Revelation 6

The Tribulation Begins

- In Revelation 5:1 we learn of the **seven-sealed scroll** that God the Father is holding in His right hand. And having found no creature who was worthy to open the scroll, Jesus Christ . . . the Lamb of God standing as if slain . . . steps forth and receives the scroll as the only One who is worthy to open this extremely valuable scroll.

- Now, beginning in chapter 6, through chapter 18, we read about the events that are unleashed as the Lord begins to break each seal of the scroll.

- In the past 110 years the world has endured much death and devastation.

    - With the invention of modern weaponry mankind has devised more and more efficient ways to kill other men. With the invention of guns, artillery, rockets and drones and nuclear bombs man has become capable of killing on a scale never imagined by our ancestors who killed only with spears and swords and arrows.

    - And since the first world war we have witnessed the deaths of millions of men, women and children . . . often times at the hand of their own country's leaders. During and after World War II Joseph Stalin was responsible for killing more than 20 million of his own people. Mao Tse Tung killed more than 25 million Chinese people in his quest for power.

    - In addition to the millions of men, women and children killed at the hands of other men, tens of millions have died at various times from plagues and diseases. The Spanish flu that hit the world in the early 20th century killed between 50 and 100 million people, worldwide.

- But for as bad as weaponry and diseases have been, the number of deaths resulting from them, up to now, pales in comparison to the number of people who will die during the 7-year Tribulation as God pours out His wrath upon the earth.

    - In all, half of the world's population . . . currently estimated to be 9.5 billion people . . . will die during the 7 years of God's wrath on the earth.

    - As we will see, as we continue our study of Revelation, the 7-year Tribulation will literally be hell on earth.

- With Revelation 5:14 the scene in heaven comes to an end. We then read in Revelation 6:1, ***and I saw***, as the scene now shifts to the events of the Tribulation.

    - John's use of the word ***saw*** (Greek: *horaō*) indicates that John is an eyewitness to the events he is about to describe.

<u>General observations of the events surrounding the breaking of the seals on the scroll</u>—

- As we begin our examination of Revelation 6, I want to make a couple of observations.

First, the opening of each of the first four seals is accompanied by the command to ***come*** (v. 1, 3, 5, 7) by ***one of the four living creatures***. The command to ***come*** is not directed at John, but at each of the four horsemen.

Second, the breaking of the seals does not involve a reading of the contents of the scroll, but an action associated with the breaking of each seal.

Third, the breaking of all 7 seals is done by the Lamb.

Fourth, the breaking of the seventh seal by the Lord results in and involves multiple events . . . **7 angelic trumpet judgments, with the 7th trumpet unleashing 7 bowl judgments.**

Fifth, the seal judgments represent events that happen <u>during</u> the Tribulation.

- One alternate opinion sees the events associated with the breaking of the seals as happening <u>before</u> the Tribulation because the seals are affixed to the outside of the scroll in such a manner that all must be broken before the scroll can be opened. This view places the events of Matthew 24:6-11 as <u>before</u> the Tribulation.
    - This view is not the orthodox view.
- The majority view sees the seals at the end of the scroll and the scroll being opened gradually and representing events that transpire <u>during</u> the Tribulation.
    - The events follow Jesus' Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, and Luke 21, sometimes called "the little apocalypse," which He delivered on the Tuesday before the crucifixion.
    - In His teachings Jesus divided the time into 2 periods . . . "the beginning of birth pangs" (Mathew 24:8) and "the Great Tribulation" (Matthew 24:21). "The beginning of birth pangs" parallels the first 4 seals in particular.

- Pastor Tom Pennington makes the important observation that the word ***tribulation*** is derived from the Latin word *tribulum*. A *tribulum* was an agricultural tool used for separating chaff from grain during the threshing process.
    - A *tribulum* was a heavy board with nails or spikes in it and heavy weights placed on the board to press the *tribulum* into the stalks of grain. The *tribulum* would then be dragged through the sheaves of grain, separating the grain from the husks and chaff. This process was called *tribulotio*.
    - The Greek word for *tribulotio* is *thlipsis*, which is translated ***tribulation***, meaning "to press together or press upon."
    - This picture of being pressed upon . . . ***tribulation*** . . . is used in several New Testament passages:

Matthew 24:21— for then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall.

Matthew 24:29— "But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken . . .

Mark 13:19— "For those days will be a time of tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created, until now, and never shall.

Mark 13:24— "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light . . .

Revelation 7:14— And I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

- So, you can see that a *tribulum* was designed to separate out the wheat grains during the threshing process. We also see this concept in the Lord's parable of **the wheat and the tares** in Matthew 13:24-30 . . .

Matthew 13:24-30— 24 He presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 But while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat, and went away. 26 But when the wheat sprang up and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. 27 And the slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' 28 And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' And the slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' 29 But he said, 'No; lest while you are gathering up the tares, you may root up the wheat with them. 30 'Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn."

