

THE REVELATION TO JOHN

THE THINGS FUTURE, REVELATION 4 - 22

THE OPENING OF THE SEALS, REVELATION 6:1-17

INTRODUCTION

John Walvoord, *Five important questions must be answered before the events of chapter 6 can be understood:*

- *Are the events which begin with the breaking of the first seal past or future? . . . Actually there is no sequence in history that clearly corresponds to these events. So it may be concluded that they are yet future.*
- *A second question arises: What is the relationship of the seals to the Rapture of the church? . . . Since neither the Rapture nor the church are the subject of Revelation 6–18, many conclude that the Rapture of the church takes place before the events beginning in chapter 4 and thus precedes the Tribulation.*
- *A third question: What is the relationship of the seals to Daniel 9:27? . . . Israel's program, concluding in the 70th week of Daniel, is best understood as related to the scenes here described in Revelation.*
- *A fourth question: Does Revelation deal with the entire seven years anticipated in Daniel 9:27 or only with the last three and one-half years, often referred to as "the Great Tribulation" or "a time of great distress"? . . . Because the events of chapter 6 and afterward seem to coincide with the Great Tribulation rather than with the time of peace in the first half of the seven years (1 Thes. 5:3), there are good reasons for concluding that these great events are compacted in the last three and one-half years before Christ's return to the earth.*
- *A fifth question: What is the relationship of the events of Revelation to Christ's sermon on the end times? (Matt. 24–25) . . . The evidence points to the conclusion that it describes the final period (probably the final three and one-half years) climaxed by the second coming of Christ to set up His kingdom.*

Charles Ryrie, *Do the judgments of the seals (chap. 6) and the trumpets (chaps. 8-9) and the bowls (chap. 16) follow each other in succession, or do the trumpets and/or the bowls recapitulate with greater intensity the judgments of the seals? In other, words, do the trumpet and bowl judgments follow the seals a different and distinct judgments, or do they picture the same judgments? In this writer's understanding they all follow in chronological sequence . . .* [More will be examined concerning the seals, trumpets and bowl at the end of Revelation 6:8.]

Seals 1-6 reveal the devastating judgment of God on the sinful world. Each seal seems to be an escalation of an ongoing destruction of the world and its inhabitants. This is a picture of the hour of testing which believers are promised to be excluded. A description of these events must bring hope to believers but fear to unbelievers. An appropriate question is asked in 6:17, *Who can stand?* The proper response is no one. The hope of the believer rests in the fact that he will be removed.

Grant Osborne, *There are seven theological themes that run through the three judgment septets:*

