

Detailed Study of Revelation Chapter 6

Introduction to Revelation Chapter 6

Revelation Chapter 6 begins the opening of the seven seals, an event that initiates the judgments of God upon the earth. This chapter reveals the first six of the seven seals, each one releasing a different kind of judgment. It includes the four horsemen of the apocalypse, the martyrs' cry for justice, and the cosmic disturbances that accompany God's wrath.

From a **dispensational perspective**, this chapter is seen as a depiction of the beginning of the **Tribulation period**—the seven years of intense judgment that will occur before the Second Coming of Christ. The events in this chapter are understood to correspond to various prophetic themes throughout Scripture, such as the judgment on the earth, the purification of the faithful, and the unveiling of God's ultimate plan for His kingdom.

1. Exegetical Breakdown of Revelation 6:1-17

Verses 1-2: The First Seal – The White Horse

Revelation 6:1-2 (ESV):

"Now I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, 'Come!' And I looked, and behold, a white horse! And its rider had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering, and to conquer."

- **Greek Word Study:**

- **"Opened" (Greek: *anoigo*)** – The verb *anoigo* refers to the action of opening something that was previously shut. This is a key moment in the eschatological timeline, as the Lamb (Jesus) begins to reveal God's judgment and plan.
- **"Bow" (Greek: *toxon*)** – This word refers to a weapon used for long-range attacks. While often associated with war, it can also be symbolic of the kind of conquest that doesn't immediately lead to bloodshed. The bow here is likely not a symbol of military might but a representation of conquest through deception or diplomacy, possibly pointing to the rise of a charismatic figure who will deceive the nations (often interpreted as the **Antichrist**).
- **"Crown" (Greek: *stephanos*)** – The crown given to the rider symbolizes authority and victory, but this victory may not be a just one. It is a **stephanos** crown, which is the type given for accomplishments, not necessarily rulership over all.

- **Theological Insight:**

The rider on the white horse is often associated with the **Antichrist** in dispensational theology. The fact that he rides a white horse suggests a false appearance of peace or righteousness, as he seeks to conquer in a way that looks like a benefactor to humanity but is ultimately part of God's judgment.

- **Historical/Cultural Context:**

Horses, especially white ones, were symbolic of royal authority and military conquest in Roman and Jewish imagery. The white horse suggests power and dominance, but it is important to recognize that the rider's crown and bow imply a deceptive victory.

Verses 3-4: The Second Seal – The Red Horse

Revelation 6:3-4 (ESV):

"When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, 'Come!' And out came another horse, bright red. Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another, and he was given a great sword."

- **Greek Word Study:**

- **"Slay" (Greek: *phoneuo*)** – The verb *phoneuo* means to kill or murder. It emphasizes violent and unjust killing, which would characterize the chaos and violence that will erupt on earth during the Tribulation.
- **"Sword" (Greek: *machaira*)** – The *machaira* is a short sword or dagger used in close combat. This weapon symbolizes violence, war, and conflict on a personal, violent level.

- **Theological Insight:**

The red horse and its rider signify the **spirit of war** and violence. This seal corresponds to a time when peace will be removed from the earth, and nations will rise up in conflict, possibly pointing to internal civil strife, world wars, and global unrest.

- **Cultural and Historical Context:**

Roman emperors and military leaders often used violence and warfare to secure power, and this imagery may have resonated with John's audience, who were familiar with the Roman Empire's violent expansion. The "red" horse could symbolize bloodshed, pointing to the atrocities and suffering that will be characteristic of this period.

Verses 5-6: The Third Seal – The Black Horse

Revelation 6:5-6 (ESV):

"When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, 'Come!' And I looked, and behold, a black horse! And its rider had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures, saying, 'A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and wine!'"

- **Greek Word Study:**

- **"Scales" (Greek: *zugon*)** – The *zugon* refers to a yoke or balance, used in trade to measure goods. The image of scales suggests the necessity for rationing and the coming **economic instability** during the Tribulation.
- **"Denarius" (Greek: *denarion*)** – A denarius was the standard wage for a day's labor. The statement that it takes a full day's wages to purchase a small amount of food signals a **severe famine** and hyperinflation, likely a result of war and destruction.

- **Theological Insight:**

The black horse and rider symbolize **economic collapse** and famine. This suggests that the judgments of God will not only involve violence but will also have devastating economic consequences, such as scarcity of food and the inflation of prices.