  - The **tribulation** is the process by which God will separate out the wheat from the tares . . . or, the authentic from the fake.

- To give you an idea of the degree of severity the ***tribulation*** will bring, here are some Scriptural phrases to describe the severity of events that will come upon the world during that time . . .

  - ***birth pangs*** (Matt. 24:8; 1 Thes. 5:3)
  - ***the day of trouble*** (Zeph. 1:15)
  - ***the time of Jacob's trouble*** (Jer. 30:7)
  - ***the day of distress*** (Zeph. 1:15)
  - ***the day of darkness and gloom and clouds*** (Zeph. 1:15)
  - ***the day of the Lord*** (numerous passages)
  - ***the day of vengeance*** (Jer. 46:10)
  - ***the day of punishment*** (Is. 10:3)
  - ***the day of destruction*** (Zeph. 1:15)
  - ***the day of judgment*** (several passages)
  - ***the day of the Lord's anger*** (several passages)

- ***the day of wrath*** (Zeph. 1:15)
- ***the day of the Lord's wrath*** (numerous passages)

The first seal—peace

v. 1— Then I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, "Come."

- Revelation 6:1 begins with the statement ***the Lamb broke one*** **[the first]** ***of the seven seals***. Following this statement John then records hearing a voice . . . ***and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, "Come."***

  - The description of this angel ***saying with a voice of thunder*** points, metaphorically, to a coming storm.

  - Note that this is the only seal that is accompanied by a ***voice of thunder***.

- The word ***thunder*** (Greek: *brontē*) only occurs twice in the New Testament outside the book of Revelation and both relevant to the apostle John—

  - Mark 3:17, where he and his brother James are called "sons of thunder" (i.e. of stormy temperament)

  - John 12:28-29 in which we have a heavenly response to Jesus' prayer (a theophany) which is a manifestation of God.

v. 2— I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.

- Verse 2 begins with the phrase, ***I looked***, indicating that John is watching the sequence of events begin to unfold.

What does John see?

- John describes what he sees . . . ***behold, a white horse***.

  - The color ***white*** is symbolic of righteousness and holiness (1:14; 2:17; 3:4-5; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9, 13-14; 14:14; 19:11, 14; 20:11).

  - This white horse is an emblem of righteousness, **but, as we see, it is a counterfeit righteousness.**

Who is the rider?

- In v. 2 the rider is simply described as ***<u>he</u> who sat on it***.

- There are many views regarding the identity of the rider: the Roman emperor, the Word of God, personification of judgment, the victorious Gospel, triumphant militarism, Christ Himself, among others.

    - **The best interpretation is to view the rider <u>not</u> as a person, but, rather, a force.** It is in keeping with the impersonal forces of war, famine and death in the subsequent riders. That **force** which is being viewed as represented by the rider on the white horse is **worldwide peace**.

What does the rider possess?

- First of all, the rider is described in v. 2 as possessing ***a bow***, signifying the means by which worldwide peace is achieved.

    - Note, the absence of arrows indicates how this rider achieves **worldwide peace** . . . it is a bloodless victory. The bow indicates the threat of war, which never occurs because victory is achieved by peaceful means.

    - Death is not alluded to under this seal. It seems best to see the bow without arrows as representing a peaceful worldwide conquest.

    - Worldwide peace is the condition as the end of the first seal because one of the results of the second seal is peace being <u>taken</u> from the earth (Rev. 6:4).

- Second, we see that ***a crown was given to him***.

    - The term ***was given*** (Greek: *didōmi*) refers to "something that is given to someone." In other words, **that which the rider on the white horse possesses is <u>divinely</u> given to him.**

        - **In other words,** God sovereignly gives this rider his authority to act as an agent of His divine wrath.

    - And the thing the rider on the white horse is ***given*** is a ***crown*** (Greek: *stephanos*), signifying a winner's crown or the crown of triumph.

- Third, we see that the ***crown*** the rider is ***given*** results in him going ***out conquering and to conquer***.

    - Because there were no arrows, the conquering will <u>not</u> be by military force, but by deceit (2 Thess. 2:9-11) and by treaty (Daniel 9:24-27).

- Tom Pennington— "The picture here in this first Horseman of the Apocalypse is a picture of a rapidly expanding kingdom accomplished, not through actual bloody war, but rather through treaties and diplomacy. In other words, this horse and it's rider pictures the false peace that Antichrist will orchestrate."

    - The one able to bring worldwide peace is heralded as a worldwide leader. This person is the antichrist. As the rider on the white horse, this describes his rise to power before the 70th week

of Daniel and is in political position to make a covenant with Israel. He doesn't become "the beast" until the middle of the 70th week (Rev. 13:1-8).

Question: What sort of scenario could v. 2 be describing?

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The second seal—war

v. 3— When He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come."