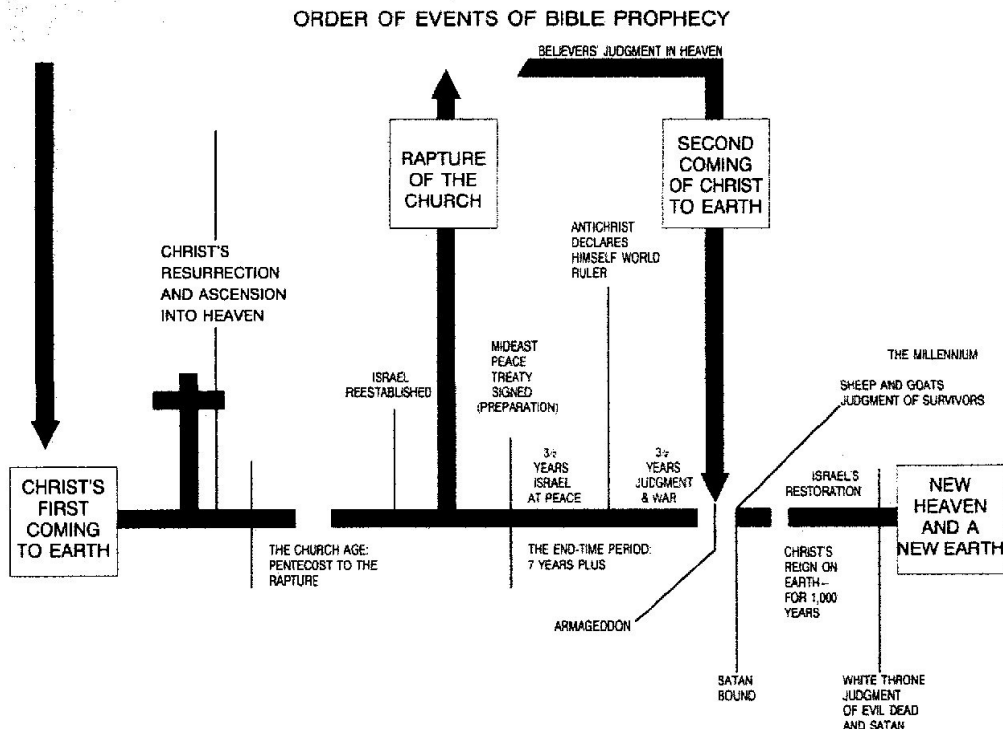
- *These judgments are poured out on the earth-dwellers/sinners, and the saints are exempt from them (3:10; 7:1–8; 9:4; 16:2).*
- *These judgments are God's response to the prayers of the martyred saints for vindication and vengeance (6:9–11; 8:3–5).*
- *God's sovereignty is a key emphasis . . . Everything that takes place does so only by divine permission and authorization.*
- *While God is sovereign, God does not command evil to operate. Evil acts on its own, comes full circle, and self-destructs (6:1–8; 9:1–19).*
- *There is a deep sense of total depravity, as the earth-dwellers, whenever they are given an opportunity to repent, virtually always choose to reject God and follow evil (9:20–21; 16:9, 11).*
- *Still, the outpouring of judgment has a redemptive purpose and provides a final chance to repent. This is part of the mission theme in the book (9:20; 14:6–7; 16:9, 11). In 11:13 we see a single instance of repentance.*
- *There is a progressive dismantling of creation as the created order is shaken in the seals, then overthrown progressively in the trumpets and bowls, preparing for the final consummation when this world order will be destroyed (20:11; 21:1; see 2 Pet 3:7, 10).*

Warren Wiersbe, *The horse imagery is probably related to the vision described in Zechariah 1:7–17. Horses represent God's activity on earth, the forces He uses to accomplish His divine purposes.*

THE POSITION OF THIS STUDY IS PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE

Much is said concerning the location of the church at the time of the Tribulation. As we examine the Tribulation, the position of this study is that the church will be raptured prior to the start of the Rapture, the opening of the first seal. An excellent resource for the Pretribulation Rapture position may be found in Mark Hitchcock's *The End*. A brief position statement follows.

1. The location of the church during the Tribulation.
 - a. The church is on the earth during the time of Revelation 1-3.
 - b. In Revelation 4-18, the church is represented by the twenty-four elders around the throne in heaven, Revelation 4:4.
2. A promise of deliverance for Christians from the coming wrath.
 - a. Revelation 3:10, *Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.*
 - b. 1 Thessalonians 1:10, . . . *and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*
 - c. Mark Hitchcock, . . . *The Lord promises to keep His people not just from, or out of, the testing, but from the very "time" or hour of testing.*
 - d. John Walvoord, *If Christ had meant to say that they would be preserved through a time of trouble, or would be taken out from within the Tribulation, a different verb and a different preposition would have been required.*
3. Events that require time between the Rapture and the Second Coming.
 - a. Mark Hitchcock, . . . *the judgment seat of Christ, the preparation of Christ's bride (Revelation 19:7-10), earthly believers living in the millennial kingdom (Isaiah 65:20-25), and the separation of the sheep from the goats (Matthew 25:31-46).*
 - b. To make sense of these four events, some sort of gap is necessary between the Rapture and the Second Coming. A pre-Tribulation Rapture provides this gap.
4. The removal of the restrainer.
 - a. 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7, *And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way.*
 - b. Mark Hitchcock, *The restrainer ... is the restraining influence of the Spirit through the church. A pretribulation rapture accounts for this removal. The church's influence disappears in pretribulation rapture, and this paves the way for the man of sin to rise up and for the Tribulation to begin.*
5. The imminency of the Rapture.
 - a. Scripture does not mention any events which must take place before the Rapture.
 - b. Mark Hitchcock, *Only those who believe in a pre-Trib Rapture can honestly say, Jesus may come today." The other views cannot say this, They expect certain events to precede the Rapture, and those events haven't happened yet.*
 - c. The imminent coming of the Lord fits the Pretribulation Rapture position.



