

# Ministry of Grace

## Revelation Chapter 6

<sup>1</sup>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!" <sup>2</sup>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.

<sup>3</sup>When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" <sup>4</sup>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.

<sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>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!"

<sup>7</sup>When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!"

<sup>8</sup>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.

<sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>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?" <sup>11</sup>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.

<sup>12</sup>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, <sup>13</sup>and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. <sup>14</sup>The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. <sup>15</sup>Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, <sup>16</sup>calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, <sup>17</sup>for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" [ESV]

## Notes

The time for God's judgment against the "earth dwellers" has finally come. Most of the remainder of this book is focused on God's judgment against the forces of evil and the earth dwellers.

Having taken the scroll, the "little lamb" now begins breaking the seals to open the document (the title deed to the earth). As each of the seals is opened, a judgment is executed against the "earth dwellers." These first four seals are often referred to as "the four horsemen of the apocalypse." Even though the action caused by this first seal does not appear to be a judgment, it is part of God's plan of judgment against those who reject His gracious offer of salvation.

When the fifth seal is opened, we see beneath the altar the martyrs who have been killed for their faith. They want to know how soon God will avenge their deaths. They are told to wait a little while longer. Then the sixth seal is opened and there is a great earthquake and awesome signs in the heavens, causing the permanent earth dwellers to hide from the wrath of the Lamb.

### **Revelation 6:1, 2 – The 1<sup>st</sup> seal judgment**

**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.**

Although some translations say that the living creature says, "Come, see," the best manuscripts have simply, "Come." This creature is not talking to John, but to the rider on the horse. This is the case for each of the four horsemen.

#### **"voice like thunder"**

Literally, "a thunderous sound" or "a thunderous voice" – The sound of the first "living one" was loud and thunderous.

#### **"a white horse! And its rider had a bow"**

The rider on the white horse probably represents a time of peaceful conquering. This may be a time of negotiated annexation or banding of nations together under one head. Notice that he has a bow (a weapon of war) but no arrows, indicating that there is no conflict but perhaps the threat of conflict exists.

There are three schools of interpretation as to who the rider on the white horse is.

1. Jesus Christ – This view is held primarily by those who view the Revelation as historical or spiritual. But, since Christ is the one opening the seals it does not logically fit that He is also the rider on the first horse.
2. The anti-christ – This view holds that the anti-christ will gain world power by negotiated conquests until he rules the entire revived Roman Empire.
3. False peace - The rider does not represent a specific person and, since the riders of the other three horses are impersonal representations (war, famine, death), this rider is also an impersonal representation, that of peaceful conquest or a time of false peace.

“a crown was given to him”

The word translated “crown” here is *stephanos*. This is from the root *stephō*, which means “to twine” or “to wreath.” It is often referred to as a “victor’s crown.” This is the reward that was typically given by the Greeks to winners of athletic events. The other Greek word that is translated as “crown” in the Bible is *diadema*, which is often referred to as a “ruler’s crown” or a “crown of power.” It is an inherited crown representing ruling authority and dominion. The rider on the white horse did not inherit this crown but it was given to him, perhaps through a democratic process or through negotiation. This further indicates that the conquering mentioned at the end of this verse was peaceful and negotiated, using the threat of warfare to accomplish it.

“conquering and to conquer”

This could also be translated as “overcoming that he should overcome.” This is a time on earth characterized by intentions of domination through peaceful, though threatening, means with the result being just such domination.

### **Revelation 6:3, 4 – The 2<sup>nd</sup> seal judgment**

**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.**

As the Lamb opens the second seal the second living one (angelic being, possibly a Seraph) calls out for the second horseman to come forth. He is on a red horse. The rider on the second horse is believed by some to be the false prophet (by those who believe the rider on the first horse is the beast or anti-christ). However to pursue this thinking in keeping with good Biblical exegesis, the riders on the third and fourth horses would also have to be identified as specific people. This is particularly difficult since the rider of the 4<sup>th</sup> horse is named “death.” It is better, rather, to view the four riders as impersonal representations. The rider on the 2<sup>nd</sup> horse appears to symbolize warfare as the remainder of verse 4 implies.

