

The Seven Seals – A Collision Course with Judgment

Revelation 6:1-17

The vision of heavenly worship yields to the middle portion of Revelation (chapters 6-18), which describe in graphic detail the period of judgment following the Second Coming of Jesus and the Rapture of believers = the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:21; Revelation 7:14).

Four symbols of judgment: (1) the opening of the seven-sealed scroll, (2) the sounding of seven angelic trumpets, (3) the aftershocks of seven thunders, and (4) the emptying of seven bowls of divine wrath.

These judgments are not synonymous, but broadly diversified. These judgments depict a progression of “worsening intensity”.

The first four (4) Seals introduce four (4) horsemen.

1. The First Seal – white horse rider = military conquest.

6:1) Then I saw the Lamb open one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, “*Come!*” 2) I looked, and there was a white horse. Its rider held a bow; a crown was given to him, and he went out as a conqueror in order to conquer.

This white horseman is the long-awaited Antichrist. (Dan. 7-12; 1 John 2:18-22; 4:1-3; 2 John 7)

2. The Second Seal – red horse rider = violent bloodshed.

3) When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, “*Come!*” 4) Then another horse went out, a fiery red one, and its rider was allowed to take peace from the earth, so that people would slaughter one another. And a large sword was given to him.

“*allowed to take peace from the earth*” – Jesus predicted wars and rumors of war (Matt. 24:6).

“*people would slaughter one another*” – worldwide havoc and destruction.

3. The Third Seal – black horse rider = famine.

5) When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, “*Come!*” And I looked, and there was a black horse. Its rider held a set of scales in his hand. 6) Then I heard something like a voice among the four living creatures say, “*A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, but do not harm the oil and the wine.*”

“*a set of scales in his hand*” – symbol of weights and balances

“*a denarius*” = one day’s wage. Imagine a time of limited productivity and economic deficiency = world-wide famine.

“*but do not harm the oil and the wine*” – olive orchards and vineyards belonged to wealthier people while wheat and barley fields belonged to common folks. The implication: lifestyles of the wealthy less affected by the early judgments of the tribulation.

4. The Fourth Seal – pale horse rider = death and Hades bring death to ¼ of the earth.

7) When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, “*Come!*” 8) And I looked, and there was a pale green horse. Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following after him. They were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill by the sword, by famine, by plague, and by the wild animals of the earth.

“*Death and Hades was following after him*” = open graveyards.

“*authority over a fourth of the earth*” = imagine ¼ of the Earth’s population dying

“kill by the sword (2nd seal), famine and plague (3rd seal), wild animals (an added judgment).

5. The Fifth Seal – Martyred Christians

9) When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered because of the word of God and the testimony they had given. 10) They cried out with a loud voice: *“Lord, the one who is holy and true, how long until you judge those who live on the earth and avenge our blood?”* 11) So they were each given a white robe, and they were told to rest a little while longer until the number would be completed of their fellow servants and their brothers and sisters, who were going to be killed just as they had been.

“the souls of those who had been slaughtered.” Many will be saved in the tribulation – the world’s greatest revival **after** the Rapture. But they will pay a great price – objects of Satan’s wrath. Jesus predicted this great persecution of Christians (Matthew 24:9)

“slaughtered because of the word of God and the testimony they had given.” The cost of faithfulness and discipleship will be greater in the tribulation.

“Lord, how long will you judge those who live on the earth and avenge our blood?” The cry of the martyrs.

“Given a white robe and told to rest a little while longer.” White robe = holiness and purity. Rest = *anapausontai* – rest or stop.

6. The Sixth Seal – Unprecedented Cosmic Upheaval

12) Then I saw him open the sixth seal. A violent earthquake occurred; the sun turned black like sackcloth made of hair; the entire moon became like blood; 13) the stars of heaven fell to the earth as a fig tree drops its unripe figs when shaken by a high wind; 14) the sky was split apart like a scroll being rolled up; and every mountain and island was moved from its place. 15) Then the kings of the earth, the nobles, the generals, the rich, the powerful, and every slave and free person hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains. 16) And they said to the mountains and to the rocks, *“Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, 17) because the great day of their wrath has come! And who is able to stand?”*

Natural disasters = greater in magnitude and extent in the Tribulation.

The response from all types of people = fear, pleading, hiding, calling out to God.

John simply asks the question, *“Who is able to stand?”*

Applications:

1. One of the great themes of Revelation pictures God seated on His Throne, affirming that God is in control. Three of the first four seal judgments contain *“divine passives”*, indicating God as the divine source of these judgments: 1) the white horseman *“was given”* a crown, 2) the red horseman *“was allowed”* to take peace from the earth, 3) the pale horseman *“was given”* authority over ¼ of the earth. God stands behind these judgments (divine passives will also appear in the trumpet judgments).

2. God will judge evil because He is Holy and Righteous. A God who would not condemn and judge evil would be worse than evil itself. God’s strategy of judging evil is to allow the consequences of sin to “run its course” and evil to “self-destruct.”

3. God is serious about judgment. Hebrews 10:31 confirms *“It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”* God’s love and God’s judgment are two sides of the same coin.

4. As we consider the awful scenes of the Great Tribulation, remember that Christians will not

experience these judgments. If you wish to chance making it through the Great Tribulation, be my guest, but I don't plan to be here. I'm confident of meeting the Lord in the air on that Second Coming day. Thank God there is a way out of the Tribulation, and it is the way up – Look up to Jesus!