

## Revelation 6 – The Seals Are Broken

### I. The First Four Seals (1-8)

#### A. The Horsemen Symbolism

##### 1. Comes from Zechariah 6:1-8

- a. Four groups of different colored horses are sent out to patrol the earth and bring judgment on those who oppress God's people
- b. The context here seems the same, four judgments coming from the throne of God as the Lamb breaks the seals

##### 2. Also a Reference to Ezekiel 14:21

- a. In Revelation 6:8, the fourth rider is said to be given authority to bring four judgments: sword, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts
- b. This is an exact quote from Ezekiel 14:21 (other than word order) which is a promise of covenant judgment on Jerusalem

#### B. The First Seal – The White Horseman (1-2)

##### 1. Identifying the White Horseman

- a. Regardless of what interpretational camp one belongs to, there is wide disagreement about the identity of the first rider
- b. Option 1 - Christ or a personification of the Word of God (gospel)
  - i. The White Rider in Revelation 19:11-16 is definitely Christ.
  - ii. White always has connotations of righteousness in Revelation
  - iii. In the Olivet discourse, which parallels Revelation 6, the gospel goes forth before the tribulation comes
  - iv. There is no clear "woe" assigned to the White Rider
  - v. The Rider is wearing a Stephanos (a victor's crown) which has been promised to the faithful
- c. Option 2 – Anti-Christ or False Christs
  - i. The only similarity with the rider in Revelation 19:11-16 is the white horse
    - In 19, Christ wears many diadems, not a stephanos
    - In Rev. 6 the rider has a bow, in 19 he has a sword
  - ii. The other three horsemen are clearly personifications of Judgment. There is no

warrant to separate this rider as something different

iii. The reference from Zechariah 6:1-8 speaks of “four” groups of horses that bring judgment and justice

iv. Some argue that the “white” here is a parody of Christ

d. Option 3 – Personification of Conquest (or Vespasian)

i. The other three riders are clearly personifications of war, famine, and pestilence

ii. The four groups of horses from Zechariah seem to indicate that they should all be taken together

iii. Vespasian and the Roman army did go forth conquering throughout the region as they subdued city after city, driving the Jews toward Jerusalem.

2. The White Horseman Brings Forth Conquest (regardless of what position you take)

C. The Second Seal – The Red Horseman (3-4)

1. A Personification of War

a. God removes his restraint of man’s evil

b. The Rider is allowed to take peace from the “Land”

i. Γη is translated as “land” – specifically The Land in the Septuagint. (Depending on Context)

ii. The Land is always a reference to the promised land, the land God gave to His people

iii. Here peace is removed from the land of Israel as the Roman armies go forth conquering.

2. Josephus’ Account of the Jews During Rome’s Conquest

a. Wars of the Jews - 2:18:2

"so that the disorders in all Syria were terrible, and every city was divided into two armies encamped one against another, and the preservation of the one party was in the destruction of the other; (463) so the daytime was spent in shedding of blood, and the night in fear,--which was of the two the more terrible; for when the Syrians thought they had ruined the Jews, they had the Judaizers in suspicion also; and as each side did not care to slay those whom they only suspected on the other, so did they greatly fear them when they were mingled with the other, as if they were certainly foreigners. (464) Moreover, greediness of gain was a provocation to kill the opposite party, even to such as had of old appeared very mild and gentle towards them; for they without fear plundered the effects of the slain and carried off the spoils of those

whom they slew to their own houses, as if they had been gained in a set battle; and he was esteemed a man of honor who got the greatest share, as having prevailed over the greatest number of his enemies. (465) It was then common to see cities filled with dead bodies, still lying unburied, and those of old men, mixed with infants, all dead, and scattered about together; women also lay amongst them, without any covering for their nakedness: you might then see the whole province full of inexpressible calamities, while the dread of still more barbarous practices which were threatened, was everywhere greater than what had been already perpetrated."

- b. During the Siege Josephus wrote: There were besides disorders and civil wars in every city; and all those that were at quiet from the Romans turned their hands one against another. There was also a bitter contest between those that were fond of war, and those that were desirous of peace. (132) At the first this quarrelsome temper caught hold of private families, who could not agree among themselves; after which those people that were the dearest to one another, brake through all restraints with regard to each other, and everyone associated with those of his own opinion, and began already to stand in opposition one to another; (133) so that seditions arose everywhere, while those that were for innovations, and were desirous of war, by their youth and boldness, were too hard for the aged and the prudent man; (134) and, in the first place, all the people of every place betook themselves to rapine; after which they got together in bodies, in order to rob the people of the country, insomuch that for the barbarity and iniquity those of the same nation did no way differ from the Romans; nay, it seemed to be a much lighter thing to be ruined by the Romans than by themselves. (Wars of the Jews 4:3:2)

- 3. Peace was indeed removed from the Land and the Jews slaughtered each other as Rome besieged the city

#### D. The Third Seal – The Black Horseman (5-6)

##### 1. The Personification of Famine

- a. Famine is one of the covenant curses God promised if the people did not keep His covenant – Leviticus 26:26 – “When I break your staff of bread, ten women will bake your bread in one oven, and they will bring back your bread in rationed amounts, so that you will eat and not be satisfied.”

