

The Grace of Wrath

Studies in the Revelation of Jesus Christ

Text

Chapter 6:1-17

Topic

The Tribulation begins as four colorful horses are sent galloping out of Heaven

Title

"The Horses of a Different Color"

Introduction

The best part of going to the movies is the trailers that show before the main feature. If I don't see at least four trailers, I want my money back.

For a potential blockbuster they will release a teaser before any filming has been done. The recent *Cinderella* had a teaser that only showed you the glass slipper; but you knew, from that iconic image, what was intended.

I remember when we first saw the teaser for *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Being huge fans of the books, we nearly screamed when we saw the one ring spinning on screen.

A teaser for *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace* was attached to the films *The Siege* and *A Bug's Life*, and a lot of people paid for admission to those films *just to watch the trailer*, then walked out after the trailer had been screened.

Our text, Revelation chapter six, is a little like a teaser trailer. It introduces the future seven-year Tribulation.

Six seals on a seven-sealed scroll are opened, each releasing or revealing a terrible judgment upon the earth. It is a preview of things to come, in that the six seals span the first half of the Tribulation, taking us into the second half.

They are an overview of the first three and one half years. We will get fill-in details a little later.

Unlike the movies, the Tribulation is nothing to get excited about. Billions of people will die by the time it's over.

One very special group of people are mentioned in this chapter: The Tribulation martyrs. They start the seven years as nonbelievers, but come to Jesus during the judgments, and are "slain for the Word of God and the testimony which they held" (v9).

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You Hear The Voice Of The Martyrs Crying Out In Heaven, and #2 You Hear The Voices Of The Martyrers Crying Out On The Earth.

#1 You Hear The Voice Of The Martyrs
Crying Out In Heaven
(v1-11)

We're in a mind-blowing age of special effects when it comes to movies. If a director isn't careful, his characters can become overshadowed by the effects, and their story fade into the background.

We want to be careful to not lose the characters as we see the judgments of the Tribulation. It's about people - about sharing Jesus Christ with them, offering them one last chance to repent, to be saved, and to not perish eternally.

Rev 6:1 Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals...

So begins the time of Jacob's trouble; the seventieth week of Daniel; the Tribulation.

Author and pastor, Mark Hitchcock, lists at least thirty-five Scriptural names for the seven year Tribulation. In this chapter, at the end, it will be called "the great day of His wrath."

Chapters six through eighteen describe it in great detail, as one-by-one seven seals are opened by Jesus in Heaven on a scroll He has taken from His Father's right hand.

It is our position that the Revelation is chronological. As each seal is opened, we go deeper into the seven years.

- When the seventh seal is opened, seven trumpets are blown.
- When the seventh trumpet is blown, seven bowls of wrath are poured out upon the earth.

In other words, the seventh seal *is* the seven trumpets being blown, in order. And the seventh trumpet *is* the seven bowls being poured-out, in order.

Thus the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls cannot be simultaneous, but must be chronological.

Jesus likened the Tribulation to a woman in labor about to deliver a baby. Labor pains generally start slowly and then intensify up to the delivery. The Tribulation is like that. The first six seals, although all opened in chapter six, follow one another at a relatively slow pace.

The events they describe span a period of about three and one half years - the first half of the Tribulation.

At the seventh seal the trumpets and the bowls describe events from about the mid-point of the Tribulation on to the end.

If you look for the opening of all seven seals you find chapters six, eight, nine, fifteen, sixteen, nineteen and twenty are in order. The chapters in-between those are pauses, and are like footnotes that give additional details of the events being described.

Rev 6:1 Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, "Come and see."

The angel speaks "with a voice like thunder." A storm is about to break forth on the earth.

When he says, "Come and see," he isn't talking to John. The word means *proceed*. It is a word of command from God's throne. The time has finally arrived for Jesus to *proceed* and open the seals.

Rev 6:2 And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.

The four horsemen are one of the most familiar literary and artistic images in history. Even nonbelievers know something apocalyptic is coming.

This first horseman is thought by some to represent Jesus since the Lord returns in His Second Coming on a white horse. But this rider is *not* representing Jesus Christ.

1. For one thing, Jesus is in Heaven, opening the seals. He is not simultaneously on earth, on His white steed.
2. For another thing, when Jesus returns to earth, He establishes peace and a kingdom. His return isn't followed by war or famine or any of the things these horsemen bring.

The white horseman releases the man we commonly refer to as the antichrist. He is represented as coming on a white horse because he is a counterfeit of Jesus. He appears at the very beginning of the Tribulation bringing the world an unprecedented peace.

Notice he has a bow. Don't automatically conclude that this is describing a bow that an archer would carry. The first use of the word bow in Scripture is just after the flood of Noah's day when God promised He would put a bow in the clouds - what we call a rainbow. That bow was to be the sign of a covenant.

This rider on the white horse comes with a covenant. We believe it is the same covenant Daniel was told about:

Dan 9:27 Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, Even until the consummation, which is determined, Is poured out on the desolate."

