

## Revelation 6

*“The truth is, Christians don’t come up out of the spiritual watery grave of baptism into a perfect world of physical peace and wealth. As physical beings, we must face all the daily trauma, threatening world events, diseases, and death that the rest of mankind must face – both believers and unbelievers. We are not physically exempt from normal life. There are the realities of the spiritual war.*

*Here’s the difference for us: We are spiritually exempt. This physical life is only temporary. After its finish, we will soar into the presence of our gracious God to live in peace and in heavenly wealth forever.”<sup>1</sup>*

This next section us the first of seven-fold pattern that appears throughout the book of Revelation. The pattern is schematized below.

Structure of the Seven-Fold Pattern of Woes <sup>2</sup>			
	7 Seals	7 Trumpets	7 Bowls
<b>The Initial Unit Of Four Catstrophes</b>	6:1-2 white horse, bow, crown, conquer	8:7 hail, fire, blood	16:2 sores
	6:3-4 red horse, word, take peace from earth	8:8-9 fiery mountain in sea, 1/3 sea became blood	16:3 sea to blood
	6:5-6 black horse, balance	8:10-11 star falls on 1/3 rivers water > wormwood	16:4-7 rivers to blood
	6:7-8 pale horse, sword, famine, plague, wild animals	8:12 1/3 sun, 1/3 moon, 1/3 stars	16:8-9 sun
<b>The Woes Intensify As the End Approaches</b>	6:9-11 martyrs under altar – “how long,” “a little longer”	8:13 “woe, woe, woe” demon locusts from dark pit	16:10 darkness
	6:12-17 earthquake, sun and moon, stars fall, all fear	9:13-21 200,000,000 demon calvary from Euphrates	16:12-16 kings of east cross Euphrates to prepare Armageddon
<b>INTERLUDE</b>	7:1-8 sealing 144,000/ great multitude	eating scroll (10:1-11) 2 Witnesses (11:1-3)	(pattern broken)
<b>The End</b>	8:1 silence	11:15 end announced and celebrated but not described	16:17-21 theophany “God remembered great Babylon”
			17-18 elaborate the 7 <sup>th</sup> bowl Babylon as a continuation and elaboration of the Fall of Babylon

<sup>1</sup> Echols, Eldred. *Haven’t you Heard? There’s a War Going On! Unlocking the Code to Revelation* (Fort Worth: Sweet Publishing, 1992), 82-83.

<sup>2</sup> Boring, M. Eugene. *Revelation*. (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989), 120-121.

**I. The first four seals: The four horseman (6:1-8)** – The four living creatures around the throne introduce the first four seals as the lamb opens them.

A. 1<sup>st</sup> Seal – White horse (6:1-2)

1. White Horse – A horse was a common animal of war
2. Crown – Grk: Stephanos, a victory wreath
3. A bow – This was an archer, a victorious soldier
4. This was some sort of conqueror. Who was he?
  - a. Some identify him with Jesus. But the difficulties with this are as follows
    - In all other instances in Revelation, Jesus is clearly identified, but this horse is not identified
    - The rider of chapter 19 is clearly identified as Jesus. The only similarity is the white horse

**DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO HORSEMEN<sup>3</sup>**

**THE FIRST RIDER**

(Rev. 6:2)

One Crown  
 Victory Crown (*stephanos*)  
 Has a bow  
 Followed by three horsemen  
 Not named  
 Clothing not mentioned  
 Conquering

**JESUS**

(Rev. 19:1-16)

Many crowns (v.12)  
 Ruling Crowns (diadems) (v.12)  
 Has a sword (v.15)  
 Followed by a heavenly army (v.14)  
 Named (vv.11-13, 16)  
 Wearing a robe dipped in blood (vv.13, 16)  
 Dispensing Justice (vv.11, 15)

- 4 is the number of the cosmos, each living creature therefore identifies each of the four riders. These riders are of the earth.

- The first rider only appeared to be victorious. The true victor will be Jesus

- b. Others have identified the first rider with the Parthians, Scythians, and even with Alexander the Great
- c. If there is not a specific designation for the first rider, it is a generic reference to a coming conquering force

B. 2<sup>nd</sup> Seal – Red Horse (6:3-4)

1. Red – Bloodshed, or war
2. Persuaded men to kill each other
3. Wielded a Roman combat sword
4. Some sort of internal violence is coming

C. 3<sup>rd</sup> Seal – Black Horse (6:5-6)

<sup>3</sup> Roper, David. "Thundering Hoofbeats." *Truth for Today*, Mar 99, Vol 19, No. 11, p. 47

1. Scales – Rampant inflation
2. A quart of wheat for a denarius
  - a. Quart of wheat enough to feed one person for a day
  - b. Denarius is a day's wage
  - c. Ones that had families will slowly starve
  - d. Three quarts of barley not enough nutrition for a family
3. Do not harm the Oil and wine
  - a. Oil was a common commodity needed for so much of daily life.
  - b. May reveal God's mercy in the midst of judgment
 

