

## OPENING THE SEALS: Rev 6

In Rev 5:1, John said, "I saw on the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book (scroll) written inside and on the back, sealed up the seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the book and break the seals?' And no one in Heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth, was able to open the book, or to look into it. And I *began* to weep greatly, because no one was found worthy to open the book or look into it; and one of the elders said to me, 'Stop weeping; behold the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals."

In Rev 6:1, He begins to open the seals. John says, "And I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a loud voice of thunder, 'Come' (King James Version says, *Come and see*, they added 'and see' actually, it just says, come; he says to them 'Come' and they come). When the Lamb breaks each of the first four seals, one of the four living creatures summons a different colored horse with a rider.

When the Lamb breaks the first seal, one of the living creatures says "Come" and a white horse comes and the one on the white horse went out conquering and to conquer. The second is a red horse. Its rider takes peace from the earth, that *men* should slay one another (war). The third one is a black horse. Its rider had a pair of scales in its hand (brings famine to earth). The fourth seal, the living creature summons a pale horse (some versions say ashen horse; actually, the word is green, it is a green horse). He brings death. **Verse 8, "And authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth."**

He breaks the fifth seal. Underneath the altar, John saw the souls of those who have been martyred or killed ("because of the word of God"). They were crying out for vengeance and asking the Lord how long before You bring vengeance? Verse 11, "And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been killed, should be completed also." He told them to wait a little while and assures them that vengeance is coming.

He opens the sixth seal and great catastrophes happen upon the earth. Men are running to the caves and among the rocks of the mountains and asking the mountains and the rocks to "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come; and who is able to stand?"

**The question we want to look at is what did these visions in Revelation, like the opening of the Sixth Seal, mean to the original reader? As we study Revelation, we want to approach Revelation the same way we would approach the other books of the bible, like Romans, Corinthians, or Ephesians. Each book has a message to the church in that day, and from the message that was given to them, that is the message for the church in all ages. What**

**did it mean to the original readers? What did they think whenever they read it? How did they see the opening of these six seals and, later on, the seventh seal? How did they understand what John was saying?**

Since these early christians did not have a Scofield Reference Bible to refer to, books like, "The Late Great Planet Earth," or any of the late-night television prophecy personalities like John Van Impe, they had to look elsewhere. Where did they go when they asked themselves, "What is he talking about?" In the case of the sixth seal, for example, they might have turned to Matthew 23:33-34 and recalled what Jesus said.

In verse 33, Jesus speaks sternly to the Jewish leaders of His day calling them a brood of vipers (snakes) and telling them they will not escape the sentence (judgement) of hell. In verse 34, Jesus says, "Therefore, behold, I am sending you the prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, some of them you will scourge from your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, that upon you may fall *the guilt* of all righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar." Jesus concludes, verses 36 and 38, "**Truly I say unto you, all these things shall come upon this generation . . . Behold, your house is being left to you desolate.**"

Confused, the apostles point out to Jesus the magnificence of the temple (Matt 24:1). Jesus said to them, verses 2-3, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here shall be left upon another, which will not be torn down. And as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately saying 'Tell us, when will these things be, and what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of age?'" They want to know when these things will happen that are going to come upon this generation and make their house desolate, including the destruction of the temple and not leaving one stone left upon the other?

Where would the early believers turn to understand the seals? Read Matthew 24 in connection with the opening of the six seals in the Book of Revelation. Note verse 6, "And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars." The first horse is a white horse, an emblem of war, he goes forth conquering and to conquer. There is war under the first seal.

The first part of verse 7, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom." That is international strife. Relate that to the second seal where there is a red horse who takes peace from the earth and men slay one another.

The second part of verse 7, "There will be famines." The third horse is a black horse, which signifies famine. The rider has a pair of scales in his hand; describes hardship and famine.

The last part of verse 7, "earthquakes." The fourth seal is pestilence and death (not a mirror image like the first three).

The fifth seal. Matthew 24:9-13 talks about persecution and suffering. The fifth seal speaks of suffering and persecution, and martyrs dying.

The sixth seal. The latter part of Matthew 24 talks about what I will call De-Creation. These are things which affect the sun, moon, and the stars. It is the beginning of the judgment that is coming. The sixth seal involves de-creation where God is coming against His creation. With earthquakes, of course, the sun is black, the moon refuses to shine, the stars fall. Under the sixth seal, great events happen upon the earth.