- In v. 3 the Lord breaks ***the second seal*** of the scroll, **and with it, the peace that the first rider brings is shattered.**

- Notice in v. 3 that the breaking of the second seal is accompanied by ***the second living creature saying, "come."***

    - So, the second seal is announced by the second of the four ***living creatures***.

v. 4— And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men would slay one another; and a great sword was given to him.

- In v. 4 John sees a second horse . . . ***a red horse*** . . . and rider.

    - The word ***another*** (Greek: *allos*) means "another of the same kind" as the one under the first seal. It shows a connection between the two with a separation in time. In other words, peace and war cannot exist simultaneously. Peace and war are separated by time. In this instance, peace comes first, followed by war.

    - The significance of the horse being ***red*** is symbolic of blood and war.

    - Like the first rider, the rider on the ***red horse*** represents a worldwide force. It is representative of war and bloodshed and parallels Matthew 24:6-7 . . .

      Matthew 24:6-7— 6 "You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. 7 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes.

- In v. 4 we see that the rider on the red horse ***was granted to take peace from the earth***.

    - The term ***was granted*** (Greek: *didōmi*) is the same term, ***was*** given, in v. 2 and refers to "something that is given to someone." In other words, that which the rider on the red horse possesses is also divinely given to him.

- The fact that the rider on the red horse is ***granted*** permission to ***take peace from the earth*** indicates that he is divinely appointed as an agent of God for this purpose . . . ***to take peace from the earth***.

- The statement in v. 4 that ***men would slay one another*** indicates that the antichrist will not be the agent of destruction and death, but will hasten men killing one another.

- In v. 4, when we read that ***a great sword was given to him***, the ***great sword*** is indicative of great military power and the ability to inflict great bloodshed.

    - The fact that ***a great sword <u>was given to him</u>*** indicates that it is God's will that the antichrist rise to great power and inflict great bloodshed upon the world.

    - In other words, it is God's will . . . as part of God's wrath . . . that the antichrist arise to power to inflict death and injury on the "earth dwellers."

Question: Here in the breaking of the first two seals we see that a counterfeit peace comes upon the world, followed by devastating war. **Where does the antichrist fit into these events?**

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The third seal— famine

v. 5— When He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, "Come." I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand.

- Next, as the Lord breaks the third seal, ***the third living creature*** summons the third horse and rider. We then see the third horse and rider . . . a ***black horse***.

    - The word ***black*** (Greek: *melas*) is associated with **famine** (Lam. 4:8-9).

      Lamentation 4:8-9— 8 Their appearance is blacker than soot, They are not recognized in the streets; Their skin is shriveled on their bones, It is withered, it has become like wood. 9 Better are those slain with the sword Than those slain with hunger; For they pine away, being stricken For lack of the fruits of the field.

- The rider on this ***black horse*** is described as having ***a pair of scales in his hand***.

    - The word ***scales*** (Greek: *zugos*) is used to describe scales used by merchants to weigh out food. The significance of the scales portrays the scarcity of food. Eating food by weighing it out denotes a condition of famine (Eze. 4:16-17)

      Ezekiel 4:16-17— 16 Moreover, He said to me, "Son of man, behold, I am going to break the staff of bread in Jerusalem, and they will eat bread by weight and with anxiety, and drink water by measure and in horror, 17 because bread and water will be scarce; and they will be appalled with one another and waste away in their iniquity.

    - Throughout Scripture we find examples of God using famine as a means of divine judgment (Lev. 26:26; Deut. 32:24; 2 Kings 8:1; Psalm 105:16; Is. 3:1; Jer. 16:4; Eze 5:16; 14:13; Hag. 1:11).

v. 6— And I heard something like a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not damage the oil and the wine."

- In v. 6 we read an interesting statement. It begins, ***and I heard something like a voice in the center of the four living creatures.***
    - While we aren't told specifically who is making the statement, the fact that ***something like a voice*** is heard ***in the center of the four living creatures*** probably means that what John hears is the voice of God from the throne of God.
- The thing the voice says is enigmatic . . . ***"A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not damage the oil and the wine."***
    - **Wheat** is a better grain than barley and was **the main food of the ancient world**.
    - One quart was barely enough to sustain one person for one day. So, the cost to feed 1 person for 1 day was ***a denarius*** . . . equivalent to one day's wage.
    - **In other words, a famine would require maximum cost for minimum ration.**
    - Barley, the lesser quality grain, bought more for a day's wage. While it could feed more people, barley's nutritional value was also less than wheat.
        - Because it was a lesser-quality grain, barley was generally used to feed livestock.
- The phrase, ***do not damage the oil and the wine***, was an admonition not to damage those luxury items that only the wealthy would have been able to purchase.
    - This phrase indicates that while the poor are barely able to eke out an existence, the wealthy continue to live with virtually no interruption in their lifestyle.
    - But God's judgment upon the wealthy will come during the sixth seal (Rev. 6:15).

