

Revelation Chapter Six The Action Begins

We begin a new portion of the text. We begin with the first series in a set of series. We will have seven seals, then seven trumpets, and then ultimately seven bowls. Each of these series brings forth a variety of judgments upon the earth. With each series the judgments become more severe. We will watch the action in the story rise with each successive series. In this first series we have the famous four horsemen. These are not new to the Jewish readers. In Zechariah 1:8-11 and 6:1-8 there are four different horse with four colored horses. These horses and their riders are in place to patrol the earth for God. In a sense it is as if these horsemen are being commanded by God to move from patrolling to bringing misery on the earth for the sins of humanity. Notice carefully that God does not send these, but instead allows them to act. It is as if God is allowing humanity to reap the rewards of its own actions. One other note is that we are returning to the earth, to the world in which the readers live.

1 Then I saw the Lamb open one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures call out, as with a voice of thunder, "Come!" 2 I looked, and there was a white horse! Its rider had a bow; a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering and to conquer.

Saw the lamb: *it is Jesus and Jesus alone who can open the seals. He alone has been given the power to unveil the present and future judgments because of his willingness to sacrifice himself for the people.*

Four living creatures: *these are the creatures surrounding the throne that can see and move in any and all directions. They work intimately with God. Set as per four compass points.*

Come: *this is not to John but acts like a stage direction in the amphitheatre to call out one of the riders.*

White horse: *there has been much speculation about this horse. Some see it as a Christ figure, yet this is troubling because Jesus is the one sending, he already has a crown and is on the throne. Others see it as an anti-Christ attempting to seem as if he is perfect. The language of the crown is similar to the language for the crown on a Roman general. The bow may refer simply to the ability of warriors to conquer. This may also be a generic image of a conquering nation that overpowers those who are weaker.*

1. What images do the ideas of "conquering and to conquer" bring to mind?
2. How do you hold together the image of the Lamb and the destruction of the other rider and horse?

3 When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature call out, "Come!" 4 And out came another horse, bright red; its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people would slaughter one another; and he was given a great sword.

Horse, bright red: *the image of blood and war. Bright red blood means that there is still oxygen in it, so this is instant death.*

Take peace: *we have peace beginning to leave through conquest and death. Note that people are to slaughter one another... this is not God doing it. God is allowing.*

Sword: *he is given the means to bring about death*

1. What images does the idea of war bring forth for you?
2. Who is doing the killing here?

5 When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature call out, "Come!" I looked, and there was a black horse! Its rider held a pair of scales in his hand, 6 and I heard what seemed to be 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, but do not damage the olive oil and the wine!"

Black rider: *this is death and mourning. Death begins to lead to famine. When there are no people to work the fields then there will be no food and thus famine.*
A quart of wheat: *the prices mentioned are about 12 times what they normally would be.*

But do not damage: *while the destruction is growing there are some things, some long lived things (vines and olive trees) that remain. This is not total destruction.*

1. Where have you seen pictures of famine?
2. What impact have those pictures had on you?

7 When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature call out, "Come!" 8 I looked and 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.

Pale green horse: *this is the color of a cadaver, of a person who is infected with plague and hungry.*

Death: *he is even identified... this is the end for many, death will stalk the earth*
Hades followed: *this is the place where all souls go after death. It is as if Hades is scooping up the souls of those who have been killed by the first three riders*
Give authority: *they are allowed to take a large portion of the earth, one quarter, but still not all the earth. Things are bad and death is present, but it is not the end.*

1. Is there anything happening today that would seem to fit this horse and rider?
2. What images does the idea of Hades following bring to mind?

9 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered for the word of God and for the testimony they had given; 10 they cried out with a loud voice, "Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?" 11 They were each given a white robe and

told to rest a little longer, until the number would be complete both of their fellow servants and of their brothers and sisters, who were soon to be killed as they themselves had been killed.

Under the altar: we have now returned to heaven. The focus has shifted back to the throne room. The image is of a temple where God dwells.

The souls: these are those whom Christ has rescued and have not given their lives up to Hades which was following death.

Slaughtered: the believers are suffering. Some writers argue that all the suffering in Revelation is done by those who are non-believers, all of the believers have been raptured. This does not hold since it is apparent that believers have been, and are suffering both in Revelation and real life. What this also does is bring these chapters into the past/present/future rather than simply being a promise of future events.

For the Word of God: they are slain not merely for being good people, or for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. They are slain because they proclaimed what they believed. Again, the idea of testimony is that they refused to be silent in the face of threats.

How long: they ask the eternal question of all righteous and persecuted people, how long must we wait for justice. For they understand that God is about justice. This may not sound all that appealing to our ears, justice in terms of vengeance, yet it is part of Revelation, that judgment means some people will pay a penalty for their rejection of God's grace.

White robes: this is the sign of purity. They have been judged and found to be true.

Rest a little while longer: they can take hope because the end is in sight. There will be justice done for them.

Brothers and sisters: this is a clear proclamation that believing comes with a price. There is no escape from the tribulation. There will be persecution until God decides that enough is enough...and only God knows when that time will be.

1. Have you ever cried out to God asking, "How long?"
2. What do you think God's justice will look like?
3. Why do you think God is waiting so long?
4. Would you be willing to be a martyr?

12 When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and there came a great earthquake; the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, 13 and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree drops its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. 14 The sky vanished like a scroll rolling itself up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.

Great earthquake: all of these events is typical of the end times. It is as if the very fabric of the universe is beginning to unfold. The idea is that is God's work that keeps the universe together...the power behind creation. However hovering at the edges is chaos...which God dealt with at the beginning of time. Now God is slowly withdrawing his watch care and is allowing chaos once more to enter into the picture.

Stars fell: this can be literal since stars were lights hung in the ceiling of heaven. Or it could be angels who are fallen because of the great battle that is taking place.

Sky vanished: this has to be taken in the context of ancient cosmology. The sky was the ceiling of earth and the floor of heaven. It was what kept the two realms apart. Now that is no longer so. We can begin to see what is taking place in heaven and heaven can see what is happening here. There is a melding of all things back into a single whole.

Mountains and islands: this is the great leveling of all things. A way is being prepared for God to come and the sea, chaos, is also trying to take its place. In a sense all hell is breaking loose.

1. Have you ever felt like “all hell was breaking loose in your life?” Was your faith helpful in those moments? How so?
2. Why should or should not we equate the disasters of today with these mentioned in the preceding verses?

15 Then the kings of the earth and the magnates and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, 16 calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb; 17 for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”

Kings: all you have to do is read the class of people mentioned and it becomes clear that no one will escape. This will be a cosmic event in which heaven and earth will be moving together. And it is a dangerous thing to fall into the hands of a God bent on judgment. Notice that the saints under the altar are not afraid of being in the presence of God. In fact they call out to God. Here these people are afraid because they do not know the lamb of God.

Who is able to stand?: this is the central question. The saints know the answer. They are able to stand even when they have been killed and tortured for their faith. They will be the ones vindicated.

1. Why do you suppose it was important to name all the classes of people who would want to hide from God?
2. Are you afraid to face the living God? Why or why not?