

THE GRACE OF WRATH

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

Text

Revelation 6:1-17

Topic

Jesus sets in motion the future Great Tribulation
by opening the first six seals of the scroll

Title

"On With the Scroll, This is It!"

Shadowfax, "Lord of All Horses." He is the white steed in the *Lord of the Rings* who bore Gandalf on his Middle Earth missions. A horse of Rohan, the chief of the Mearas, he was noted for his speed, "like an arrow."

Trigger, Silver, and Cochise were once household names thanks to television. Sea Biscuit, the Black Stallion, and Hidalgo 'starred' in equine feature films.

By far, beyond any doubt, the greatest of them all:

Quick Draw McGraw.

Sheriff Quick Draw originated the iconic saying, "I'll do the 'thin'in' around here and don't you forget it!" No matter he occasionally shot himself. That's what hero-horses do.

There are at least nine impressive steeds featured in God's Word.

Four of them are in the Old Testament. In Zechariah 1:8-10 we read,

Zec 1:8 I saw by night, and behold, a man riding on a **red horse**, and it stood among the myrtle trees in the hollow; and **behind him were horses: red, sorrel, and white.**

Zec 1:9 Then I said, "My lord, what *are* these?" So the angel who talked with me said to me...

Zec 1:10 "... These *are the ones* whom the LORD has sent to walk to and fro throughout the earth."

There are five significant steeds from Heaven's stable in the New Testament. The most majestic is the war horse Jesus will ride in His Second Coming:

Rev 19:11 Now I saw Heaven opened, and **behold, a white horse.** And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war.

There will be a *lot* of horses when the Lord returns. "And the armies in Heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him **on white horses.**" (Revelation 19:14).

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse are the most widely known biblical horses. They are prominent as Jesus opens the seals on the scroll that He alone is worthy to take from His Father's right hand.

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

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

The apostle John was "in the spirit," raptured to Heaven, to attend the Scroll Call ceremony in chapters four and five. Jesus, the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Lamb of God, stepped forward as the unique Person qualified to take the seven-sealed scroll from God the Father's right hand.

The scroll is the operational plan for the seven-year Great Tribulation.

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."

We instantly recognize certain celebrity voices. James Earl Jones is at the top of most lists. He's excellent, but no competition for the angel speaking "with a voice like thunder."

When he says, "Come and see," he is not talking to John. The word means *proceed*. The time has 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 colors of the horses, and the outfitting of the horsemen, definitely suggest certain things. We are not free, however, to treat this as a figure or an allegory.

The horses of a different color are horses & the four horsemen are supernatural beings.

The first horse and rider are not Jesus Christ and His white horse:

- Jesus rides out of Heaven to end the Great Tribulation, *not* to start it.
- When Jesus returns, multitudes of His saints will follow him on white horses, *not* three angels on colored horses.
- The Lord will be crowned with many crowns, *not* one.
- The Lord will defeat His enemies by the power of His Word, depicted by a sword, *not* by a bow.

Neither is the first horseman the antichrist. The antichrist will be a human being on the earth. *He won't be sent from Heaven.*

These riders are supernatural beings, most likely angels. They are members of Heaven's Mounted Patrol.

They have power to ensure that conditions on the earth correspond to the first four seals.

On the Tuesday before His crucifixion, Jesus gave His disciples a talk about the Great Tribulation while on Mount Olivet. We title it the Olivet Discourse, but it is also known as the Little Apocalypse. Matthew recorded it in chapters twenty-four and twenty-five of his Gospel. It simplifies and summarizes the eighteen chapters in the Apocalypse that describe the seven-year Great Tribulation.

Jesus understood the seven years to have a very definite beginning, middle, and end. Here is what He said about its inception: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many.

And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all *these things* must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these *are* the beginning of sorrows" (Matthew 24:4-8).

The first thing Jesus mentioned was "false Christ's." The antichrist will be the ultimate false Christ. The color and the equipping of the first horse and rider suggest the conditions necessary for the antichrist to bring peace in a volatile atmosphere of "wars and rumors of wars."

We know from other Scripture that the antichrist will sign a treaty with Israel guaranteeing peace. We know, too, that peace is the condition on the earth at the start of the Great Tribulation because, in verse four, peace is taken away.

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.

“Wars and rumors of wars” is how Jesus put it to His disciples. In addition to wars, people will be killing one another. Think of any apocalyptic movie. Groups form seeking limited resources and are willing to kill for them.

The red horse and rider ensure that conditions on the earth are tumultuous.

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.”

“And there will be famines,” Jesus said in His discourse. A “denarius” was a day’s wage for a laborer. The measures of wheat and barley would be less than one person required each day.

“Oil and... wine” are luxuries. It suggests that there will be a severe gap between classes.

The black horse and rider ensure famine conditions on the earth. It could be as a result of wars, but not exclusively. There are many ways the food supply could be affected.

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” and “Hades” are inseparable companions in the Bible. You could make a buddy movie about them, but it would be very dark.

From Adam and Eve until the resurrection of Jesus, after Death everyone went to Hades. It consisted of two areas:

1. One was a place of comfort for believers awaiting Heaven.
2. The other was a place of torment for those who died in their sins, awaiting Hell.

Jesus conquered Death by dying on the Cross. He descended to Hades and when He ascended to Heaven He brought the righteous dead with Him.

When post-resurrection believers die, we no longer spend time in Hades. We are immediately absent from our bodies and present with the Lord. The unrighteous dead are still consigned to Hades to await their final judgment.

The pale rider is identified as Death, and Hades seems to walk alongside him.

