

1. **Introduction:** John vision of God's throne room continues. Jesus will open the seals of the scroll one-by-one. Each seal begins a new vision. In the visions, John will see consequences of God's wrath when the unredeemed are allowed to follow their own unconstrained desires.
  - God is sovereign in the events of human history. He sometimes allows unredeemed human sinfulness to run its course free from His common-grace constraints. The results are warfare, violence, bloodshed, spiritual deception, economic hardship, and death.
  - The meaning of the seven seals' passage is best seen by letting Scripture interpret Scripture. Some pertinent comments are in John 3:19 and Romans 1:18-32.
2. **John 3:19:** *And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.*
3. **Romans 1:18, 22:** *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. Claiming to be wise, they became fools.*
4. **Romans 1:28-29:** *And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness.*
5. **Romans 1:32:** *Though they know God's righteous decree (His moral law) that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.*
  - God will withdraw His common-grace restraints and gifts enabling the unredeemed to act as they choose in response to their unrestrained sin-nature.
  - When constraints are removed from thoughts and actions of the unredeemed, their sin nature goes into overdrive. Their feelings and sin-nature-controlled imagination unleash disasters.
  - When each of the scroll's seven seals is opened with no common-grace constraints imposed, a judgment disaster is revealed that affects people spiritually, mentally, and physically.
  - The opening of each seal activates the judgment process it represents. Only the Lamb can open the seals. The scroll's contents are not revealed by opening the seals. The content is revealed later when the seven trumpets sound.
  - The judgements of Revelation do not impact believers and unbelievers equally. Believers' souls are protected from God's wrath, even as they may physically experience general tribulations that affect the world.
  - Opening the first six seals one by one triggers specific disasters that engulf the earth.
  - Opening the seventh seal leads to a period of silence in heaven before the trumpet judgments.

- It is helpful to keep the verses from John and Romans in mind as we follow the disasters released by opening the seals. Opening the first four seals brings forth the dreaded Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse to work their disasters on the people of the earth.
- Each horsemen must receive permission from the Lamb and His agents before they can carry out the judgements God has decreed. God is Sovereign in all things.
- In opening the seals of judgment disaster, God gives the unredeemed people of earth over to their sinful desires with no Godly oversight and restraints. This withdrawal of God's common grace restraints and gifts leads to dreadful consequences.
- Opening the first four seals brings disasters like war and famine that have always been present on the earth. When all people are left to the control of their own sin nature, global civil war will be the result. Jesus now opens the first of the four seals.

**6. Revelation 6:1-2: *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.***

- As the Lamb opens the first seal, one of the living creatures shouted "***Come***" in a voice like thunder. John saw a white horse come forth whose rider was holding a bow.
- A crown (*stephanos*) wreath signifying temporary power delegated by a higher authority is given to the rider in anticipation of the rider's victory. The rider on a white horse rides out as one skilled in military conquest eager to conquer and keep on conquering.
- Christ appears on a white horse in Chapter 19. Here in Chapter 6, the rider of a white horse is not Christ Himself but is the instrument of judgment.
- The best clue to understanding the mission of the rider on a white horse is found in Jesus' own words in the Olivet Discourse.
- When the disciples asked Jesus privately when the destruction of the Temple would be and what would be the sign of His coming at the end of the age, Jesus answered them:

**7. Matthew 24:4-5: *"See that no one leads you astray.<sup>5</sup> For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray.***

- The temptation to be led astray will be powerful. Jesus is concerned that they make every effort to avoid being led astray. Attempts through the years to spiritually deceive the elect will be powerful and long-lasting and the number of deceivers will be "many."
- The little flock of believers are going to be in danger of being overwhelmed by many deceivers who will produce a continuous supply of false teachers and liars. They will deceptively come in the name of "Christ" or of "God alone" spreading false doctrine.
- The white horseman carries a bow which can be a very effective weapon of war, but John doesn't mention arrows. It seems this horseman will fight a spiritual war not with physical killing weapons but with words and ideas (Ps 11:2; 64:2-4; Jer 9:8; Eph 6:16).

- Scripture uses bow images as symbols of God's judgment. For example, Job says, ***"His (God's) archers surround me. He pierces my heart and does not pity. He pours my gall out on the ground. He breaks me with wound upon wound."*** (Job 16:13-14)
- The white horseman's bow symbolizes an effective instrument of God's judgment to be used against the world in rebellion against God's rule. What is that "effective instrument?"
- A sword symbolizes "God's Word" (Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12). This bow symbolizes counterfeit "truth" or a false gospel. Note what Paul says in 2 Thessalonians.

**8.2 Thessalonians 2:11-12: *Therefore, God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false,<sup>12</sup> in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.***

- In this judgment, God will send false teachers who will deceive the unredeemed. The false teachers will come pretending they believe Jesus is the Messiah to gain people's trust.
- Having gained people's attentive trust, the deceivers will feed them false doctrine.
- The deceivers will stick as close to the truth as they can while still able to spread their false doctrine. C.S. Lewis pointed out that a slight downward slope from the truth is a slippery slope that over time will lead to a view approved by Satan.
- Religious deception, false gospels, and unchristian philosophies were present from the beginning Christianity, but these delusions are delusions sent by God as judgments. The modern "tolerant" view that there are many roads to salvation presents a huge vulnerability.
- The truth as Peter says in Acts 4:11-12 is: ***"This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.<sup>12</sup> And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."***
- The white horseman continues his work to this day spreading the delusion. He rides through the world spreading counterfeit "truths," conquering through communicating lies. His bow shoots false ideas and plausible but false beliefs into the minds of mind separated from God and opposed to God's plan for human life (Romans 8:7).
- He fools the world with a false image of peace, prosperity, and righteousness when what he is spreading leads to the direct opposite of those desirable concepts.

**9. Matthew 7:15-16: *"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves."<sup>16</sup> You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?***

- Then the Lamb opens the second seal.

**10. Revelation 6:3-4: *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.***

- While the rider on the white horse spreads spiritual deception to the whole earth. The rider of the red horse takes peace from the earth so that people will deliberately kill one another.
- Since Adam and Eve, human society has always seemed to be inherently violent. Cain killed his brother, Abel, beginning the reign of aggression. It continues.
- The 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries are no exception with two horrible world wars of astounding violence. Also, a “cold” world war where the violence continued in clandestine forms.
- Mass murders (ethnic cleansing) in Germany, the Soviet Union, China, Cambodia, the Sudan, and Rwanda and others. Terrorism has become commonplace as have smaller conflicts between nations like in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, the Balkans, Spain, Cuba, countries in Central and South America, Israel, and many African nations.
- There is seemingly no end to such conflicts. The red rider has and is doing his task well. He symbolizes the deadly scourge of bloody armed conflict.
- The “great sword” given the rider of the red horse symbolizes a totally effective instrument of death. We might in today’s world think of it being like a nuclear weapon.
- God judges’ disobedience. Even to the disobedient of His own people, God promises ***“And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall execute vengeance for the covenant.”***
- The purpose of the great sword given the rider of the red horse appears to be divine judgment in which death is inflicted on many people. Revelation 6:4 makes the intended purpose of the great sword very clear.

11. **Revelation 6:4:** *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.*

- The rider of the red horse is not restricted to inciting wars. He is permitted to take peace from the earth extending the devastation from large-scale wars to individuals killing one another – that is, from small and large wars to individual murder.
- However, God has not called believers to the kind of judgment represented by the rider of the red horse’s great sword. He has called believers to salvation in Christ.
- “In Christ” believer’s souls are safe from all harm through the protection of the One who is, Who was, and Who is to be. At no time will a believers’ soul be in danger.