THE SIX SEAL JUDGMENTS, REVELATION 6:1-17

A. First Seal (1-2)

1. The Lamb, a seal and one of the four living creatures (1), ***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!"***
 - a. William Barclay, *This is not an invitation to John to come and see; it is a summons to the four horses and their riders one by one to come forward on the stage of history.*
 - b. Kendell Easley, . . . *the living creature's "Come!" is the word that summons a white horse galloping across John's field of vision.*
 - c. Grant Osborne, *The worthy Lamb who has taken the scroll from the hand of God now proceeds to open the seals one at a time, acting as the divine Judge beginning the trial proceedings. All of John's senses are involved as he sees the Lamb, hears the command, then writes down the action. The voice is "like thunder" (also 14:2; 19:6), evoking again the manifestation of God in a storm and the Sinai imagery from 4:5-6.*
2. The rider on the white horse (2), ***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.***
 - a. Charles Ryrie, *The rider is Antichrist who goes forth conquering at the very beginning of the tribulation period. The method of conquest at this time, however, does not seem to be by open hostilities, for peace is not removed from the earth until the second seal is opened. One might label this judgment, then, "cold war," and this corresponds perfectly with the delusion of peace and safety at the beginning of the Tribulation, as stated in 1 Thessalonians 5:3.*
 - b. Mark Hitchcock, *In Matthew 24 [4-14] Jesus gives the divine interpretation of the rider on the white horse. He is the final great false Christ, or Antichrist. He will begin his ride at the start of the Tribulation to bring peace in the midst of global upheaval and turmoil . . . He wears a victor's crown and has a bow - but no arrows! This indicates he will win a bloodless victory at the beginning his career. The bow represents the threat of war, but apparently this war will never materialize because the Antichrist is able to gain victory through diplomacy and peaceful negotiations, or possibly through threats of destruction.*
 - c. Thomas Constable, . . . *this is a prophecy of Antichrist, who will make a covenant with Israel, but only as a pretense for destroying the Jews (cf. Dan. 9:27; 1 Thess. 5:3).*
 - d. John Walvoord, *He is probably the same person as the ruler of the people mentioned in Daniel 9:26. This ruler has a bow without an arrow, indicating that the world government which he establishes is accomplished without warfare (see comments on Rev. 13:4). The future world government begins with a time of peace but is soon followed by destruction (1 Thes. 5:3).*
 - e. Warren Wiersbe, *We shall note later that the sequence of events in Revelation 6 closely parallels the sequence given by our Lord in His Olivet discourse; and the first item mentioned is the appearance of false christs (Matt. 24:5).*

B. Second Seal (3-4)

1. The opening of the second seal by the second living creature (3), ***When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!"***
 - a. Thomas Constable, *When the Lamb broke the second seal on the scroll John heard the second living creature order the second horseman forward.*
 - b. Kendell Easley, *The second living creature that summoned the second horse and rider was probably the one "like an ox" (4:7).*
 - c. Grant Osborne, *As with the first horseman, Christ breaks the seal, the living creature gives the command, and the horse and rider appear.*
2. The rider on the bright red horse (4), ***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.***
 - a. William Barclay, *The function of the second horse and its rider is to take peace from the earth.*
 - b. Charles Ryrie, *It is perfectly clear that, in the judgment of the second seal, peace is removed from the earth and people begin open war with each other. Phrases in verse 4 explicitly state this, and the statement "a great sword was given to him" confirms it. That also shows that all is within God's control. The red color of the horse also suggests bloodshed.*
 - c. J. Dwight Pentecost, *John's first seal has to do with a rider on a white horse (v. 2) who is a false messiah. As the result of the rise of this one, peace will be taken from the earth and war will ensue (v. 4).*