To understand the first six seals, the early believers may have recalled the near perfect correlation between the seals and what Jesus prophesied would be coming upon that generation described in Matt 24. Relying on scripture to interpret scripture, that is the closest we could get.

So, let's look at the four horsemen from the perspective of Matthew 24: 6-8. Let's see if the Bible can tell us who and what these horsemen are?

Two passages from the Old Testament book of Zechariah; first Zech 1:8-9, "I saw at night, and behold, a man was riding on a red horse, and he was standing among the myrtle trees which were in the ravine, with red, sorrel (brown), and white horses behind him. Then I said, 'My Lord, what are these?' And the angel who was speaking with me said to me, 'I will show you what these are.'"

In Revelation, John does not show us exactly what these horsemen are; but Zechariah is shown and we know what they are Zechariah's account (scripture interpreting scripture). Zech 1:10, "And the man who was standing among the myrtle trees answered and said, 'These are those whom the Lord has sent to patrol the earth.'" These horsemen represent angelic beings of spiritual power that are sent to patrol the earth. In Zech 6:1-5, he not only sees horses, but also chariots. With the first chariot, there are red horses. With the second one, black horses. With the third chariot, white horses, and the fourth chariot, dappled horses. Then, I spoke and said to the angel who was speaking to me, "What are these, my Lord," and the angel said to me, "These are four spirits of heaven, going forth after standing before the Lord of all the earth."

**That may not help us much, but Zechariah tells us these horses he saw were spirits. They were administrative forces with spiritual power sent forth upon the earth from the throne of God. What do they do? Jeremiah 49 is an interesting passage. Here again, to get the most correct and accurate understanding of Revelation, we need to interpret Revelation by the rest of scripture. To understand Revelation, stay away from the commentaries and man's (preacher's and denomination) opinions. Read the rest of the scripture. The rest of the scripture will tell you a lot about the Book of Revelation.**

Jeremiah 49:34, "That which came as the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet concerning Elam (Elam is the old name for Persia), at the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, saying, Thus says the Lord of Hosts, 'Behold, I am going to break the bow of Elam, the finest of

their might" (I am going to bring judgment upon this nation, Persia). And I shall bring upon Elam the four winds (or "the four spirits" . . . in both the Greek and the Hebrew, the wind is the same word that is often translated spirit; sometimes it is translated wind, and sometimes it is translated spirit; they were represented by the four horsemen in Zechariah) from the four ends of heaven, and shall scatter them to all these winds; and there will be no nation to which the outcasts of Elam will not go. I shall shatter Elam before their enemies and before those who seek their lives; and I shall bring calamity upon them, even My fierce anger, declares the Lord, and I shall send out the sword after them until I have consumed them."

The four horsemen are spirits sent from the throne of God, who bring judgment upon the nation of Elam in the Book of Zechariah. If you take that and compare it to what John is saying in the Book of Revelation, we understand the four horsemen represent four spiritual powers, represent spirits that are sent forth from the throne of God to bring upon the earth the judgment of God.

The white horse, war and conquest, Jesus said to the people of His day, "Before Jerusalem is destroyed, you will hear of wars and rumors of wars." War is going to come. The end is not yet, do not be troubled when that happens. It is going to come. That is part of the judgment of God. Wars and rumors of wars. The rider on the red horse is given power to take peace from the earth, men slay one another, international strife between nations. Kingdom will rise against kingdom, and nation against nation. There will be conflict with one another.

Then comes the black horse of famine. Jesus specifically said they were going to experience famine before God's final judgment comes upon Jerusalem. That was one of the events Jesus makes very plain.

Then, there is the pale horse of death. In this instance, it is the sword and famine and pestilence and wild beasts. If you read the Old Testament, those are the means whereby God brings judgment upon not only His people (according to Ezekiel 14), but also upon nations that oppress God's people. These were the forms of judgment that came upon the disobedient.

With that in mind, go back for a moment to Habakkuk 3 where we will point out just a few things. Habakkuk 3, in fact, the entire book of Habakkuk is speaking of God bringing judgment upon the Chaldeans, upon the Babylonians. The Chaldeans were the ones who took Israel (Judah) into captivity. Habakkuk talks about the judgment that God is bringing upon the Chaldeans. He mentions the Chaldeans by name in Hab 1:6, "For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that fierce and impetuous people who march throughout the earth to seized dwelling places which are not theirs. They are dreaded and feared."