“bright red”

This is from the Greek word *purros*, meaning “fire-like.”

“earth”

Translated from *gēs*, meaning “ground, dirt, or the earth.”

“Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth”

It is neither the sinfulness of man nor the power of Satan that causes this warfare, but the Lamb. As the possessor of the scroll, the title deed of the earth, it is he who grants the authority to take peace from the earth. This seems contrary to how many people perceive God (only a God of peace and love), but these seals are judgments which God is executing upon the “earth dwellers,” or “dirt dwellers.” God is now demonstrating that He is also a God of judgment and wrath.

“slay”

This is from the Greek verb *sphadzō*, meaning “to slaughter.” It is the word used of slaughtering an animal for the purpose of sacrifice or for food. This implies that the people are not killing each other out of self-defense, but indiscriminate killing and slaughtering.

“a great sword”

The word translated “sword” is *makaira*, meaning a short, stabbing sword, like the Roman army and assassins used. It is a weapon of stabbing, not slashing, and may indicate the occurrence of assassinations, intrigue, or terrorism in the slaughtering of each other.

### **Revelation 6:5, 6 – The 3<sup>rd</sup> seal judgment**

**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!"**

As the third seal is broken, it is the third living one who announces the black horse. The fact that the rider of this horse has a pair of scales in his hand (used for the buying and selling of food), coupled with the announcement from the throne, indicates that this horse and rider represent famine, which is a natural result of large scale warfare (the second seal).

“voice in the midst of the four living creatures”

Since these four living ones are encircling the throne, it is apparent that this voice is coming from the throne itself. Therefore, it can be none other than the voice of God.

“a quart of wheat for a denarius”

The word translated “quart” is *koinix*, which simply means “a measure.” It represents the amount of food required to sustain a person for one day. Similarly, a “denarius” represents the amount of money that a person earns in one day. Therefore, God is declaring that as a result of the judgment of the third seal, food staples will become scarce and it will require an entire day’s wage to sustain a single person.

“three quarts of barley for a denarius”

Barley is inferior in nutritional quality to wheat and was most often purchased to feed animals. During the famine of the third seal judgment, families will likely have to rely on inferior nutrition in order to be able to feed each member of the family. Again, this is clearly indicative of famine conditions.

“do not harm the oil and the wine”

God is speaking to the rider of the black horse telling him not to harm the wine and oil, which are luxuries when the staples get scarce. This implies that the rich will still have their nutritional needs met and they will continue to consume their luxuries as well. It may also be an indication that annual crops like wheat and barley are scarce whereas perennial crops like olives and grapes are not scarce.

## Revelation 6:7, 8 – The 4<sup>th</sup> seal judgment

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.

The fourth seal completes a set of judgments, each of them announced by each of the four living beings around the throne of God.

“a pale horse”

The word translated “pale” is *chlōros*, which refers to “a pale green, like grass when dried up.” The same word, is used in extra-Biblical writing to refer to the color of honey, the color of sand, and the pale color of a person in mortal sickness or death.

The rider of this pale horse is named Death. He is followed by Hades. When the unsaved die today they go immediately to Hades whereas the saved go to Paradise (see studies on “Heaven” and “Hell”). So, the implication is that as death rides forth throughout the world, those who die will be unsaved.

“and Hades followed him.”

Literally, “and Hades followed with him.” The word translated “with” is the Greek word *meta*, which implies “accompaniment.” So, apparently Death and Hades are working together

“And they were given authority”

There is some disagreement as to who is referred to as “they.” Some believe that it is the four horsemen, but the first horseman does not appear to kill, though it could still refer to the horsemen as a general group. By the grammatical rule of immediate antecedence, however, “they” would have to refer to those most recently mentioned in the text. Therefore, it would refer to “Death and Hades.”

“kill”

This word is translated from the verb *apokteinō*, which means simply “to put to death.”

“And they were given authority ... to kill”

It is interesting to note Jesus’ response to John in **Revelation 1:18**,

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and **I have the keys of Death and Hades.** (**Revelation 1:17, 18**)

However, according to the book of Hebrews, prior to the death and resurrection of our Lord, the power of death belonged to Satan:

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him **who had the power of death, that is, the devil**, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.... (**Hebrews 2:14**) [NASB]

So, in order for Death and Hades to accomplish their macabre task they have to be given authority to take human lives and this authority comes from the Lamb.