The fourth seal—death

v. 7— When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come."

- The breaking of the fourth seal follows the same pattern . . . the Lord breaks the seal and the fourth living creature summons the fourth horse and horseman.

v. 8— I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. 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.

- The fourth horse is described as ***an ashen horse***, sometimes translated ***pale horse***.

- The word ***ashen*** (Greek: *chlōros*) means "pale yellowish." The same word is used in Mark 6:39, Rev. 8:7; 9:4.

- In the present context is designates the yellowish green of decay. It describes the color of a corpse in the advanced state of decomposition.

- The rider of the ***ashen horse*** is specifically named ***Death***.

  - The word ***death*** (Greek: *thanatos*) is the same word that is translated "pestilence" later in this verse.

  - This rider, however, encompasses <u>more</u> than pestilence. ***Sword***, ***famine***, ***wild beasts*** are listed in the same verse and are all instruments of ***death***.

- John also describes that ***Hades was following with him.*** Contextually, this is a reference to the intermediate place of the dead . . . the grave.

  - ***Hades*** is the place that <u>only</u> the wicked dead go to. When believers die, they immediately go to be present with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8).

Interpretive question: Is Hades mounted on the horse with Death, or is Hades on foot? Is Hades riding a separate horse?

- The third question can be answered most easily. We can eliminate the suggestion that Hades is riding a separate horse since a fifth horse is not mentioned by John.

- The first two questions are debatable.

  - If Hades is not mounted, he is on foot and apparently acts as Death's hearse, standing ready to engulf and detain Death's victims.

  - Because the two are inseparable, hades apparently is able to maintain the horse's pace so as to keep up with death's movements.

- Note that John records that ***authority was given to <u>them</u> over a fourth of the earth, to kill....***

  - With approximately 9 billion people on earth, 2—2½ billion people will die when this seal is broken.

- Death and Hades are given specific authority to kill in **4 ways . . .**

  - ***with sword*** indicates war continues to dominate the earth.

  - ***with famine*** indicates many die as a result of starvation

  - ***with pestilence*** indicates that many fatal diseases will kill

- ***by the wild beasts of the earth*** describes animals looking for prey. If the animals are starving, as mankind is, it is natural that the animals would hunt anything they could to survive, as we see in Deut. 32:24; Joshua 24:12; 2 Kings 2:24; 17:25; Isa. 30:6; Jer. 5:6; Eze. 14:21; 33:27)

- **Important point:** It is important to understand that in the timeline of the events of the Tribulation, the events of the first four seals **begin** in the first half of the 7-year Tribulation, but the **effects** of those seals, particularly the third and fourth seals . . . famine and death . . . will continue throughout the 7 years.

  - As the later trumpet and bowl judgments are unleashed . . . as the earth is being devastated by God's wrath . . . famine and death will continue and increase as a result of the trumpet and bowl judgments.

  - **In other words**, peace, followed by war, followed by famine and followed by death are **specific judgments** that occur in the first half of the Tribulation. But war, famine and death will continue to be **consequences** upon the earth as later trumpet and bowl judgments occur.

- **Additionally**, while these 4 seals are opened sequentially, their effects overlap. In other words, famine will result from world-wide war and death by sword, famine and wild beasts will occur as the war and famine are going on.

The Fifth Seal—prayers for vengeance

- The fifth seal is distinctly different from the first four seals. There is no mention of an angel summoning or announcing the breaking of this seal and there is no horse or horseman. And this fifth seal is different from the sixth seal, which will come next, in which earthly devastation will come. This fifth seal is unique.

- The focus of the fifth seal is **Christian martyrdom** and complements the Lord's teaching in Matthew 24:9-10, Mark 13:9-13 and Luke 21:12-17 during the time He refers to as ***the beginning of birth pangs*** . . .

  Matthew 24:9-10— *9* ***"Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name.*** *10* ***At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another."***

  Mark 13:9-13— *9* ***"But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them.*** *10* ***The gospel must first be preached to all the nations.*** *11* ***When they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit.*** *12* ***Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death.*** *13* ***You will be hated by all because of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.***

Luke 21:12-17—12 "But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name's sake. 13 It will lead to an opportunity for your testimony. 14 So make up your minds not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves; 15 for I will give you utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute. 16 But you will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death, 17 and you will be hated by all because of My name.

- The nature of the 5th seal is gleaned from the cry of the martyrs in Revelation 6:10 for vengeance. It is consistent and harmonizes with an answer to prayer from God's elect, such as found in Luke 18:7...

  Luke 18:7— now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them?

- **The events surrounding the breaking of the 5th seal is an example of imprecatory prayer.** To "imprecate" means "to call down divine calamity on someone as the just result of their evil and wickedness."