God is going to bring against Judah the destructive war-mongering Chaldeans ("I am raising up the Chaldeans") to put Judah into captivity. Make no mistake, God is always in complete charge and control. Whatever happened in Chaldea, God was in charge. Whatever happens anywhere on earth: Iraq, Afghanistan, Russia, China, Venezuela, America, God is in charge.

Now, note the correlations between Habakkuk, chapter 3, and Revelation, chapter 6:

Heb 3:3 (the latter part) "His splendor covers the heavens, and the earth is full of His praise."

Correlates to Revelation 1:6 and 4:3

Hab 3:5, "Before Him goes pestilence, and plague comes after Him."

Correlates to Revelation 6:8

Hab 3:6, (the latter part), "Yes, the perpetual mountains were shattered, the ancient hills collapsed"

Correlates to Revelation 6:14

Hab 3:8-9 (the latter part), "That Thou didst on Thy horses, on Thy chariots of salvation. Thy bow was made bare."

Correlates to Revelation 6:2

Hab 3:11, "Sun *and* moon stood in their places; at the light of Thine arrows."

Correlates to Revelation 6:12-13

Hab 3:12, "In indignation Thou didst march through the earth; in anger Thou didst trample the nations."

Correlates to Revelation 6:15

Hab 3:16 (the latter part), he tells us he is talking about, "Because I must wait quietly for the days of distress, for the people to arise *who* will invade us."

What people is that? Hab 1:6, it is the Chaldeans ("I am raising up the Chaldeans").

In Habakkuk, he is talking about bringing judgment upon the Chaldeans, and he is using the same language that John uses in the Book of Revelation. If the language in Habakkuk was the language of judgement, are we not safe in saying that the language in Revelation is a language of judgment? Seems reasonable.

So, the four horsemen are the spirits of God sent forth to bring judgment upon the world, upon those who have defied the living God, and not lived according to His word. His judgment is coming in the form of war, bloodshed, strife, famine, persecution and suffering . . . Upheaval, the four horsemen ride forth.

The people who first read this would remember what Jesus said about the destruction that was coming upon Jerusalem, and they would realize that it was not going to be long before God's final judgment came upon the Jewish nation.

Turn now to the fifth seal. These are the martyrs. They are underneath the altar. That tells us something. In the Temple, the priests in Jerusalem who shed the blood of the animal at the altar.

Here, the blood of the martyrs is flowing, evidently, from the altar. Their souls are under the altar where they have been slain. The priests are the ones who have slain them. These are those who have been killed by Apostate Israel. These are the priests who gave the apostle Paul so much trouble throughout his missionary journeys. These are the same priests who used the Roman power to put Jesus Christ to death.

Matthew 24:9-13 will interpret Revelation 6:9-11 for us. When tragedy strikes, we are always tempted to ask the question, "Does God care?" Prior to opening the fifth seal, the four horsemen from the first four seals have ridden forth. In the fifth seal, John sees those who have suffered, been persecuted, and have died. They are underneath the altar. They are crying out for vengeance in Rev 6:10 saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" How long are You going to let men get by with this? How long before You avenge us?" When there is tragedy, suffering, or persecution that we must endure, particularly when our pain, anger, or suffering are caused by the enemies of God, we cry out to God today asking, "How long, O Lord . . . Do you really care Father?" When will Matthew 23: 34-35 come to pass? How long before You move against them?" This is a reasonable reaction; most of us react in this way.

**But notice, God is the One who is brings forth judgment to occur. The judgments are coming forth from the throne. The one who opens the seals is the One who is sits on the throne making all of this happen.**

**It is crucial we understand this. In every age, christians must face the world with confidence and unshakeable conviction that every event that happens in the course of history, all events in history are predestined and originate from the throne of God, meaning we know God is in charge, we know He has always been in charge, nothing takes Him by surprise, nothing happens without His knowledge or without His consent. God did not say we had to understand it, but we need to know it and accept it.**

Turn your attention to an interesting passage, Psalm 46:8, "Come, behold the works of the Lord." That seems great doesn't it. Come and see the works of the Lord. We rejoice at the works of God. The Psalmist says Come and see the works of the Lord. Notice what he says the works of the Lord are: Come and behold the works of the Lord "who has wrought desolations in the earth. He makes wars to cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariots with fire. Cease striving (writhing) and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth. The Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our stronghold."