- d. Warren Wiersbe, *Antichrist's conquest begins in peace, but soon he exchanges the empty bow for a sword. The color red is often associated with terror and death: the red dragon (Rev. 12:3), the red beast (Rev. 17:3). It is a picture of wanton bloodshed.*
- e. Kendell Easley, *The horse that came was a fiery red one, a color in the New Testament used elsewhere only to describe the dragon (12:3). This is the right color for describing fresh blood spilled in battle.*
- f. Grant Osborne, *The rider is given three things by God: the ability to take peace from the earth, to cause people to kill one another, and to use a sword to accomplish this bloody purpose. God is allowing evil its final freedom to show its true colors and prove once and for all why God must destroy it for eternity.*

C. Third Seal (5-6)

1. The opening of the third seal by the third living creature (5a), ***When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!"***
 - a. Kendell Easley, *The third living creature was probably the one that "had a face like a man" (4:7).*
 - b. John Walvoord, *With the opening of the third seal a black horse was revealed with a rider carrying a pair of scales in his hand.*
2. The rider on a black horse (5b), ***And I looked, and behold, a black horse! And its rider had a pair of scales in his hand.***
 - a. William Barclay, . . . *here the black horse and its rider represent famine, a famine which is very severe and causes great hardship,*
 - b. Charles Ryrie, *The black horse forebodes death, and the parity of balances bespeaks a careful rationing of food.*
 - c. Thomas Constable, *A black horse followed, symbolizing the destructive effect of war, namely, famine. Antichrist, the cause of this famine, again seems to be the rider (cf. Matt. 24:7b). He carries a pair of balance scales, which are a symbol of commerce, indicating his control of commodity prices.*
 - d. Kendell Easley, *As with the previous horses, the colors are like those in Zechariah 6:1–8. The first rider had his bow; the second his sword; this one was holding a pair of scales—a balance beam with scales on either side for careful measuring. This means that the weight of the food was critically important. In times of scarcity, every kernel of grain counts.*
 - e. Grant Osborne, *The scales held in the horseman's hand consist of a balance beam with a scale at each end. Their purpose is to ensure justice, as seen in Old Testament texts like Proverbs 16:11: "Honest scales and balances belong to the LORD."*
3. A voice makes a proclamation (6), ***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!"***
 - a. Possible identity of the voice
 - 1) Grant Osborne, *The "voice among" the living creatures stems from the throne room itself and describes the human dilemma.*
 - 2) Thomas Constable, *The voice ("something like a voice") in the middle of the four living creatures probably belonged to God or the Lamb, probably the Lamb, since He is the executor of all these judgments (cf. v. 11).*
 - b. The declaration of famine
 - 1) Charles Ryrie, *At this point in the Tribulation, a daily wage will buy food for only one person. How will families survive? The phrase "do not damage the oil and the wine" is an ironic twist in this terrible situation. Apparently luxury food items will not be in short supply, but of course most people will not be able to afford them. This situation will only serve to taunt the populace in their impoverished state.*
 - 2) Warren Wiersbe, . . . *during the Tribulation, a man will have to work all day just to secure food for himself! There will be nothing for his family! At the same time, the rich will be enjoying plenty of oil and wine. No wonder Antichrist will eventually be able to control the economy (Rev. 13:17) as he promises to feed the hungry masses.*
 - 3) Thomas Constable, *A quart of wheat will provide one day's ration for a person, but it will cost a whole day's wages. In John's day a denarius would purchase eight to 16 times as much food as what he said it will purchase in the future . . . The poor would have little money left over for oil, for fuel and health needs, and for wine to drink (cf. Ezek. 4:16–17). Wheat, barley, oil, and wine were the staple foods in Palestine and Asia Minor . . . The causes of the famine were not extremely severe, since they killed only the wheat and barley, but not the vines and olive trees (v. 6), whose roots go deeper. As the Tribulation grows worse, the rich as well as the poor will suffer, but at this early stage, the poor will suffer more than the rich.*