In Daniel's famous prophecy, "one week" is one week of years or seven years. It is the Tribulation.

It's clear that the covenant brings peace. "Sacrifice and offering" refer to the rebuilding of a Jewish Temple and the renewing of worship and sacrifice there.

He wears a "crown." It is the word that describes a victory wreath, not the crown of a sovereign ruler.

Let me clarify one thing: The antichrist isn't in heaven waiting to ride out on a white horse. The actual rider is a mighty angel whose release from Heaven represents the rise of antichrist on the earth.

These angels ride forth, and their release from Heaven releases the events on the earth that they represent.

By this we are to understand that God is in charge of the events as they unfold.

The peace is short-lived as you see the second horseman ride forth:

Rev 6:3 When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come and see."

Rev 6:4 Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that *people* should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword.

We encountered the four living creatures earlier in the Revelation and said they were a type of angels on special assignment before the Throne of God.

Notice that each of the four living creatures surrounding God's throne in Heaven are involved in the release of the horses and horsemen. This is an intricately choreographed scene in which the activity in Heaven represents what occurs on the earth.

John sees the heavenly power behind the earthly drama.

I like that phrase - "the heavenly power behind the earthly drama." Whatever drama is in your life, now or in the future, Heaven is aware of it, with resources in abundance for you to draw from during it.

The second horseman, the second mighty angel, represents the next series of events on the earth: Wars. There will be wars and rumors of wars as nation rises up against nation.

Rev 6:5 When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come and see." So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand.

Rev 6:6 And I heard 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 the wine."

This third horseman represents the next series of events on the earth: Scarcity brought on by war and the forced rationing of goods. A "denarius" is one days wages, enough money to buy three meals. A "quart of wheat" is a quantity one person would eat at one meal. Barley was considered animal food. Some people will be forced to eat animal food.

At the same time there is no problem obtaining "oil" and "wine." These are the equivalent of luxury items. In other words, at first, the rich will be unaffected, while the poor are devastated.

Rev 6:7 When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, "Come and see."

Rev 6:8 So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth.

"Death" refers to the body, "Hades" to the soul. One fourth the population of the earth is killed. If there are seven billion people on the earth, one fourth would be one and three quarter billion.

1. "Sword" refers to continuing wars.
2. "Hunger" is the ensuing scarcities and famine.
3. "Death" refers to plagues and pestilences.
4. "Beasts" refers to living organisms of any size, and could even be a reference to microscopic killers, such as viruses.

This is just the beginning of the storm of the centuries. Things will get much worse as we go on in the Revelation. Especially after the mid-point at the breaking of the seventh seal.

I pause to point out that John is safe in heaven as the seals are opened. If you were with us when we studied chapters four and five you know that John was raptured to Heaven prior to the seals being opened. He is a type of your being raptured to Heaven prior to the seals being opened.

You will be safe in Heaven during the great day of God's wrath.

Believers on the earth will not fare so well. They will be vulnerable.

Rev 6:9 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 testimony which they held.

Millions on the earth, during the Tribulation, will get saved, by grace through faith in Jesus. We will see how in subsequent chapters.

The believers described in the fifth seal are Tribulation martyrs.

It will be most difficult to openly declare your faith as the Tribulation goes on. I'd say that the majority of those who openly declare Jesus as Savior, or who are found out, will be killed.

Their 'crime' on earth will be two-fold: "the word of God and... the testimony which they held." The apostle John, the one receiving the Revelation, was himself described as being persecuted for the word of God and for his testimony. It points to that moment of crisis when, no matter the human cost, you must take your stand for Christ.

You can picture them being asked to renounce Jesus but instead they hold fast to their testimony and proclaim the word of God.

In the time in which we live if a believer dies we know that his or her spirit and soul goes immediately to Heaven to await the future resurrection of their body at the time of the rapture. Nonbelievers who die seem to still go to the torment of Hades to await their future resurrection.

During the Tribulation believers who die will go to a specific part of Heaven – "under the altar."

Rev 6:10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

The Tribulation martyrs are not seeking revenge. They are longing for God's righteous rule on the earth that will put an end to evil once and for all. It is their way of saying, *Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.*

It's OK for us to wonder "How long?" At the same time we must keep any sense of vengeance in check. We want to be more like the first martyr of the church age, Stephen, who prayed for his persecutors that God would forgive them even as the stones they were throwing were pelting his body.

The cry of the martyrs is a sweet sound in Heaven. It's like a musical prelude that anticipates the Lord coming forth.

Rev 6:11 Then a white robe was given to each of them...

White robes are one of my favorite symbols to describe salvation by grace through faith in Jesus.

The sinner is depicted as standing before God in filthy garments that are unsuitable for entrance into Heaven. But because Jesus died on the Cross in place of the sinner, He can remove their filthy garments, clothe them with a white robe, and God can thereby declare them righteous. It is an exchange of your sin for Christ's righteousness and it must be done *for* you and received *by* you as a gift.

