

Revelation

Escape the Coming Wrath!

Lesson 9

Revelation 6:1-8

The Beginning of the End: The Seals are Broken!

The worship described in Revelation 4-5 is preparation for the wrath described in Revelation 6-19. It seems strange to us that worship and judgment should go together, but this is because we do not fully understand either the holiness of God or the sinfulness of man. Nor do we grasp the total picture of what God wants to accomplish and how the forces of evil have opposed Him. God is long-suffering, but eventually He must judge sin and vindicate His servants.

According to Daniel 9:27, seven years are assigned to Israel in God's prophetic calendar, beginning with the signing of an agreement with the world dictator (the Antichrist), and ending with Christ's return to earth to judge evil and establish His kingdom. It is this period that is described in Revelation 6-19...

What is so significant about the middle of the Tribulation? That is when the Antichrist breaks his covenant with Israel and becomes their persecutor instead of their protector (Daniel 9:27).

As you study these fourteen action-filled chapters, keep in mind that John wrote to encourage God's people in every age of history. He was not only writing prophecy that would be fulfilled in the end times; but he was also writing great theology and dramatically revealing the character of God and the principles of His kingdom. These chapters describe the cosmic conflict between God and Satan, the New Jerusalem and Babylon; and no matter what "key" a student may use to unlock Revelation, he cannot help but see the exalted King of kings as He vindicates His people and gives victory to His overcomers.

Since the church never knows when Christ will return, each generation must live in expectancy of His coming. Therefore the Book of Revelation must be able to communicate truth to each generation, not just to the people who will be alive when these events occur. Verses like Revelation 13:9; 16:15; and 22:7, 18-20 all indicate the timelessness of John's message. This also explains why the apostle used so much symbolism, for symbols never lose their meaning. In every era of its history, the church has had to contend with Babylon and Antichrist. Revelation 6-19 is merely the climax of this conflict.⁴² (See A-8, A-9)

1. Revelation 6-19 is going to unfold for us the drama of a seven year period of time that is referred to as the Tribulation. (See A-7) It is divided into two halves or two three and one-half year periods with the latter half referred to as the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:16-22). This time known as "Jacob's Trouble," (Jeremiah 30:7) will take place at a time in the future when God will bring history as we know it to an end. It will be a time of unprecedented world upheaval. At the end of this period, Christ will return (The 2nd Coming) and set up His millennial kingdom on earth (Revelation 20:6-7). Some theologians

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Wiersbe, 586-587.

argue that the church is raptured (I Thessalonians 4:17 “caught up”) to the Lord at the beginning of this period of tribulation. This position is referred to as the “pre-tribulation, premillennial view.” Other theologians believe that this rapture will occur at the end of the tribulation. This position is referred to as the “post-tribulation, premillennial view.” (See **A-4**) There are many conservative, Bible-believing scholars who hold to one or the other of these viewpoints. Therefore, we should not be dogmatic on either. Simply know this: When God brings history as we know it to an end, there will be a period of time (Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:21) known as the tribulation. At the end of this period, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ will take place followed by the establishment of His millennial kingdom.

The Bible teaches that the world is headed inexorably not toward peace and unity, but toward a final, cataclysmic war, the battle of Armageddon (Revelation 16:14-16). Until that climactic holocaust, things will continue to deteriorate as the world falls deeper and deeper into chaos, confusion, and sin. As the end approaches, wars will increase, crime will escalate, there will be economic upheavals and unprecedented natural disasters, such as earthquakes, floods, famines, and diseases (cf. Matthew 24:6-8). All those calamities will mark the outpouring of God’s wrath on the fallen, rebellious world.

The Old Testament prophets spoke of this terrifying time of future judgment. Describing Israel’s sufferings during that time, Jeremiah wrote, “Alas! For that day is great, there is none like it; and it is the time of Jacob’s distress” (Jer. 30:7). Describing the coming judgment of the Gentile nations, Isaiah wrote,

Draw near, O nations, to hear; and listen, O peoples! Let the earth and all it contains hear, and the word and all that springs from it. For the Lord’s indignation is against all the nations, and His wrath against all their armies; He has utterly destroyed them, He has given them over to slaughter. So their slain will be thrown out, and their corpses will give off their stench, and the mountains will be drenched with their blood. And all the host of heaven will wear away, and the sky will be rolled up like a scroll; all their hosts will also wither away as a leaf withers from the vine, or as one withers from the fig tree. (Isa. 34:1-4)

In Revelation 5:1-7, Christ received from God the Father a scroll sealed with seven seals until opened by the One with authority to do so. The scroll contained the title deed to the earth. Unlike normal title deeds, it did not contain a description of Christ’s inheritance, but rather details how He will execute His reclaiming of what is rightfully His. Beginning in chapter 6, that scroll is unrolled and its seals broken. The unrolling of the scroll marks the beginning of God’s wrath and judgment on sinful mankind as the Lord takes back creation from the usurper, Satan.⁴³

Read Matthew 24:1-13 along with Revelation 6:1-17. Compare the parallels between Christ’s prophetic words recorded in Matthew and what John wrote in Revelation 6.

Matthew 24

- False christs (vv. 4-5)

Revelation 6

White horse rider (vv. 1-2)

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2. Read Revelation 6:1-6.