  - We see examples of imprecatory prayers in the Psalms as David prays that God will bring calamity and justice upon those who unjustly persecute him and seek his life. We find examples in Psalms 7, 35, 40, 55, 58, 59, 64, 69, 79, 94, 109, 137, 139 and 144.

- But while Scripture records imprecatory prayers of God's children, there is never instruction to take our own vengeance on the wicked. In fact, Scripture teaches the opposite, as we see in Romans 12:19-20 . . .

  Romans 12:19-20— 19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord. 20 "but if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."

  - Note in the Romans 12 passage that calling for vengeance is desiring to see God glorified in His justice against the ungodly.

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v. 9— When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained;

- Who are ***the souls of those who had been slain***?

  - The context places these martyrs in the same time period as the first four seals. It parallels Christ's Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24:7-10. They have not yet received their resurrected bodies (cf. Rev 20:4).

  - These represent those martyred by the "earth dwellers" (cf. v. 10). The offering of these prayers should be placed after the events of the first four seals and shortly before the events of the 6th seal. **Remember, the events of the opening of the seals are consecutive, therefore, there is a consecutive fulfillment.**

- **Where are these souls located? . . . *underneath the altar.***

    - Though not explicitly stated, John's vision has shifted from the scenes on earth back to heaven. Dead people do not cry out on earth. Direct access for these souls is only possible in heaven.

- With the exception of the earthly ***altar*** in 11:1, the word ***altar*** (Greek: *thysiasterion*), is a reference to a heavenly ***altar*** (cf. Rev 8:3,5; 14:18).

- What was the throne room in Chapters 4-5 is now God's temple (cf. 11:19; 14:15, 17; 15:5,8; Ps18-6; Micah1:2; Hab2:20).

- What is the altar?

    - This ***altar*** is identified as the golden altar of incense. This is the heavenly altar after which the golden altar of incense in the earthly Tabernacle and Temple were modeled. The altar of incense was located adjacent to the sanctuary.

- Historically, Israel's Tabernacle and Temple had two altars:

    - The first altar is the **altar of sacrifice**. This altar <u>cannot</u> be the one in view : It was 7 ½' x 7 ½' x 4 ½' ; the souls are <u>under</u> the altar, not on it; there are no more sacrifices for sin, Christ is the only sacrifice ; it was bronze; burned sacrificial animals; it was located in open air at the door of the courtyard; served by priests; symbolized atonement (Exodus 27:1-8; 38:1-7).

    - The second altar is the **altar of incense** (cf. Rev 6:9; 8:3; 14:17-18). It was 18"x 18"x 36"; gold; burned sweet smelling incense; located within the Tabernacle/Temple; served by priests. In Rev 8:3 the prayers of the saints are offered like incense, with the angel acting as the priest; symbolizes worship (cf. Ezekiel 30:1-10).

- **Why have these souls been slain?** Two reasons are given in v. 9

    - First, ***because of the Word of God***.

        - Note: John is seen as one who bore witness to the word of God Rev 1:2 and exiled to Patmos because of the word of God. Rev 1:9.

        - See Rev 7:9 The Great Multitude from the first four seals are distinct from "***the souls under the altar***".

        - As for why they are martyred, John MacArthur writes, "they will correctly interpret what they see going on around the in the world in the light of Scripture. They will proclaim from the Bible, God's judgment and call on people to repent and believe the gospel."

    - The second reason given for these souls being slain is ***because of the testimony which they had maintained.***

        - Note: The same could be said of the apostle John in Rev 1:2, 9

- The word ***testimony*** (Greek: *martyrian*) means their testimony was the ultimate cause of their martyrdom. Their loyalty is evident to those around them by their proclamation of the word of God.

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v. 10— and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

- In Revelation 6:10 we learn what the souls under the altar are doing . . . ***they cried out with a loud voice***.

  - In the phrase ***cried out with a loud voice***, the term ***loud voice*** (Greek: *phōnē mega*) is in a verb tense that shows this to be a <u>single</u> definite appeal, not one that was continually offered.

  - Their ***crying out*** is a prayer is in the form of a question: ***"How long, O Lord, holy and true, wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"***

- The cry, ***how long*** (Greek: *heōs pote*) is frequently used in the Septuagint as the cry of suffering of Israel (cf. Psalm 13:1; 35:17).

  - The sentiment conveyed with this term is seen in the appeal of Abel's blood in Gen 4:10.

    Genesis 4:10— The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground.

- In v. 10, the term ***Lord*** (Greek: *despotes*) is a term that means "master" and the title is one of divine might, majesty, power and authority. It recognizes the absolute power of God.

- In v. 10 the terms ***holy and true*** refer to two of God's attributes.

  - Because He is ***holy***, He must judge sin (cf. Ps 5:4-5; Hab. 1:3; Acts 10:42)

  - Because He is ***true***, He must be faithful to keep His word and promises (cf. Numb 23:19; Lk. 21:33; 2 Tim. 2:13).