“Death” and “Hades” aren’t their names. Sticking with Westerns, in the film *Tombstone*, Wyatt Earp announces his intention to execute his wrath upon the Cowboys. He tells Ike Clanton, “Run you cur. And tell the other curs the law is coming. You tell ‘em I’m coming! And Hell’s coming with me you hear! Hell’s coming with me!”

Wyatt Earp was coming, *not* “the law” and *not* “Hell.” Likewise for Death and Hades. When the pale rider appears, Death is coming, and Hades is coming with him.

One “fourth of the earth” is killed. The serial killers listed are:

1. “Sword,” which could refer to violence in general.
2. “Hunger” is worse than famine. There will be nothing to eat. Hungry people will take up weapons against those who have food.
3. “Death” could refer to epidemics and pandemics.
4. “Beasts of the earth” will be set upon the human race as killers. *Cujo... The Birds... Ben...*

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.

Jesus said, "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake" (Matthew 24:9). People saved during the Great Tribulation have a strong likelihood of being martyred. The "altar" in Heaven would correspond to the Altar of Incense in the Jewish Temple. I cannot visualize how these "souls" were "under the altar" without more information.

One scholar insightfully pointed out, "The verb tense shows this to be **a single, definite appeal**, not one that was continually urged." These Great Tribulation martyrs gather "under the altar" *for one specific prayer meeting* when Jesus opens the fifth seal.

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?"

Their prayer could be read as them asking God to "judge and avenge." It can also be read as their longing for God's righteous rule on the earth that will put an end to evil. It is their way of saying, *Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.*

A believer in the Great Tribulation will know that it lasts seven years, starting with the peace treaty, and that it will be marked by certain prophesied events at its middle and end. Yet they ask, "How long?"

Affliction and suffering cause us to question what we know to be true.

John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and told the world that He was the Savior. However, when languishing in prison he sent his followers to ask Jesus if He was the One.

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

At the Martyr's Under Altar Prayer Meeting, they will be presented with a heavenly garment, a white robe, and told to rest. All believers get a white robe. This one may have a unique designation. Great Tribulation martyrs are an exclusive group. Not more spiritual than other believers, just distinctive. More will join the group and get robed before the end.

God's plan to redeem sinful man and to restore ruined creation takes time. It takes the exact amount of time God has ordained. It seems to us to be unfolding at a sloth's pace. To the Lord, "one day *is* as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (Second Peter 3:8).

We calculate that there have been seven-thousand years since creation. To the Lord, *it's less than a week*.

Whether it is now or in the future Great Tribulation, Christians are persecuted and martyred for "the word of God and for the testimony which they [hold]" (v9).

There are currently in America movements and mandates, pending legislation and proposed laws, that essentially make it criminal to preach what God's Word condemns as sin.¹ The California Globe titled an article, "The 2021 List of Family Values Killer Bills is Out and It's Bad."

Jesus promised the church that he would keep us out of the Great Tribulation. But we also know things are liable to get worse as the time approaches. Each of us can expect a moment of decision when, no matter the human cost, you must take your stand for Christ.

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

¹ <https://www.heritage.org/gender/heritage-explains/the-equality-act>

Jesus marked the mid-point of the Great Tribulation by saying, "When you see the 'ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (v15).

It isn't our subject, and I don't want to go off on any tangents. Simply put, the 'abomination' is the antichrist going into the Holy Place of a rebuilt Jewish Temple in Jerusalem and demanding worship.

Our interest is that Jesus said "the abomination" marks the mid-point of the Apocalypse. He went on to tell His disciples what would follow over the next three-and-one-half years.

"For **then** there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be... Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from Heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in Heaven..." (v21, 29 & 30).

When Jesus opens the sixth seal, we read about those catastrophic events in the heavens.

Rev 6:12 I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood.

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.

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.

John saw the awful, final judgments that precede the Second Coming of Jesus.

You'd think that all there was left to do was to open the seventh seal and rejoice at the Second Coming.

To John's (and our) surprise, the seventh seal is not the Second Coming.

When Jesus opens the seventh seal, seven trumpets are blown (8:6). The seventh trumpet is not the end. When the seventh trumpet is blown (11:15) seven bowls of God's wrath are poured out (15:1). When the seventh bowl is poured-out we read "A loud voice came out of the temple of Heaven, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" (16:17).

The sixth seal brings us to the end of the Great Tribulation, then the seventh seal flashes back to show us everything that leads up to the end.

You have probably read a book or watched a movie that starts by telling you what will happen at the end. Then it flashes back to explain how the end came about. The opening of *Ghandi* portrays his assassination and the world's reaction to his death. The whole film after that is a flash back of his life leading up to that end.

The Revelation timeline can be confusing because of the flash backs between the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls. Nevertheless it is sequential with a definite beginning, mid-point, and ending

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?"

Meteorites will be striking the earth like a hail storm. Colossal, unprecedented seismic catastrophes will collapse mountains and islands. There will be global atmospheric disturbances.

Instead of turning to the Lord in repentance and receiving the forgiveness of their sins, lost human beings will seek refuge in the rubble. They prefer being entombed on earth then to surrender to the Savior.

Thus begins the beginning of the new beginning.

Refuge in the rubble.
Think of all the places of refuge men prefer over Jesus on this ruined earth:

- There are the four "P's" - philosophy, psychology, politics, and pharmacology.
- There is the big "R" - religion.

A Christian therapist put it this way: "Any refuge that I create is something akin to a cardboard box in the rain. The harder the rain, the more boxes I go through."

Jesus is our refuge. He was dead but is now alive. He conquered Death and emptied Hades.

Your rest is *in* Him. Your rest *IS* Him.