Revelation Chapter 6 – The First Six Seals

Remember that Jesus has taken the scroll; Revelation 5:7; “He came and took the scroll from the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.”

The scroll had seven seals. One could say that that this scroll represents the history and destiny of humankind and the earth. Its writing contains the actions that will occur in order for the earth to be cleansed.

This book is not designed to scare us; if it does – go to the end of this book and be reminded – God Wins – faith triumphs – therefore we win and will be with Jesus Christ for all eternity. Go back to Revelation 1:3 and know God is blessing us for reading and hearing this book.

Revelation 6:1-8  The Four Horseman
The opening of the seals of the scroll begins. The seven seals are:

- literal; they are not symbolic.
- events that will occur in the future; their fulfillment is yet to come.
- progressive and they do increase in intensity.
- numbered and will be released in a sequential order.

This section details the opening of the first four seals; the four horsemen of judgment.

The parallel to this passage is found in Mark 13:3-8.

Zechariah 1:8-17; this passage describes four horses on different color horses that represent the Lord’s patrol that report back to him about quiet on earth.

Keep in mind; Jesus is unsealing each seal; He is releasing each of these seals. These events of each of these seals are not against Jesus; Jesus is allowing all of these events to happen. Jesus allows this to happen so the church can be purified
and the forces of evil will come to be judged. Free will continues here (God will not violate our free will) and He is going to let righteousness and sin to come to fruition. Every person will get to choose righteousness or sin. This will be the perfect environment for people to make their choice.

In these first four seals, God takes his hand of restraint off the evil of the world. God has restrained evil until now and now he allows evil greater freedom. This is not a new idea; recall how God used evil men to discipline Israel; Nebuchadnezzar (king of Babylon) and Sennacherib (king of Assyria). God of course then turned around and destroyed these men.

Again, John draws close to get a clear vision or what is going to occur:

**Verses 1-2: “I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals...before me was a white horse...”**

- First Seal: White horse and its rider held a bow (not a sword). Notice this rider held a bow without an arrow.
- If we didn’t look at the rest of the Bible, one might think that the first horseman was Jesus; but we know this is a satanic director who imitates Jesus. (Ezekiel 39:1-3)
- The antichrist rides in on a white horse because initially this person will appear to be righteous.
- The antichrist however is the counterfeit of Jesus (The Faithful and True); Who we know (Revelation 19:11-16) will ride in on a White horse.
- All will appear to be well; this arrowless rider with the bow will achieve victories without blood, without killing; this antichrist will be diplomatic.
- The antichrist will achieve peaceful conquest through deception. He acts like the ‘prince of peace’ while the entire time he is really a man of war.

Authority is given to him by Jesus and the antichrist wears a crown as a symbol of political authority.
Jennings writes; “The whole context and character of these seals absolutely forbid our thinking of this rider being the Lord Jesus, as so many affirm. His reign shall not bring war, famine, and strife in its train.”

Remember, this is God’s prophetic plan, what will occur, and not something found in history.

2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 talks of this; “And now you know what is retarding, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way.”

The opening of the first seal brings this dictator to prominence.

When we connect this first seal (the emergence of the antichrist) with what we know from Daniel 9 about this leader; it is easy to connect Daniel’s seventieth week and the great tribulation.

**Verses 3-4:** “When the Lamb opened the second seal...another horse...a fiery red one...”

- Second Seal: Red Horse, understood to be the “red” horse Zechariah refers to in 1:8.
- Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and make men slay each other.
- The peaceful conquest is followed by bloodshed; world war is released, the final world war.
- The rider is given a large sword; this sword emphasizes the volume of bloodshed. It will be extremely violent.

Note the contrast between the two seals that are released; the first suggests “peace and safety and the second extreme destruction. We find this emphasized in 1 Thessalonians 5:3; “While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will
not escape." The people referred to here are the unredeemed; these people and nations are thinking there is finally peace and safety because of the antichrist. Suddenly though; the antichrist true colors shine forth and people will slay one another.

Daniel 9:20-27 seems to prophecy this as well. The antichrist brings peace and then takes it away. The antichrist will confirm a covenant for one seven (that is seven years) and then in the middle of it (3 ½ years) he will break it and cause desolation.

- Guzik notes that peace among nations is a gift from God. It is not the natural state of relations between men.
- Also note; God is in control. It is God that grants the authority for these actions to occur. Indirectly this is God’s judgment.

**Verses 5-6:** “When He opened the third seal...a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand.”

Note the language at the beginning: “Come”, come and see, get close, take a close look and see clearly. We are called to do this as well; come close to the Lord and see Him, search out the Lord, call on the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth of God’s word.

- Seal Three: Black Horse and its rider held a pair of scales. These scales are understood to suggest balance, normally used in the marketplace to weigh out the amount of food one could buy for one’s money.
- Famine and pestilence usually accompany war or follow war. The basic staples are most affected; it will take a day’s wages just to buy food for one person for a day. This economic crisis will represent a reduction in buying power of 10 time normal.
- John Walvoord comments; “This describes a time of famine when life will be reduced to the barest of necessities.”
Ironically, the oil and the wine will not be damaged. Destroying crops in the fields is only a short-term hardship, the crop fields can come back in a year. Destroying the Olive trees and the vines would mean long-term devastation. Those most affected will be the poor; the rich will still be able to afford the luxuries.

