

Christ, the Lamb of God, has taken the book of God's judgments on the earth and is now proceeding to open its seals, revealing the war, violence, famine and death that will sweep the world during the Great Tribulation. The inhabitants of the earth will understand that these plagues are the result of God's wrath and will desire to hide themselves from Christ at His coming.

This chapter describes the opening of 6 of the 7 seals of the book that only the Lamb was worthy to open. In Revelation, there are judgments revealed by each of 7 seals, followed by 7 trumpets and then by 7 bowls. These three sets of 7 span the 7 year tribulation period, but commentators disagree as to the timeline of these sets of 7. Some believe they are sequential: that the 7 seals are followed by the 7 trumpets and then the 7 vials in chronological order. Other commentators believe that the seals, trumpets and bowls are concurrent: that the seals represent judgments poured out during the 7 years of tribulation, but the trumpets and the vial judgments aren't necessarily following the seals in chronological order. The seals are general (particularly the first four) while the trumpets and vials are more specific and are layered on top of the seals and occurring simultaneously. I lean toward this latter view.

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<sup>1</sup> And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. <sup>2</sup> And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.

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**“And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals”** - After witnessing Jesus Christ the Lamb of God stepping forward to take the seven-sealed book from His Father's hand and the ensuing worship that erupted from the four beasts and the 24 elders, John now watches as the Lamb opens the first seal.

**“and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see”** - The voice of the beast was as loud and powerful as the rumble of thunder as he said “Come and see,” an invitation to see the section of the scroll that the first seal had been protecting. Who was he inviting to “come and see?” Some commentators point out that in some of the better manuscripts the beast's invitation is to “Come” with the words “and see” omitted. On that basis they suggest that the invitation is to the horseman to reveal himself. The most natural interpretation of the text as we have it in the KJV is that the invitation is to John, who has been instructed to “write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter” (Rev. 1:19), so that he can witness what the seal has revealed and then write it down.

**“And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer”** - Roman conquerors typically rode a white horse in a procession celebrating his victory. The rider of this horse has a bow and a crown, indicating that he has taken rule over those he has conquered. He is further described as going “forth conquering and to conquer,” indicating that he is not a peacemaker but someone bent on conquest. While it would be easy to identify this rider as the Antichrist, more likely this rider and those revealed by the next three seals are not individuals but representative of the trials that will come upon this earth during the tribulation period. It may be that this rider represents the oppression of conquerors during the tribulation, one of which will be the Antichrist who will conquer all the others. Jesus mentioned this when He said that “nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” (Matt. 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:10).

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<sup>3</sup> And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see. <sup>4</sup> And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.

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The Lamb opens the second seal and the next beast gives the invitation to “Come and see.” This time John sees a red horse, the color likely symbolizing war and bloodshed. The rider of this horse is given the power to sow the seeds of violence on the earth, causing nations to go to war as well as individuals to kill one another. The Greek word for “sword” indicates a large knife and when coupled with the word “great” indicates a small sword. This type of sword is not used for working but for killing. This horse and its rider represent the great violence that will be present on the earth during the tribulation.

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<sup>5</sup> And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. <sup>6</sup> And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.

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The third seal reveals a black horse representing famine. The wars and violence will lead to food shortages across the whole world. The pair of balances are the scales merchants used to measure out grain for their customers. A penny was the normal wage for one day's work and a measure of wheat was just enough food to sustain one person for one day, indicating the difficulty a man will have earning enough money to provide for his family. Barley was lower in nutrients and typically used to feed animals so it was cheaper. The voice declaring the prices of wheat and barley, which seems to be like a film voice-over, also seems to indicate that the oil and wine will not be affected by the shortages, perhaps because only the wealthy will be able to afford them.

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<sup>7</sup> And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see. <sup>8</sup> And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.