Each of the scroll's seven seals represents a specific divine judgment that will be poured out sequentially on the earth. The seals encompass the entire period of Tribulation, culminating with the return of Christ. It seems best to understand the first four seals as taking place during the first half of the Tribulation, the fifth stretching from the first into the second half, (called the "great tribulation" in 7:14 and lasting three and one-half years; 11:2; 12:6; 13:5) and the sixth and seventh taking place during that "great tribulation." Apparently the seventh seal contains the seven trumpet judgments (8:1-13; 9:1-21; 11:15-19) and the seventh trumpet (11:15) contains the seven bowl judgments (16:1-21). The seven seals thus contain all the judgments to the end when Jesus Christ returns.⁴⁴

Prepare to meet the four horsemen of the Apocalypse!

- Who opens the first seal?
- What does one of the creatures say to John?
- What did John see?
- What did the rider hold, what was he wearing and what was he bent on accomplishing?
- Who do you think the rider is?
- What might he be deceptively offering to the world (Matthew 24:4; I Thessalonians 5:1-3)?

Daniel states that there is a "prince that shall come," who will make a covenant with Israel to protect her from her enemies (Daniel 9:26-27). In other words, the future world dictator begins his career as a peacemaker! He will go from victory to victory and finally control the whole world.

Some have suggested that the rider on the white horse is actually a symbol of the "conquering Christ" who today is defeating the forces of evil in the world. They point to Revelation 19:11 as proof, but the only similarity is the presence of a

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Ibid. 176-177.

white horse. If this rider is indeed Jesus Christ, it seems strange that He should be named at the end of the book and not at the beginning!

We would expect the Antichrist to resemble the Christ, because Antichrist is Satan's great imitation! Even the Jews (who ought to know the Scriptures) will be deceived by him (John 5:43; II Thessalonians 2:1-12). This great deceiver will come as a peaceful leader, holding a bow but no arrows! (Our Lord's weapon is a sword; Revelation 19:15.) Antichrist will solve the world's problems and be received as the Great Liberator.

The word for crown in Revelation 6:2 is *stephanos*, which means "the victor's crown." The crown that Jesus Christ wears is *diadema*. "the kingly crown" (Revelation 19:12). Antichrist could never wear the diadem, because it belongs only to the Son of God.⁴⁵

3. When Jesus opens the second seal, what does the second living creature say to John?
 - a. What does John see this time?
 - b. What does the color represent?
 - c. What will he take from the world?
 - d. What will he bring to the world (Matthew 24:6; Revelation 6:4b)?

4. Notice Who is opening the seals! Do you think Jesus knows what is going to happen on earth as He opens each one?
 - a. What does this do to your conception of the love of God?
 - b. Which of God's attributes are often not discussed in the church (Psalm 9:16; 33:5; Leviticus 19:2; Psalm 76:10; Zephaniah 1:15)?

5. Now, back to Revelation 6. When Jesus opens the third seal, what does the third living creature say to John?
 - a. What does John see?
 - b. What is the color of the horse and what do you think this color represents (Lamentations 5:10 [KJV] "Our skin was **black** like an oven because of the terrible famine;" Matthew 24:7)?

- c. What did John hear?

God' pronouncements reveal how devastating the famine conditions will be. A quart of wheat is barely enough to sustain one person for one day, while a denarius represents one day's wages for an average worker. People's labor will barely provide enough food for themselves and not enough to feed their families. Those with families will be able to purchase three quarts of barley for a denarius. That will provide food for their families, but barley was low in nutritional value and commonly fed to livestock. Thus, a person's wages will barely feed three people with low quality food. Both of those scenarios represent starvation wages, and signify severe famine conditions.⁴⁶

6. Read Revelation 6:7-8.

- a. What did John see when the fourth living creature said, "Come?"
- b. What was the color of this fourth horse?
- c. What was its rider's name?
- d. What were they given power to do?
- e. What are the typical consequences of war (v.8)?

Hades is the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew word, Sheol. Sheol is the place where unbelievers are sent pending the coming White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15).

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 (Revelation 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 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

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MacArthur, 183.

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.⁴⁷

7. As you read about all the dreadful events that await the world as the Day of God's wrath approaches, what are your thoughts and what do you feel?
 - a. Are you trusting in the Lamb of God who can protect you from the coming wrath?
 - b. Read I Thessalonians 1:10; Philippians 4:6-9; and, Hebrews 6:19. How do these verses of Scripture encourage you?

Throughout human history, disease has killed people on a far more massive scale than war. More Union and confederate soldiers died from disease during the Civil War than were killed in battle. An estimated 30 million people died during the great influenza epidemic of 1918-19—more than three times as many as the estimated 8.5 million soldiers who died in battle during World War I. In addition, several million more died at about that same time in an outbreak of typhus in Russia, Poland, and Romania. In a world ravaged by war and famine, it is inevitable that such disease will be widespread...

The first four seals clearly describe awe-inspiring, frightening judgments without parallel in human history. There is nothing that has happened since John had this vision that could be the fulfillment of these judgments. These doomsday prophecies cannot be applied to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (which was before John had these visions, since he wrote Revelation about A.D. 96) or any other event since that one. 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. At that time the world of sinners will realize that "it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31). 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).⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Wiersbe, 588.

⁴⁸ MacArthur, 184-185