*"Ancient Mediterranean warfare included destroying the standing crops in the fields but not the vines and olive trees; destruction of vines and olive trees would produce a long-range devastation of the local economies (and so negate the entire point of conquering the land). Destroying wheat and barley meant hardship for a year until the new harvest would come, but destroying the olive trees (which took about seventeen years to grow) and vines spelled enduring disaster. In ancient Mediterranean thought, only the most savage of barbarians would destroy all means of food production; the wars of 6:2-4 were not total wars, but they would lead up to more powerful threats (16:12-16)."*<sup>4</sup>

#### D. The 4<sup>th</sup> Seal (6:7-8)

1. Ashen/ Pale horse – Death
2. Hades – The abode of the dead
3. People are going to die



#### E. Limited power of the horsemen

1. Authority was "given" to them
2. God only allowed them to afflict 1/4 of the earth
3. This interprets the meaning of the horsemen. Death would come by sword, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts

## II. Overall message of the first four seals

### A. Trouble is coming

1. But for whom is the trouble meant?
2. Not Rome – 7 trumpets and 7 bowls are used for that
3. 4 seals are followed by martyred souls under the altar, suggesting that they are victims of the four horsemen
4. The Sixth seal is for judgment on the wicked

### B. Why share this with people who were suffering persecution?

1. To prepare them for the difficulty that is coming

<sup>4</sup> Keener, Craig S. *Revelation*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 205

2. To show God is still in control
  - a. Note the word “come” when the seals are opened
  - b. Note that they were permitted to do what they did
  - c. Only a fourth were killed
3. God limits the problems of Christians (1 Cor 10:13)

C. Why did God permit the riders to come forth?

1. Cursed earth (Gen 3:16-19)
2. Never will be Heaven on Earth
3. Still have to face trials
4. God uses horses to make us see the need for him
5. Satan uses them to make people concentrate on the problems of the world.
6. When you see horses charging toward you, Satan wants you to despair and lose hope

D. To get the effect this vision may have had on the original readers, imagine a vision of a war with bombs, nuclear explosions, nerve gas, and the aftermath with could include a lack of food, medicine, water, and the onset of disease, confusion, and lack of order where people are killing each other and looting.

### III. The 5<sup>th</sup> Seal (6:9-11)

A. Would expect to see a vision of the carnage left behind by horsemen

B. Instead, scene shifts to Heaven – Souls of the martyrs under the altar

1. Uses traditional Jewish thought
  - a. In Old Testament, priests pour blood of sacrifice around the altar (Leviticus 4)
  - b. The life of the flesh was in the blood (Lev 17:11, 14)
2. Believers “sacrificed” their lives for Christ
  - a. Text says they were killed for their testimony
  - b. They died due to their undying faith in Christ
3. This reinterprets death by torture, de-capitation, etc.
  - a. It is not a mere losing of life
  - b. It is a sacrificing of one’s life to God!



C. Their question – How long will you keep from avenging our blood?

1. This would validate emotions of Christians still on earth suffering
2. (Psalm 79) – Similar to this Psalm
  - The desire is for God to vindicate himself & his people
3. Each given a white robe
  - a. Elders of chapter four also had white Robes
  - b. White robes signify purity

4. Rest for a while longer
5. More would be killed, but there will be an end to the killing

#### IV. The 6<sup>th</sup> Seal (6:12-17)

- A. This an answer to question of the martyrs – How long?
- B. Universe flies to pieces
  1. Great earthquake – Often seen in ancient world as divine judgment
  2. Sun turned black – Similar imagery used in Old Testament prophets for divine judgment
  3. Moon became as blood
  4. Stars fall to the earth
    - a. In Ancient Near East, stars seen as representing rulers or even deities
    - b. Num 24:17; Isa 14:12; Dan 8:10 are examples of this
  5. Sky split apart like a scroll
    - a. Isa 34:4-5 – Judgment on Edom
    - b. When nation destroyed, it's sky is rolled up
  6. Mountains and islands moved from their places
    - a. Jer 4:23-24 – Creation being “undone” in judgment
    - b. Mountains are symbols of kingdoms and their strength
- C. Same apocalyptic imagery used in other passages
  1. Isa 13:6-10 – Destruction of Babylon
  2. Isa 29:6; Joel 2:31 – Judgement on Jerusalem
  3. Ezek 32:2-8 – Judgement on Egypt
  4. Amos 8:9 – Judgement against Israel
  5. Matt 24:29-31 – Destruction of Temple and Jerusalem
- D. Reaction of those on the earth
  1. All, whether kings, commanders, great men, etc. terrified
  2. Tried to hide selves in caves, asked mountains to fall on them
    - a. Didn't wish for death.
    - b. Death would have only brought them before Him who sits on the throne, so they just wanted to hide
    - c. They couldn't hide from God
  3. Wrath of the lamb – What they had killed now turns on them
  4. Rhetorical question – Who is able to stand?