- **Cultural and Historical Context:**

Famines were a recurring issue in the ancient world, and the effects of war and conflict often caused food shortages and economic crises. The image of the rider with scales is familiar in Roman society, where the control of grain and food supplies was often a key element of imperial control.

Verses 7-8: The Fourth Seal – The Pale Horse

Revelation 6:7-8 (ESV):

"When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, 'Come!' And I looked, and behold, a pale horse! And its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth."

- **Greek Word Study:**

- **"Pale" (Greek: *chloros*)** – The term *chloros* refers to a pale, greenish color, symbolizing decay, sickness, and death. The pale horse's rider represents **Death**, and the fact that Hades follows him emphasizes the inevitable destination for those who die during this period.
- **"Pestilence" (Greek: *loimos*)** – *Loimos* refers to a deadly disease or epidemic, a common form of judgment in the ancient world.

- **Theological Insight:**

The pale horse signifies the death and destruction that follow war, famine, and disease. Death claims a large portion of the population, and Hades, symbolizing the realm of the dead, follows behind, emphasizing the finality and inevitability of the judgment.

- **Historical Context:**

Throughout history, plagues and disease often followed wars and famines, causing widespread death. The Roman Empire, for instance, dealt with multiple plagues that decimated populations. The rider's name, **Death**, is an unavoidable and terrifying reminder of the consequences of divine judgment.

Verses 9-11: The Fifth Seal – The Cry of the Martyrs

Revelation 6:9-11 (ESV):

"When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, 'O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been."

- **Greek Word Study:**

- **"Altar" (Greek: *thysia*)** – The word *thysia* refers to the sacrificial altar. This image suggests that the martyrs' deaths are viewed as a form of sacrifice, something that is recognized and honored by God.

- **Theological Insight:**

The souls under the altar represent the **martyrs** who gave their lives for Christ during the Tribulation. Their cry for justice reflects the righteous desire for God to bring about His vengeance on the wicked, a theme that will be more fully realized in the later judgments.

- **Application Insight:**

The delay in God's vengeance teaches believers about **God's patience** and the need to trust in His timing. The call for justice is answered, but only after the full number of martyrs has been reached, signifying God's perfect plan unfolding in its time.

Verses 12-17: The Sixth Seal – Cosmic Disturbances

Revelation 6:12-17 (ESV):

"When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place."

- **Greek Word Study:**
 - **"Earthquake" (Greek: *seismos*)** – The word *seismos* refers to a violent shaking of the earth, signifying not just physical destruction but also a **cosmic upheaval**, as the very natural order is disturbed.
 - **Theological Insight:**

The opening of the sixth seal marks the **cosmic disturbances** that will signal the **end of the age**. These signs, drawn from Old Testament prophecies like *Joel 2:10* and *Isaiah 13:10*, represent the physical and spiritual convulsions that will accompany God's judgment on the world.
 - **Historical and Cultural Context:**

Natural disasters like earthquakes and eclipses were often interpreted as signs of divine intervention or judgment in ancient cultures. For John's audience, these events would have been understood as apocalyptic signs pointing to the end times.
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2. Questions for Application for Today's Christian Audience

1. **How do we view the world's increasing instability and conflicts?**

As Christians, how should we interpret current wars, famines, and natural disasters in light of the judgments described in Revelation 6?
 2. **Are we prepared for persecution and suffering?**

The martyrs cry out for justice, but they must wait. How does this speak to us about the nature of God's timing and our role in standing firm in faith during times of suffering?
 3. **What is our response to the suffering of others?**

The judgments in this chapter highlight immense suffering. How can we, as Christians, respond to the injustices in our world and act as agents of mercy, knowing that ultimate justice will come from God?
 4. **Do we live with the expectation of Christ's return?**

The cosmic disturbances and the cries for justice remind us that Christ's return is certain. How should this truth shape our daily lives and the way we view the world?
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Conclusion

Revelation 6 reveals the devastating consequences of sin and the unfolding judgment of God during the Tribulation period. The opening of the seals sets in motion a series of events that will culminate in the return of Christ and the establishment of His kingdom. For the dispensationalist, these judgments correspond to the final phase of God's plan for humanity, culminating in His ultimate victory. As we study this chapter, we are reminded of God's sovereignty, the reality of judgment, and the call to remain faithful amid suffering and trials.