- The question, ***how long will you refrain from judging and avenging our blood***, is a cry for divine retribution to see God's name vindicated. This is an imprecatory prayer ***on those who dwell on the earth*** and is a phrase used to designate **unbelievers** (cf. Rev 3:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 12; 17:2, 8).

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v. 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, would be completed also.

- The response to the question in v. 10 is immediately given in v. 11.

  - First, we learn that ***there was given to each of them a white robe***.

  - The term ***white robe*** (Greek: *leuke stolē*) refers to a robe flowing to the feet. This garment is here bestowed upon the faithful. The purity of this white document pictures blessedness and

holiness. Recall that this is a promise to the overcomer to the church at Sardis in Rev 3:5, "***He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments***."

Interpretive question— Are these saints given intermediate bodies or is this symbolic?

- We know from Rev. 20:4 that tribulation saints do not receive their resurrection bodies until after the tribulation. Theologians are divided over whether an intermediate body is given until bodily resurrection.

- John Walvoord states, "The martyred dead here pictured have not been raised from the dead and have not received resurrection bodies. Yet it is declared that they are given robes. The fact that they are given robes would almost demand that they have a body of some kind. A robe could not hang upon an immaterial soul or spirit. It is not the kind of body that Christians now have, that is, the body of earth, nor is it the resurrection body of flesh and bones which Christ spoke of after His own resurrection (cf. Luke 24:39; John 20:17). It is a temporary body suited for the presence in heaven but replaced in turn by their everlasting resurrection body given at the time of Christ's return" (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13-18).

Argument for a temporary/ intermediate body:

- Enoch and Elijah were raptured- no body to be resurrected since they were not in the grave, therefore, they must be in some form not yet glorified.

- the Transfiguration- Elijah and Moses must have had temporary bodies (cf. Matt. 17:2, 3 with 1 Cor. 15; 2 Cor. 5:1)

- Jesus crucified (earthly body) ….. three days in the grave (made proclamation to the spirits in prison 1Peter 3:19)…..resurrected and appeared to His disciples over a 40 day period. Acts 1:3 (intermediate resurrected body Luke 24:39; John 20:17; 1John 1:1)....ascended to heaven Acts 1:9…..seated in heaven as the glorified Christ. cf Mk 16 :19; Heb 1:3; Rev 2

- **What are the souls told?** They are told by God "***that they should rest for a little while longer.***

  - The term ***rest*** (Greek: *anapausin*) "to cease from movement, keep quiet and rest." The instruction here is not an admonition (for that would infer impatience, which is a sinful), but rather an exhortation to enjoy the blessedness of being in heaven.

- The length of the proposed rest is an unspecified time . . . ***for a little while longer***.

  - How much longer would that imply? Up to the sounding of the seventh trumpet (Rev. 10:16— ***"there shall be delay no longer,"*** and Rev. 11:15 ***"and the seventh angel sounded."***

- **What is the reason for the delay?** . . . ***until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren were to be killed even as they had been, should be completed also.***

  - The phrase, ***until the number***, signifies a predetermined number to be killed. They represent a set number of elect during the specific time period of ***a little while longer***.

- At the time of the opening of this seal, early in the Tribulation, God is not done saving those who will receive salvation during the 7 years . . . ***until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren were to be killed even as they had been, should be completed also.***

- **Who is in this number?** ***. . . their fellow servants and their brethren***. Many suggest two classes of people. John MacArthur suggests:

- ***fellow servants***- i.e., those willing to die like martyrs for the cause of Christ, but not necessarily killed.

- ***brethren***- fellow believers who will be killed.

  - The phrase, ***who were to be killed***, however, is a participial clause that modifies both fellow servants and brethren and therefore is speaking of only one class.

  - Robert Thomas writes, "the word to the souls under the altar gives them assurance that God will eventually avenge their blood, but the time for the culmination of that vengeance has not yet arrived. One feature that must yet transpire beforehand is the increase of their number through additional martyrdom. The earth dwellers under the dawning leadership of the beast from the sea will take an even greater toll of human lives before Christ finally intervenes through His personal arrival back on earth. Until then, the already martyred are told to rest and enjoy their state of blessedness already attained."

The Opening of the Sixth Seal- Cosmic and Terrestrial Disturbances

v. 12— I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood;

- Note: The events in vs. 12-17 have been taken symbolically by some commentators, but it is best to interpret these events as literal in keeping with hermeneutics and what Jesus, Himself, stated would occur in the Olivet Discourse in Matt. 24:7; Mk. 13:8; Lk. 21:10-12 concerning earthquakes and "***terrors and great signs from heaven***." These events are towards the end or at the end of what has been called "***birth pains***" (the first half of the Tribulation).