- 4) William Barclay, *What John is foretelling is a situation in which a man's whole working wage would be needed to buy enough corn for himself for a day, leaving absolutely nothing to buy any of the other necessities of life and absolutely nothing for his wife and family.*
- 5) Kendell Easley, . . . *under these famine conditions food prices were so inflated—about 1000 to 1500 percent—that someone must work all day to make enough to subsist.*

D. Fourth Seal (7-8)

1. The opening of the fourth seal by the fourth living creature (7-8), ***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.***
 - a. The rider on the pale horse
 - 1) Thomas Constable, *John next saw an ashen (lit. pale green) horse, the color of a human corpse. Presumably Antichrist, the cause of the widespread death that follows, is the rider since his name is Death. Hades, also known as the place of departed spirits, which claims unbelieving people's immaterial part at death, followed on his heels. Death claims the material part of the person, and Hades claims the immaterial part . . . I think John personified Antichrist as Death with his domain following in his train.*
 - 2) Charles Ryrie, *This rider only among the four horsemen is named, and he is called Death . . . Here is evidence that death does not end all, for the soul goes to Hades at death, and eventually the unsaved person will be cast into the Lake of Fire (20:14).*
 - b. The rider's God-given authority
 - 1) Thomas Constable, *God gave Death and Hades authority to take one-fourth of the world's population. This evidently is the total number that will die as a result of all the catastrophes predicted so far.*
 - 2) Charles Ryrie, *The effect of this judgment is that one-fourth of the population of the earth is killed (cf. 9:18; where an additional one-third are killed). The means of extermination are four: sword (war), hunger (famine that often follows war), death (perhaps by plagues of diseases that often accompany war), and wild beasts of the earth (which apparently will be unrestrained and will roam the earth to kill people).*
 - 3) John Walvoord, *Here is the aftermath of war, famine, and death. With war and famine people fall prey to a plague and the wild beasts of the earth . . . It should be obvious that this is not a trivial judgment but a major factor in the Great Tribulation, thus supporting the conclusion that the Great Tribulation has begun.*
 - c. The identity of the wild beasts of the earth
 - 1) There are several views concerning their identity. They could be actual wild animals who have become more ferocious during the Tribulation. Some believe they are military and political leaders based on the usage of the word which is used 38 times in Revelation to describe the Antichrist and his followers. Others believe they refer to animals who carry new and more deadly viruses like HIV, COVID, Ebola, to name a few.
 - 2) Mark Hitchcock, *In my opinion, the best interpretation of "wild beasts" in Revelation 6:8 is in reference to brutal political and military rulers who will rule the world in the end times. This view is consistent with the meaning of the term every other time it appears in the book of Revelation.*

E. Comments

1. John Walvoord, *The first four seals may be considered as a unit and a general description of the Great Tribulation as an unprecedented time of trouble (cf. Jer. 30:7; Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21–22).*
2. Thomas Constable, *These first four seal judgments appear to be just "a preliminary phase of the more terrible judgments to follow." Most premillennialists view them as descriptive of conditions in the Tribulation.*
3. Charles Ryrie, *Suddenly all human programs for bringing in peace, plenty, and longevity through medicine will be overturned in the short time that it will take to accomplish this judgment (cf. Matt. 24:4-7).*

TO BE CONTINUED - LORD WILLING!

F. Discussion of the relationship of the seals, trumpets and bowls to each other.

G. Fifth Seal (9-11)

H. Sixth Seal (12-17)