“with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth.”

The four means of taking human lives during this time are “sword” implying warfare, “famine” implying starvation, “death” implying all natural forms of death (or possibly implying plague), and “wild beasts.” A similar judgment was threatened against Jerusalem:

For thus says the Lord GOD: How much more when I send upon Jerusalem my four disastrous acts of judgment, sword, famine, wild beasts, and pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast! (Ezekiel 14:21)

The Hebrew word translated “pestilence” in Ezekiel is *dehber*, meaning “a plague.” If Ezekiel is talking about the same event, then “death” spoken of in **Revelation 6:8** may possibly be a plague of some kind.

“wild beasts”

This is a translation of the Greek word *thēriōn*, which means, “a wild beast or a venomous creature (literally or figuratively).” Since the dangerous wild beasts of the earth are most likely in relatively small numbers, we have to ask “What are these beasts?” Some speculate that they are venomous snakes that multiply rapidly during the reign of the four horsemen, but this seems unlikely. Others say, since the other thirty-seven times this word appears in the book of Revelation it is a reference to the anti-christ or his false prophet, this use of the word must refer to murderous human beings. Finally, some say that it refers to rats which can multiply rapidly and are known carriers of dozens of diseases including typhus and Bubonic Plague. As an indication of the rapidity of their reproduction, if 95 percent of all rats were killed it would take only one year for the rat population to return to its original number.

“And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth”

Whatever the means used by Death and Hades, it appears that they will take the lives of ¼ of the population of the earth. In the year 2000 the total world population of the earth was about 6 billion people. By the year 2020 it is projected to be 8 billion. That means that the total number of deaths from the fourth seal judgment could easily be between 1.5 and 2 billion.

### **Revelation 6:9-11 – The 5<sup>th</sup> seal judgment**

**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.**

“souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne”

These are the souls of those who have been martyred because they believed the word of God and gave witness (Greek word *marturia*) of that fact, even in the face of death.

The events of this passage of Revelation occur before the mark of the Beast is required. Compare this passage with those who will refuse the mark of the beast.

Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the **souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of**

**Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands.** They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. (Revelation 20:4)

“I saw under the altar”

The altar is a solid mass, not something sitting on legs. So, how was John able to see under the altar? Recall in Revelation 4:6, there was a “sea of glass, like crystal” before the throne. This would indicate that one could see through it and observe what was underneath the throne.

In his second letter to the Christians in Corinth, Paul made this statement:

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into paradise--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows – and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. (2 Corinthians 12:2-4)

Notice that Paul said he was taken “to” (the Greek word *eōs*, meaning “as far as, but not going into”) the third heaven (God’s throne room), but he was taken “into” (the Greek word *eis*, meaning “into – moving from the outside to the inside”) Paradise. From this we can deduce that Paradise is up next to the third heaven. Also, remember that Paradise is where believers reside until they are resurrected and receive their eternal bodies (see studies on “Heaven” and “Hell”). Therefore, it makes sense that John was able to observe the martyrs in Paradise through the sea of glass which separates Paradise from God’s throne room. Also notice that the rapture has already occurred, therefore the church, represented by the twenty-four elders, is already in God’s throne room. As a result, the martyrs under the altar must be martyrs of Israel and of the early part of the tribulation.

“O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”

These martyrs want to know when God will take out His judging vengeance on those who dwell on the earth. God’s answer is that they should rest a little longer (indicating that they are in a state of rest currently) until the number of martyrs for the Messiah is completed. This remainder of the martyrs may possibly be those referred to in Revelation 20:4 as quoted above.

“Lord”

This is not translated from the typical Greek word for Lord which is *kurios*. It is from the word *despotēs*, (from which we get our English word “despot”) meaning “one who possesses supreme authority.”