- b. The Rider is Given a Scale (to weigh food)
  - i. The same judgment is pronounced on Jerusalem by Ezekiel who foretold its destruction by Babylon
  - ii. Ezekiel 4:16-17 - 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, because bread and water will be scarce; and they will be appalled with one another and waste away in their iniquity."
- c. The Voice Foretells the Inflation
  - i. A Quart of Wheat for A Denarius –
    - A quart of wheat was about a day's ration for a single person
    - A Denarius was about a day's wage for a laborer
    - This is 8x the normal price in the region
  - ii. A Quart of Barley for a Denarius –
    - A quart of barley was a day's ration for a family (or a horse)
    - A denarius was about a day's wage for a laborer
    - This is 5x the normal price in the region
  - iii. Everything people had was spent on food
- d. Josephus' account: Wars of the Jews 5:10:2
  - i. The madness of the seditious did also increase together with their famine, and both those miseries were every day inflamed more and more; (425) for there was no corn which anywhere appeared publicly, but the robbers came running into, and searched men's private houses; and then, if they found any, they tormented them, because they had denied they had any; and if they found none, they tormented them worse, because they supposed they had more carefully concealed it. (426) The indication they made use of whether they had any or not, was taken from the bodies of these miserable wretches; which, if they were in good case, they supposed they were in no want at all of food; but if they were wasted away, they walked off without searching any farther; nor did they think it proper to kill such as these, because they saw they would very soon die of themselves for want of food. (427) Many there were indeed who sold

what they had for one measure; it was of wheat, if they were of the richer sort, but of barley, if they were poorer. When these had so done, they shut themselves up in the inmost rooms of their houses, and ate the corn they had gotten; some did it without grinding it, by reason of the extremity of the want they were in, and others baked bread of it, according as necessity and fear dictated to them; (428) a table was nowhere laid for a distinct meal, but they snatched the bread out of the fire, half-baked, and ate it very hastily.

- e. NOTICE: God pronounces the covenant curse if the people disobey by saying that the famine would be so bad that the people would eat their own children (Deut. 28:53)
- f. **Josephus' Account: Wars of the Jews 6:3:4 – Read carefully – absolutely amazing** There was a certain woman that dwelt beyond Jordan, her name was Mary; her father was Eleazar, of the village Bethesub, which signifies the House of Hyssop. She was eminent for her family and her wealth, and had fled away to Jerusalem with the rest of the multitude, and was with them besieged therein at this time. (202) The other effects of this woman had been already seized upon; such I mean as she had brought with her out of Perea, and removed to the city. What she had treasured up besides, as also what food she had contrived to save, had been also carried off by the rapacious guards, who came every day running into her house for that purpose. (203) This put the poor woman into a very great passion, and by the frequent reproaches and imprecations she cast at these rapacious villains, she had provoked them to anger against her; (204) but none of them, either out of the indignation she had raised against herself, or out of the commiseration of her case, would take away her life; and if she found any food, she perceived her labors were for others, and not for herself; and it was now become impossible for her anyway to find anymore food, while the famine pierced through her very bowels and marrow, when also her passion was fired to a degree beyond the famine itself; nor did she consult with anything but with her passion and the necessity she was in. She then attempted a most unnatural thing; (205) and snatching up her son, who was a child sucking at her breast, she said, "O, thou miserable infant! For whom shall I preserve thee in this war, this

famine, and this sedition? (206) As to the war with the Romans, if they preserve our lives, we must be slaves! This famine also will destroy us, even before that slavery comes upon us:--yet are these seditious rogues more terrible than both the other. (207) Come on; be thou my food, and be thou a fury to these seditious varlets and a byword to the world, which is all that is now wanting to complete the calamities of us Jews." (208) As soon as she had said this she slew her son; and then roasted him, and ate the one half of him, and kept the other half by her concealed. (209) Upon this the seditious came in presently, and smelling the horrid scent of this food, they threatened her, that they would cut her throat immediately if she did not show them what food she had gotten ready. She replied, that she had saved a very fine portion of it for them; and withal uncovered what was left of her son. (210) Hereupon they were seized with a horror and amazement of mind, and stood astonished at the sight; when she said to them, "This is mine own son; and what hath been done was mine own doing! Come, eat of this food; for I have eaten of it myself!