- Here in Revelation 6:12-17 John describes **six catastrophic natural disasters that strike the earth.**

Disaster #1—Worldwise Earthquake

- In v. 12 we read that ***there was a great earthquake***. The term ***great earthquake*** (Greek: *seismas megas*) literally means "a shaking of the heavens and earth or seismic convulsions."

  - It seems likely that this ***great earthquake*** may be on a scale that **it shakes the whole earth and its effects are felt throughout the earth**.

  - ***Earthquake*** events are recorded several times in Revelation and their effects will have devastating effects on the earth and ***those who dwell on the earth*** (Rev. 6:12; 8:5; 11:13; 11:19; 16:18)

Disaster #2— The Sun Blackened

- In v. 12 we also read that ***the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair***.

  - In Old Testament apocalyptic literature this refers to the darkening of the sun, as seen in Isaiah 13:10, Ezekiel 32:7-8,Joel 2:10, 31, Amos 8:9, Matthew 24:29, Mark 13:24-25 and Luke 21:25.

  - The events described will be a literal darkening of the sun, compared to ***sackcloth*** made of black goat's hair. Sackcloth was a black garment made of coarse cloth and worn as a visible expression of mourning and despair (cf. Is. 50:3).

Disaster #3— The Moon's color becomes like blood

- Also in v. 12, we read ***and the whole moon became like blood***.

  - There are two plausible explanations for why the moon takes on the visible appearance of being ***like blood***.

    1. First, it could be because the **worldwide *earthquake*** has also resulted in massive volcanic eruptions that release **massive clouds of ash** that encircle the earth, dimming the sun and causing the color of the moon to be obscured, taking on the reddish appearance, ***like blood***.

    2. The second possibility is that the reddish color of the moon, expressed as being ***like blood***, is how the moon appears during **an eclipse** when observed through post-eruption atmospheric conditions (Joel 2:31).

  - Once again, there is no reason to see this description of this cataclysmic event as symbolic. What is being described will be a literal devastating worldwide event.

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v. 13— and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind.

Disaster #4— Stars fall from the sky to the earth

- To continue the description of natural events, in v. 13 we read, ***and the stars of the sky fell to earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken with a great wind***.

  - The term ***stars*** (Greek: *asters*) can refer to stars, but is also used to refer to smaller objects such as comets, meteors and meteorites. Since literal stars are many times larger than the earth, it seems certain that smaller objects falling from the sky to the earth is what John is describing. But from man's perspective, these "***stars***" hitting the earth as fire balls from heaven will certainly seem to be like ***stars*** falling from the sky. This is similar to the description in Luke 21:11 . . .

    Luke 21:11— and there will be great earthquakes, and in various places plagues and famines; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.

- The reference to ***terrors and great signs from heaven*** are part of the birth pains. The scope of the events is so violent that it is described and likened to, ***as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken with a great wind.***

  - For those who know fruit trees, unripe fruit is very firmly attached to the tree and is very difficult to dislodge. Therefore, the wind necessary to dislodge unripe figs from a tree would be very fearsome, like the winds of a hurricane or tornado.

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v. 14— The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

Disaster #5— The earth's atmosphere damaged

- In v. 14 John continues the description of the terrifying events that accompany the opening of the sixth seal . . . ***the sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up*** . . .

  - In the description of the sky splitting apart, the blue sky will appear to split and roll back in two opposite directions. John likens the sky to an unrolled scroll that rolls up in the middle and rolls up on either side. This is similar to the description in Isaiah 34:4 in which Isaiah describes . . .

    Isaiah 34:4— And all the host of heaven will wear away, And the sky will be rolled up like a scroll; All their hosts will also wither away As a leaf withers from the vine, Or as one withers from the fig tree.

  - The impression from all these heavenly phenomena is that the earth's atmosphere is coming apart or being destroyed. But it is not.

Disaster #6— Global tectonic movement

- The final disaster of this sixth seal is described in v. 14 as ***every mountain and island being moved out of their places***.

  - It is very possible that this final disaster incorporated the earlier disasters of the ***great earthquake*** that results in worldwide volcanic eruptions and the pollution of the atmosphere with ash. If this is true, the we see the reason for the ***great earthquake*** . . . the earth's tectonic plates all move, resulting in a devastating destruction and re-allignment of the earth's mountains, seas, continents and islands.

  - This activity will be of such a great magnitude that John uses the word ***every*** to describe the degree of devastation. While this might be hyperbole, the degree of devastation will be unlike anything seen since the Noahic flood.

The Response of *those who dwell on the earth*

v. 15— Then 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;

- In response to these catastrophic events, we see the human response of ***those who dwell on the earth.***

  - Notice that every category of humanity is covered by the seven-fold classification with special attention focused upon the upper classes in the first five that are listed kings of the earth- highest rulers and heads of state:

    1. ***the kings of the earth***- highest rulers; heads of state

    2. ***great men***- high ranking officials of the king's courts; high ranking officials in government.