These Tribulation martyrs are described as conscious souls. They will not have glorified physical bodies until they are resurrected at the end of the Tribulation in Revelation 20:4. Since they are given robes it is clear they have some substance.

Whether it is a temporary body or whether your soul has substance, I don't know.

Rev 6:11 ... and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both *the number of* their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they *were*, was completed.

Persecution and martyrdom against Christians will characterize the whole Tribulation from start to finish. Together this group of martyrs is described as "brethren" and "fellow servants."

- "Brethren" has to do with *relationship*.
- "Fellow servants" describes *responsibilities*.

Christians are in the relationship of being spiritual brothers and sisters because we are all born into God's family. We all have very different earthly family backgrounds.

It's a shame that so many families are dysfunctional. I think it can contribute to the ease with which we quit striving with one another, forgiving one another, bearing with one another, in the church. Too often a Christian has a problem with a brother or sister and solves it by leaving a church to join another 'family' of believers.

As fellow servants we each have our individual responsibilities. It should be a positive pressure to perform my responsibilities as unto the Lord for the sake of others in the church and those who come to the church.

There will be a completed number of Tribulation martyrs. Again we see this is a specific group of believers unique to the Tribulation. **We might call it an exclusive club. Club TM maybe?** (For Tribulation Martyr).

"Completed" isn't just a numerical reference. It also tells us that this group completes their mission and purpose. It's a 'mission accomplished' statement.

I want to complete **my** mission and hear the words, *"Well done!"*
So do you.

#2 You Hear The Voices Of Martyrers
Crying Out On The Earth
(v12-17)

"Martyrers" **is** a word - or, at least, it was in use at one time. The saddest thing about the Tribulation is that, even facing these horrifying judgments, men will refuse to repent, and, instead, kill God's saints, seeking to silence their testimony.

Rev 6:12 I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake...

Are earthquakes increasing in frequency? In 2014 the *LA Times* posted a story titled, "Quakes are increasing, but scientists aren't sure what it means."

Other sources say they are not really increasing; it's just that we have better reporting than ever.

We need to be careful to stay in context. When Jesus mentioned earthquakes in various places (Matthew 24:7) He was describing events in the first half of the Tribulation. Thus I don't really see earthquake frequency and intensity as a major sign to watch during the church age.

In fact Jesus' talk in Matthew twenty-four and twenty-five parallels exactly, in order, the events of the Tribulation: He describes war, then famine, then death, then martyrdom, then signs in the heavens.

We know that here *will* be a major earthquake just before the middle of the Tribulation; we'll see it a little later. It will preview massive upheavals yet to come on planet earth.

Rev 6:12 ... and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood.

The prophet Joel predicted that "the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come" (Joel 2:31). He said "the sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining" (Joel 3:15).

Just towards the middle of the Tribulation God will use the sun and moon as signs of His great power. He will be trying to get mankind to pay attention to the preaching of His witnesses on the earth.

It's like when the lights are dimmed at the theater. It alerts you the show is about to start.

The signs in the heavens thus show His mercy. He will be telling mankind what they can expect if they refuse His offers of salvation.

Rev 6:13 And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind.

Shooting stars are the common name for the streak of light produced by a meteor as the small bits of it burn up when passing through the atmosphere. These are meteorites striking the earth.

Meteors *do* hit the earth. You can visit the International Meteor Collector's Association website for some great true stories.

Mid-trib there will be many more meteorites striking the earth. The sky will seem to be falling.

Rev 6:14 Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place.

A "scroll" is generally pictured as a parchment with rolled ends. Isaiah 42:5 says that God stretched out the heavens. Isaiah 34:4 says the heavens will be rolled up like a scroll. Skeptics laughed at this for years. **Not anymore.**

We know that the universe is indeed expanding and quantum physics and the findings of the Hubbell spacecraft verify that the universe is indeed curved, perhaps scroll-like, in shape.

For the sky to recede as a scroll when it is rolled up would imply that the atmospheric heavens have suddenly and rapidly cleared themselves as if in preparation for something or Someone to arrive.

Though this sixth seal does have an apocalyptic sense of the Second Coming of Jesus, it is only the preview.

Why these amazing mid-trib signs and sufferings? The first five seal judgments can be variously interpreted by ungodly men as acts of men. This sixth seal will leave little to the imagination. This is an act of God.

And men will definitely know it:

Rev 6:15 And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains,

Rev 6:16 and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!

Rev 6:17 For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

No other explanation will do. These things are the work of God and are being administered by Jesus as He prepares the earth for His return. **Everyone** on earth will know God is calling to them, and that Jesus is coming.

Mankind will choose to take shelter in those final days of the first half of the tribulation.

The prepper movement will have its ultimate heyday.

But, really, the theme song will be, "There's nowhere to run to; nowhere to hide."

The real shelter is **spiritual**. It is to be found safe in Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

He is God's shelter in every generation.

Are you safe in the arms of Jesus? You can be.