**Verses 7-8:** “When the lamb opened the fourth seal...before me was a pale horse...”
- Seal Four: Pale Horse and its rider named ‘Death and Hades” was following close behind. Power was given to him over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.
- John sees one-fourth of the earth’s population killed. Ezekiel refers to this as “God’s four severe judgments”. (Ezekiel 5:17 and 14:21)
- This tremendous death will be birthed from dictatorship, war, and famine.
- In our history we’ve seen the terrible impact of war; but the death toll will be nothing in comparison to what the antichrist will bring.

It is not surprising Jesus said about this time; “For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been seen since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.” (Matthew 24:21)

Remember again; Even though as Guzik puts it, “all hell is breaking loose on earth”, God is in control.

This passage first and foremost is there so we can recognize God’s sovereignty over everything. God is going to use these forces to bring this chapter of history to its climax.

While the first four seals dealt with earthly happenings; the fifth seal pertains strictly to activity in heaven.
Verses 9-11: “When the Lamb opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain...They called out, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood...”

- The Fifth Seal: The Seal of the Martyrs; those who have suffered at the hands of the world for their message of Jesus Christ. Prayer is also a focus of the fifth seal; the prayer could also be termed; “Thy Kingdom Come”.
- The fact that they are under the altar indicates that their very life blood has been poured out in and offering to Jesus Christ.
- “How Long Oh Lord” is the cry from the persecuted Christians. Their cry reflects that they have shared in the suffering with Jesus and express their love for Jesus by asking how much longer until your blood is avenged and our blood is avenged.
- They recognize they are allies with the slain lamb and they will share in His exaltation.
- Jesus call for them to wait serves as a divine assurance. Your sacrifice, your suffering is not in vain and Jesus provides one more assurance; a white robe to each. This might reference those who overcome as Jesus tells the church in His letter to Sardis (Revelation 3:5).
- Then Jesus says, “a little longer”. While time can only be measured according to God’s standard; this statement assures the martyrs that the time is coming soon; they will not have to bear their burden much longer. There are more to be martyred; we can find joy in this sadness.

It is important to remember that it is not in the type of death we have that will make anyone a martyr; but it is how they lived a life of faith that makes this.

We are called as Christians to join in this cry as well; Luke delivers this message in 18:6-8. “And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you; He will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”
There is a great lesson here; these faithful people who have lost their life for their faith and witness to Jesus Christ are asking for vengeance. Notice they leave that vengeance up to God and wait as He asks. God will set things right.

Verses 12-17: “The great earthquake…the sun darkened…the moon turned to blood…” John merely describes what he sees, as we would, without perfect scientific terms.

Prophecy is fulfilled: Joel 2:28-32, Jeremiah 4:24, 8:16, Micah 1:4, Isaiah 34:4. The Bible often connects celestial disturbances with the coming of the messiah. In addition to the above Jesus Himself described such events as did Isaiah and Zephaniah.

- The Sixth Seal: Signs from the heavens and cosmic disturbances. The sixth seal begins the release of what is prayed for by the martyrs.
- This is good news for the church when these signs occur; note Joel 32 here “and everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved…”
- This is not good news for the wicked because they are coming to the realization that they are about to encounter the wrath of God. Rather than cry out for forgiveness; they ask to be hidden from God.
- For some reason; the evil leaders of the world still think they can hide from “the Lamb” and somehow survive; if we can just be hidden from “the Lamb’s” terrifying presence we’ll be okay they say.
- Verse 17 tells us that this is not going to be possible. “For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand.” This is the “lamb’s wrath”, Jesus’ wrath.

“Who Can Stand?” This is an important question or should we call it an explanation? This question explains why God’s judgments are severe and serve as an explanation that the faithful can stand.

- “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand.” (Romans 5:1-2)
• “I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which you also received and in which you stand.” (1 Corinthians 15:1)
• “Testifying that this is the true grace of God in which you stand.” (1 Peter 5:12)

We can and will stand in our faith, during all of this horrible wrath God allows; because Jesus already took on the pain and sin, we as believers deserved.

David Torrance bring it all into perspective; “It is the wrath of love, the wrath of sacrificial love which, having done the absolute utmost for us and our salvation, tells us as nothing else could the certainty with which evil awaits its doom at the hand of God.”

Side Note: We don’t want to get too caught up in the order of things when we study the seals, trumpets, and bowls. It is logical to think that they occur in the order their written, but these events (the bowls and trumpet judgments will occur over the time of the seals). The trumpets don’t follow the seals and bowls don’t follow the trumpets.

The seals filter through the Book of Revelation; it begins with the first seal broken and follows to the seventh, with the bowls and trumpets coming during that time.

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