    3. ***the commanders***- military leaders.

    4. ***the rich***- those who control commerce and business.

    5. ***the strong***- the influential who would exert influence over a great majority of the people.

  - These first five make up the elite elements of human society who, up to this point, ignored the warnings of God's judgments. The remaining people: the lower class of society; the common people.

    6. ***every slave***

    7. ***and free man***

What do they do? ***. . . they hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains***

- The irony of this response is that they are hiding in the very places that are being shaken and brought down. They are seeking refuge from all the cosmic disturbances and foolishly believe they can hide from and evade God. For a similar response, we read in Isaiah 2:17-21. . .

  Isaiah 2:17-21— 17 The pride of man will be humbled and the loftiness of men will be abased; and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day, 18 but the idols will completely vanish. 19 Men will go into caves of the rocks and into holes of the ground before the terror of the LORD and the splendor of His majesty, when He arises to make the earth tremble. 20 In that day men will cast away to the moles and the bats their idols of silver and their idols of gold, which they made for themselves to worship, 21 in order to go into the caverns of the rocks and the clefts of the cliffs before the terror of the LORD and the splendor of His majesty, when He arises to make the earth tremble.

What do they say?

v. 16— and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb;

- In response to the cataclysmic events, we see what these **"earth-dwellers"** say . . . ***and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.***

- They foolishly believe it is better to perish than to face the wrath of God, not realizing that in the end, that <u>will be</u> their final judgment! (cf. Hos. 10:8; Lk. 23:28-31)

- The context is national calamity for Israel (Rev. 20:11-15).

- **In v. 16 we see that they will come to the realization that these judgments are from God and, more specifically, from the Lamb who is the agent of judgment.** Only at the end will they begin to acknowledge Christ.

- In the phrase, ***the wrath of the Lamb***, the word ***wrath*** (Greek: *orgē*) refers to "the settled and abiding condition with a view to taking revenge, analogous to a simmering pot."

  - In the book of Revelation, *orgē* is used five times: 6:17; 11:18; 14:10; 16:19; 19:15

    - The other word for ***wrath***, the Greek word *thumos*, signifies a more agitated condition; an outburst of anger from inward indignation; analogous to a volcanic eruption and is used ten times in the book: 12:12; 14:8,10,19; 15:1,7; 16:1,19; 18:3; 19:15

What is their conclusion?

v. 17— for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

- What is ***the great day*** a reference to? It's the day of the Lord, ***the hour of testing*** from Revelation 3:10.

  - The rebellious earth dwellers finally have theological understanding. They know this is from the first and second members of the Godhead.

- The verb ***has come*** (Greek: *erchomai*) is in the aorist tense, referring to a previous arrival of wrath, not something that is about to take place. In other words, it looks backward, not forward. This is significant because upon reflection, they have come to realize that the day of the Lord had already been in effect with the death of 1.5 billion people Rev 6:7-8; worldwide famine 6:5-6; global warfare 6:3-4.

  - This wrath of God does not have its fullest realization until the terrestrial and cosmic disturbances, that make up the sixth, have occurred. It is only then that the "aha" moment has come…. they have been in the day of the Lord all along!

  - ***Has come*** is in keeping with a pre-trib position, with the wrath of God beginning with the opening of the first seal. Robert Thomas writes: "The placement of these events just before the beginning of the last half of the prophetic week of Daniel is most likely." These events then, would encompass the first 3 ½ years on the prophetic timeline… ***the birth pains***.

Their cry of despair

- Having come to the realization that they have been experiencing the wrath of God, in v. 17 the earth-dwellers then ask the **rhetorical question**, ***who is able to stand?***

- As the wrath of God intensifies with the pouring out of the sixth seal, the purpose behind their question is really a cry of despair, **who can possibly withstand and survive the wrath of God!"** And the obvious answer is, **no one!**

- The prophet Nahum presents the same questions in Nahum 1:6 . . .

  Nahum 1:6— Who can stand before His indignation? Who can endure the burning of His anger? His wrath is poured out like fire And the rocks are broken up by Him.

- Yet, even in the midst of God's great and terrible wrath being poured out upon the earth, and even though the people of the earth know that this is God's wrath, and even though they cry out and plead for mercy . . . they refuse to repent of their sin and they refuse to believe in Jesus Christ as God and Savior. Their hearts are hardened against God, even in the face of His wrath.

Conclusion

- The first six seals are the <u>beginning</u> of the woes that comprise the day of the Lord and foreshadow even more dreadful calamities yet to come under the seventh seal. These are merely the ***<u>beginning</u> of the birth pains***, with a greater intensity of labor on the horizon. In answer to the question, ***who is able to stand?*** John will next be introduced to two new visions in Revelation 7, that conclude the sixth seal.

  - Revelation 7:1-8 is the first vision and Revelation 7:9-17 is the second vision.