“those who dwell on the earth”

This is a reference throughout the book of Revelation to the unsaved who are physically alive on the earth. The expression “those who dwell” is translated from the Greek word *katoikeō*, which is made up of *kata*, meaning “down,” but used here to imply permanence, and *oikeō*, meaning “to make one’s home” or “to dwell.” “On the earth” is from *epi tēs gēs*, meaning “upon the earth” or “upon the ground.” This is an apt description of those who make their

permanent dwelling (home) on the earth, as opposed to those who make their permanent dwelling (home) in heaven. We will refer to them as “permanent earth dwellers” or simply, “earth dwellers.” Incidentally, the unsaved will remain in the earth (in Hades) until the current earth is destroyed and they appear before the Great White Throne Judgment and are cast into the Lake of Fire.

“robe”

This is from the Greek word *stolē*, from which we get our English word “stole.” It refers to “a stately robe reaching to the feet or having a train sweeping the ground.”

“rest a little longer”

The martyrs were told that there would yet be a short delay. The end of this delay is declared in chapter ten:

and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, **that there would be no more delay, (Revelation 10:6)**

## **Revelation 6:12-14 - The 6th seal judgment**

**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.**

“great earthquake”

From the Greek words *seismos megas*, meaning “a very large shaking.” Several prophecies regarding the Day of the Lord refer to earthquakes (**Joel 2:10; Isaiah 13:13; Nahum 1:5, 6; Jeremiah 10:10.**) This is only the first of several significant earthquakes that will occur during the Tribulation. There are additional earthquakes spoken of in Revelation (**Revelation 8:5, 11:13, 11:19, and 16:18**)

“the sun became black as sackcloth”

Several prophecies in the Old Testament talk about the sun becoming dark and the moon turning blood red during the Day of the Lord (**Isaiah 13:9, 10; Joel 2:1-10, 30-31; Joel 3:14, 15**) When Jesus was asked about the signs of the end of the age and of His coming, He said:

There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. (**Luke 21:11**)

“stars”

From the Greek *aster*, meaning “a luminous body in the sky.” This can refer to stars, comets, planets, meteors, and other objects observed in the night sky. In this case it is possibly a reference to meteors.

“receded”

This is from the Greek *apochōridzō*, which is made up of *apo*, meaning “from” and *chōridzō*, meaning “to part” or “to separate.” It is described as the action of a scroll when it is rolled

up. So, apparently the sky seems to disappear from one side to the other. Compare this to the description that Isaiah gave regarding the indignation of the LORD:

All the host of heaven shall rot away, and the skies roll up like a scroll. All their host shall fall, as leaves fall from the vine, like leaves falling from the fig tree. (Isaiah 34:4)

“every mountain and island was removed from its place”

This is an unfortunate translation. The word “removed” is translated from the Greek verb, *kineō*, meaning “to stir” or “to move.” This verb does not imply removal from a location, but a movement at a location. This movement is the result of the great shaking. Notice that the mountains and islands do not disappear, but they are physically moved. The actual disappearance of the islands and mountains will happen at the end of the Tribulation when the seventh bowl is poured out (Revelation 16:17-20)

The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake. The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath. **And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found.** (Revelation 16:17-20)

This flattening of the mountains was predicted by Isaiah as a preparation for the return of the Lord to set up His millennial kingdom

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." (Isaiah 40:1-5)

### **Revelation 6:15-17**

**Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"**

There are seven designations of mankind described in verse fifteen (remember that seven is the number of completeness). The first five describe the elite (kings, great men, generals, rich men, and powerful men) and the last two describe the rest (every slave and every free man).

In fear, all men will seek death rather than face the wrath of God. It's ironic that in death they will experience the wrath of God to a much greater degree, and it will be eternal!

“the great day of their wrath has come”

This is a description of the Day of the Lord, also known as the Great Tribulation which is the final 3 ½ years of Daniel’s seventieth week. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the sixth seal judgment occurs at the beginning or just before the beginning of the Great Tribulation.

“who is able to stand”

None will stand in the presence of Almighty God

for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." (**Romans 14:11**)

One more thing to notice from this passage: John is describing events that are happening on the earth while he, himself, is still in God’s throne room (the 3<sup>rd</sup> heaven). This implies that others in heaven, including the church, will be able to witness events that are happening on the earth during the tribulation.

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