**Among all the positives God gives us (salvation, glory, redemption), God also brings desolation to the earth. Remember that and, more importantly, remain strong and steadfast in the Lord when we experience desolation, suffering, persecution, and death, particularly when it occurs "because of the word of God" (Rev 6:9).**

Another interesting thought, back in Zechariah 1:12, after the horses have gone forth and everything has been patrolled, verse 12, the angel of the Lord answered and said, "Oh Lord of hosts, how long wilt Thou have no compassion for Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, with which Thou has been indignant for these 70 years?" After the horses went forth, the angel is asking the Lord how long will it be before You restore Jerusalem? Verse 13, "And the Lord answered the angel with gracious words, comforting words . . . (vs. 16) Therefore, thus says the Lord, 'I will return to Jerusalem with compassion . . . (vs. 17) My cities will again overflow with prosperity, and the Lord will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem (He is talking about the church and God inaugurating the New Covenant with Christ, for the benefit of His church, His body, for us).'"

Similar to Zech 1:12-13, in the fifth seal, after the ones who were slain cried out "How long, O Lord," John saw the Lord's grace and comfort given to the ones that were slain, Rev 6:11, "And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer."

**The sixth seal. I like to call this de-creation. Usually, when we read this passage, and other passages that affect the sun, the moon, stars, and the earth, we immediately think these are literal events that physically happen to the universe. If we read and understand the Old Testament, we cannot think in those terms. We know a literal and physical event to the universe is not what God is talking about when He uses those types of descriptions.**

For example, salvation is often spoken of in scripture as a creation, or a new creation: II Cor 5:17, we are a new creation; Eph 2:10, God has created us for good works; Eph 4:24, put on the new self, created in righteousness and holiness of the truth, and the parallel passages in Col 3:10 and II Cor 4:6.

**In the same way, God's presence when judging the world is spoken of in terms of de-creation, which is the collapsing of the universe. When God brings judgment upon the wicked, not in the end when Jesus Returns, but in this life, in our lifetime, it is spoken of as the entire universe collapsing.**

**Go back to the Old Testament, Ezekiel 32:7-8, Ezekiel mentions Egypt beginning in verse 2, "Son of man, take up lamentations over Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and say to him (then Ezekiel lists the things that is going to happen to Egypt when God brings judgement on Egypt) . . . vs. 7-8, And when I extinguish you, I will cover the heavens, and darken the stars; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give its light. All the shining lights in the heavens I will darken over you and will set darkness on your land, declares the Lord God."**

Isaiah 13:1, "The oracle concerning Babylon (God is bringing judgment upon Babylon) . . . vs. 10, For the stars of the heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light; the sun will be dark when it rises, and the moon will not shed its light . . . vs. 13, Therefore I shall make the

heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken from its place at the fury of the Lord of hosts in the day of His burning anger. And it will be like the hunted gazelle, or the sheep with none to gather *them*, they will each turn to his own people, and each flee to his own land.”

Isaiah 34:4-5, God’s judgement against Edom (these are just a few passages in the Old Testament that deal with this), "And all the hosts of Heaven will wear away, and the sky will be rolled up like a scroll; and their hosts also wither away as a leaf withers from the vine, or as one withers from the fig tree. For My sword is satisfied in Heaven, behold it shall descend for judgement upon Edom, and upon the people whom I have devoted to destruction." When I judge Edom, the sky is going to be rolled up like a scroll. This is the same descriptive term that John uses in the Book of Revelation to describe the judgment of God.

When Christ opens the sixth seal, John uses the same words that were used in the Old Testament. He begins in Rev 6:12-15 with a “great earthquake; and the sun became black like sackcloth *made* of hair, and the whole moon become like blood; and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. And the sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up; and every mountain and island were moved out of their place. And the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains . . . vs. hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.”

**Beginning with a great earthquake, the sun, the moon, the stars, the sky, the earth, and man, judgment is coming. To these early believers, they would understand this is going to be the judgment of God upon Jerusalem to bring an end to the old Jewish covenant and destroy those who have destroyed His people. Any time severe judgment comes, the lights of Heaven go out and the earth trembles.**

Let’s try to close with some thoughts about the judgments of God.