2. The Wine and Oil is not touched
  - a. There was no shortage because no one could afford it
  - b. During the siege a leader of one of the factions in Jerusalem, John Gischala, emptied the vessels of scared wine and oil from the Temple and distributed it among the multitude in the city

#### E. The Fourth Seal – The Pale (?) Horseman

1. The Color of the Horse?
  - a. Pale, ashen, dappled?
  - b. The word is *Χλωρος* which is a pale green color
    - i. It is used in Mark 6:39 and Revelation 8:7 to denote the color of grass
    - ii. It is used in classical Greek as a sickly pale green
    - iii. This is the color of plague and pestilence
2. The Rider is Called Death Bringing Hades with Him
  - a. Death and Hades are often used synonymously in the OT (Ps. 6:6, Prov. 2:18, Job 17:13-16)
  - b. Hades is the sphere of the dead
3. The rider is given authority to bring four judgments
  - a. Sword, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts
  - b. The same four judgments promised to Jerusalem in Ezekiel 14:21

- c. These are also covenant curses promised in Lev. 26:25 and Deut. 32:24-26 if the people refuse to keep the covenant
- 4. The Rider is given authority to bring judgment over one fourth of the land
  - a. Later we will see the judgments intensify
  - b. During the trumpet judgments, one third of the land will be affected
- F. The Fifth Seal – The Martyrs Under the Altar
  - 1. They are Under the Altar
    - a. The blood of animals sacrificed on the altar in the OT ran down to the bottom of the altar
    - b. The OT priests were commanded to pour out the blood at the base of the altar
    - c. These are sacrificial victims for the cause of God
      - i. Notice that they are not waiting for the end in a holding tank
      - ii. They are not in a soul sleep
      - iii. They are in the presence of God in the Holy tabernacle
    - d. They cry out for justice upon those who killed them
  - 2. Who are They?
    - a. They include NT martyrs
      - i. James, Stephen, Paul, Peter, were all killed for the faith
      - ii. Many people whose names we don't know were killed
      - iii. Jesus prophesied that they would be
      - iv. Remember that the first persecutors of the church were Jews (see Acts)
    - b. They include OT saints and prophets
      - i. They have been killed for their testimony and the word of God
        - Every other time John mentions specifically NT martyrs, he says they were killed for the testimony of Christ
        - Rev. 20:4 Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God,
        - In Rev. 1, John says he was in Patmos for the word of God and testimony of Jesus
        - Here it simply says – their testimony

ii. First century Jerusalem was told that they would be judged for the blood of all the prophets

- Matthew 23:29-36 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, ‘If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell? “Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.
- Luke 11:47-51  
Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and it was your fathers who killed them. So you are witnesses and approve the deeds of your fathers; because it was they who killed them, and you build their tombs. For this reason also the wisdom of God said, ‘I will send to them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and some they will persecute, so that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation.’
- See also Stephen’s speech Acts 7:51-52;



3. They are Given white Robes
4. They cry for justice on those who dwell on the land

G. The Sixth Seal – De-creation

1. If we take this in a wooden literal sense – it is the end of the world – one star hits the earth and its all over
2. De-Creation language used in the OT to describe the destruction of cities
  - a. Describing the Destruction of Babylon - Isa. 13:10 - For the stars of heaven and their constellations Will not flash forth their light; The sun will be dark when it rises And the moon will not shed its light.
  - b. Describing the destruction of Egypt – Ezekiel 32:7-8 - “And when I extinguish you, I will cover the heavens and darken their stars; I will cover the sun with a cloud And the moon will not give its light. “All the shining lights in the heavens I will darken over you And will set darkness on your land,” Declares the Lord God.
  - c. Describing the destruction of Idumea (Edom) – Isa. 34:3-5 - So their slain will be thrown out, And their corpses will give off their stench, And the mountains will be drenched with their blood. 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.
3. Isaiah and Ezekiel also used this language to describe the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians
  - a. Isa. 29:6 - From the Lord of hosts you will be punished with thunder and earthquake and loud noise, With whirlwind and tempest and the flame of a consuming fire.
  - b. Eze. 38:19-20 - In My zeal and in My blazing wrath I declare that on that day there will surely be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. The fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the beasts of the field, all the creeping things that creep on the earth, and all the men who are on the face of the earth will shake at My presence; the mountains also will be thrown down, the steep pathways will collapse and every wall will fall to the ground.
4. The Kings of the Land will cry for the Mountains to Fall on them
  - a. This exact same phrase was used by Jesus in Luke 23:28-30 as he went to the cross – Look who he was talking about

- i. But Jesus turning to them said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.’ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’
    - ii. He was pronouncing judgment on Jerusalem
  - b. This exact phrase was used by the prophet Hosea speaking about judgment on Israel
    - i. Hosea 10:8 - Also the high places of Aven, the sin of Israel, will be destroyed; Thorn and thistle will grow on their altars; Then they will say to the mountains, “Cover us!” And to the hills, “Fall on us!”
  - c. Both occurrences, Jesus and Hosea, deal with Judgment on Israel. John quotes it here in the same context
- 5. Who can stand?
  - a. The lamb of God has wrath that is coming
  - b. Who will stand before him
  - c. This will be answered in chapter 7