed in Jesus Christ, even though they suffered persecutions in this life for their faith, will rejoice and be exceedingly happy to see the day of his coming. We will be gathered lovingly to our Savior in safety, and peace. We will not be afraid, because the one whom we love and who loves us so dearly will rescue us from all harm. He will wipe away every tear from our eyes, and we will live with him in true shalom — peace, safety and blessing — forever. Amen.