First, although the early readers of Revelation (believers in John’s day) would have seen this in the light of what was going to happen to Jerusalem in fulfillment of Matthew 24 with the destruction of the Old Jewish system, what John says is true throughout history concerning the judgements that come upon those who defy God.

Second, judgment falls in ways that are appropriate to the evils that provoked it. For example, our policies of greed have brought an end to the increase of wealth in America. Zephaniah 1:13, "Yes, they will build houses but not inhabit *them*, and plant vineyards but not drink their wine." Haggai 1:6, "You have sown much, but harvest little; *you* eat, but *there is not enough* to be satisfied; *you* drink, but *there is not enough* to become drunk; *you* put on clothing, but no one is warm *enough*; and he who earns, earns wages to put into a purse with holes. Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘Consider your ways!’” Judgment falls in ways that are appropriate to the evil that provoked the judgment of God.



Third, judgment is a consequence of man's attempt to live in a way inconsistent with his own nature. Judgment is the consequence. God brings judgment upon man when man attempts to live in a way which is inconsistent with his own nature. Cholera is a judgment upon dirty living. Floods and famine are judgments upon greed that causes men to destroy our forests and soils. We bring that judgment upon us because we do not live as God created us to live.

Is that biblical? Romans 1:24, "Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them . . . vs. 26-27, For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire for one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error."

The application appears straight forward. American society and its laws that protect and encourage homosexuality (telling our children the gay life is alright) are a probable sign of God's judgement that He has given America over to its own lusts eventually resulting in America receiving the due penalty of its error. America's penalty (outcomes) from that judgement, along with a long list of other judgements for similar errors (e.g., America's killing of unborn babies, now updated to include full-term babies born alive under the guise of a woman's right, and many other egregious offenses against God) will fall upon democrats and republicans, believers and non-believers alike without distinction, unless in God's decision He holds one political party responsible (e.g., 2020 election?) and shatters the responsible party thus giving America-as-a-whole another (possibly its last) opportunity to return to God (Zech 1:3). To save America, its christians must repent and return to God.

There are many examples of God's judgements that have already befallen on America. The AIDS epidemic that we are facing today that was first reported in America in June 1981 is a judgment from God because of man's attempt to live in a way which is inconsistent with his own nature. The common question is: Do you mean you believe in a God that would bring judgment in the form of an AIDS epidemic that affects innocent little babies, people who have blood transfusions, and others who live highly moral lives, including christians? That is the tragedy of the judgment of God. When God sends His judgment upon people, those who are innocent suffer also. But it is still the judgment of God.

Fourth, judgment comes because men have broken moral laws and have defied God. God's judgment, of course, is different from our judgment. He may bring judgment upon an evil nation by destroying them with a nation that is more evil than the nation He is destroyed. He can raise up the Chaldeans to destroy His own people because His own people sinned. The Chaldeans were worse sinners than the Jews, but God used them to bring His judgment upon His people. Christians may not think it is fair, but that is the way God judges.

Fifth, many times it is only when judgment falls, only when judgment comes that people, using the words of Isaiah 2:20, "Cast away their idols of silver and their idols of gold." There is a

sense in which judgment ushers in catastrophe is the only way that good can come because His judgement erases the evil. Isaiah plainly tells us that it is only when judgment falls that a lot of people will give up (“cast away”) their idols of silver and their idols of gold (sins in their life).

The Bible is telling us do not wait until you see the four horses of the apocalypse coming forth. Do not wait until there is war, bloodshed, turmoil, famine, death, and plague to cast out the sin in your life or from your country. Do not wait until God begins to shake the earth, blots out the sun, the moon, the stars, and darkens Heaven. Isaiah says a lot of people would not cast out (get rid of) their idols (sin in their lives) if God did not bring judgment.

The point is: we know the horses will come. We know the sun will be blacked out, the moon will refuse to shine, the earth will be shaken, and that God will come in vengeance individually, personally, nationally, and internationally. God will avenge His people and be true to His word throughout all centuries and all generations.

Do not wait for God’s catastrophes to strike to get things right with God. God’s judgement can be so fierce we cry for the rocks and the mountains to hide us from the One who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. Why? Because They have to. Evil cannot stand. We witnessed it as recent as World War I, World War II, in our lives, nation, and global community. Let’s not make the judgements strike by refusing to cast away our idols (sin in our lives).