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The fourth seal reveals a “pale” horse representing death. In fact, the name of the rider was “Death” and “Hell” was apparently following the horse on foot. The Greek word for “Hell” is “hades” and can refer either to the abode of the dead or to the grave. The Greek word for “pale” describes a pale-green color, the color of a human corpse. The effects of the other horsemen have taken their toll for 25% of the earth's population will die as a result of the war, violence and hunger that the prior horsemen bring to the earth. Even wild animals will suffer during the food shortages since they will apparently kill people in order to satisfy their hunger or perhaps God will enhance their wild nature in order to make them more dangerous to humans.

<sup>9</sup> And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: <sup>10</sup> And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

The opening of the fifth seal reveals the souls of martyrs for Christ that presumably have died during the tribulation underneath the altar that John now notices. The earthly temple in Jerusalem had only two altars: the altar of burnt sacrifices and the altar of incense. The altar that John sees seems to be altar of sacrifice because underneath it were the souls of those who had sacrificed themselves by remaining faithful to the testimony of Jesus Christ and to the word of God. These souls cry out for justice and vengeance upon “them that dwell on the earth” who had taken their lives. This cry for vengeance seems contrary to the normal teachings of Jesus, Who taught forgiveness and “turning the other cheek.” However, the context here is different since it is God Who is pouring out wrath and judgment on those who have rejected Him and harmed His people. The souls under the altar are not seeking vengeance themselves but are leaving it in God’s hands. They are merely asking about the timing of God’s vengeance.

<sup>11</sup> And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.

**“And white robes were given unto every one of them”** - These white robes are like a down-payment of the glory that these saints will receive later when the time is right. **Rev. 2:10b** (to the church at Smyrna) “...*be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*”

**“and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season”** - Judgment is in God’s hands and these souls are told to be patient for God’s timing. **Rom. 12:19** “*Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.*”

**“until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled”** - The Lord usually does not tell us when He will exercise vengeance on those who have offended us, but these souls under the altar are told what must transpire before God’s vengeance is poured out. Their deaths, as well as other Christians who had not yet died, was in fulfillment of God’s plan. It was not that these people were not being killed before God had a chance to intervene. Instead He was waiting until His plan fulfilled itself and their deaths were part of the plan. The Lord never has to say “Oops!”

<sup>12</sup> And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; <sup>13</sup> And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. <sup>14</sup> And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

There have been a multitude of interpretations of these verses over the centuries, many of them saying that they describe earthly events such as military invasions that were future to John but is now history to us. However, it is hard to see these verses describing anything else but the events signaling the return of Jesus Christ as predicted by OT prophets and Christ Himself. The Greek word for “departed” in v. 14 means “to separate” or “to part asunder.” The heavens will split open when Christ returns and it will be such a cataclysmic physical upheaval that it may even change the geography of the planet. There will be no doubt Who is returning.

**Joel 2:10, 30-31** “<sup>10</sup> *The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining:.....* <sup>30</sup> *And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke.*

<sup>31</sup> *The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come.”*

**Mark 13:24-26** “<sup>24</sup> *But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light,*

<sup>25</sup> *And the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken.* <sup>26</sup> *And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.”*

**Matt. 24:29-30** “<sup>29</sup> *Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:* <sup>30</sup> *And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”*

<sup>15</sup> And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; <sup>16</sup> And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: <sup>17</sup> For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

The description is of people from the highest to the lowest social ranks; all will seek to hide themselves from the return of Jesus Christ. They seem to be hiding in bunkers as if they were sheltering from a nuclear war but in this case their fear is having to face God and His Son Jesus Christ. They seem to understand that God is pouring out His wrath on them for their sins and they call on the mountains and rocks to fall on them because they would rather die than face Him and His wrath. Perhaps their understanding of God’s wrath comes from the preaching of the two witnesses that John describes later (Rev. 11:3-13). These two men will preach for 3.5 years, making the lives of the inhabitants of the earth miserable because of their guilty consciences. When Christ returns the people of earth will realize that these two witnesses were speaking the truth and will seek to hide from the wrath of God.