

# REVELATION

Seeing, Knowing and Serving Jesus Christ  
Today at the Edge of History

Chapter 6; 8:1-5

## Text: Revelation 6; 8:1-5 - The 7 Seals & The Cry That Moves History

### The Seals

**6** I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, "Come!"<sup>2</sup> I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest.

<sup>3</sup> When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!"<sup>4</sup> Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other. To him was given a large sword.

<sup>5</sup> When the Lamb opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a black horse! Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand.<sup>6</sup> Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures, saying, "A quart of wheat for a day's wages, and three quarts of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!"

<sup>7</sup> When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!"<sup>8</sup> I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.

<sup>9</sup> When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained.<sup>10</sup> They called out in a loud voice, "How



Albrecht Durer: The Four Horseman of the Apocalypse, 1498

long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"<sup>11</sup> Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.

<sup>12</sup> I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red,<sup>13</sup> and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind.<sup>14</sup> The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.

<sup>15</sup> Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains.<sup>16</sup> They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!"<sup>17</sup> For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

### *The Seventh Seal and the Golden Censer*

**8** When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

<sup>2</sup> And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets.

<sup>3</sup> Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne.<sup>4</sup> The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand.<sup>5</sup> Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

*“The message is clear. History belongs to the intercessors who believe the future into being. Intercession is spiritual defiance of what is, in the name of what God has promised!”*  
- Walter Wink, Engaging the Powers

**Read & Reflect - 6:1-17; 8:1-5**

**First Reading/First Impression:** Which of these cries best captures your feelings as you read about the breaking of the seven seals?

- Come Lord Jesus! help us!    Fall on us, O mountains!    Hide me. O rocks!
- How long, O Lord, until You avenge our blood and bring justice?
- Hide me. O rocks!    Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Second Reading/The Big Idea:** If the breaking of the seven seals indicates the unveiling of The Almighty’s glorious plan for human history, why do you think bad things seem to happen each time? Does anything good happen? What?

**Search**

**Seals 1-4, verses 6:1-8** - a. The rider on the fourth horse is named “Death.” What names would you give to the other three riders? Why?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

b. What do each of the “four living creatures” cry out when the Lamb opens each of the first four seals? To whom are they speaking? (see Revelation 1:7 & 22:7, 12 & 20)

c. Where do these events of verses 1-8 take place?

**Seal 5, vv. 6:9-11** - a. Where do these events take place? Who is there? What might this vision mean to John and his suffering friends?

b. What do the martyrs under the altar in heaven pray? Why? What answer do they get? Why?

**Seal 6, vv. 12-17** - a. What are the elements described in this “cosmic breakdown” accompanying the sixth opening? What does it all seem to mean?

b. What do the “kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man” do? What do they ask for? Why?

c. What does this all-encompassing description of this group of people suggest about who will be in trouble as that 6th seal is opened?

vv. 8:1-5 - What immediately happens when the last seal is broken? Why? (see 8:3-4)

*The significance of this picture [in Rev. 6 & 8] can hardly be overestimated. No one was more aware than John of the limitations to what individual men and women can do to change the course of history and to bring in the Kingdom of heaven, particularly in the face of cosmic forces against them and the transcendent character of the Kingdom itself (none of us can raise the dead). But we can pray to him who has almighty power, and it would seem that God has willed that the prayer of his people should be part of the process by which the Kingdom comes. The interaction between the sovereignty of God and the prayers of the saints is part of the ultimate mystery of existence. Faith is called on to take both seriously.”*  
 G. Beasley-Murray, Revelation, p.151

### Apply

*“The Christian who prays acts more effectively and more decisively on society than the person who is politically involved, with all the sincerity of faith put into the involvement. It is not a matter of seeing them in opposition to one another, but of inverting our instinctive, cultural hierarchy of values.”*  
 - Jacques Ellul, Prayer and the Modern Man

1. Read the quote from G. Beasley-Murray above. What does this say to you about the importance of your own prayers?

2. If you truly believed that prayers like yours were in fact “the cries that move history,” for what would you pray today? [How about going ahead and praying for it...]



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**S u m m a r y . . .** Perhaps most noteworthy in this section is that as the Lamb opens each of the seals, there is prayer. A prayer, one like we might

pray, is the “cry that moves history!”

Verse 1 - **“Seven seals”**... the number of completeness and the mark of God’s ownership over unfolding history... **“Come”**... a cry that follows the opening of the first four seals and precedes the arrival of each of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse... Are the four living creatures calling for the Horsemen (symbolizing, perhaps, earthly misuse of power)? It seems better to hear these as cries for Christ to come (see vv. 1:7, 22:7, 22:12 & 22:20) which are interrupted by last

ditch efforts at destruction by forces opposed to Him... The fact that it is the **four living creatures** who call out and that there are four horsemen suggests that what follows are universal events with the created order...

v. 2 - **“white horse... bow”**... The image of the horses calls to mind a similar scene found in Zechariah 6:1-8. The rider of the white horse some see as Jesus, but it is more consistent with the rest of the chapter to see him as an agent of destruction. One of Rome’s greatest fears in this day was that their powerful neighbors to the east, the Parthians, would attempt an invasion and succeed. The bow was the characteristic weapon of mounted Parthian warriors for whom white was a sacred color.



**Gustav Dore (1832-1883):  
The Fourth Horseman**

**“given a crown”**... power is granted by God... each time what the rider possesses he is given (**sword, power**)... If we don’t want to do things God’s way, He will allow us to do them our way and reap what we sow... **“conqueror bent on conquest”**... the political sphere apart from Christ... vv. 3-4 - **“fiery red”**... this horse symbolizes war and bloodshed--the

military sphere without Jesus... vv. 5-6 - **“black horse... scales... w h e a t . . . barley... oil and wine”**... this horse brings famine and economic exploitation... the prices of basic necessities are greatly inflated... the poor can’t afford to buy food to eat, but the rich will maintain the quality of their luxuries--the economic sphere, ignoring the Lord, injustice...

vv. 7-8 - **“pale horse”**... the color of decaying flesh... There may be an intended and logical order to all this: When human politics goes bad. opposing God and His kingdom, it ends with militaries going bad. When politics and military go bad, economic exploitation is soon to follow. And when all this is happening, **Death** reaps a grim harvest from **sword, plague** and eventually even **wild beasts** taking advantage of the chaos...

**“over a fourth of the earth”**... a clue that God is still in control... Evil is restricted (a “fourth” may symbolize universal restriction!)

vv. 9-11 - **“fifth seal”**... here the scene shifts from earth to heaven... **“under the altar”**... in Israel’s sacrificial system the blood of slaughtered

animals was poured out under the altar... the deaths of the martyrs, those who have stood firm in their testimony to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, are given tremendous significance... They have not died in vain... **“How long...?”**... They cry for justice, in the presence of God and as a part of the significant activity of heaven... **“until the number... was completed”**... It was believed in John’s day that a certain fixed and finite amount of suffering must take place during a period of trial before the Messianic Age would begin (see esp. Paul’s words in Colossians 1:24 about filling up “what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions”)... John’s reference to this both gives meaning to their martyrdom and affirms God’s sovereignty...

vv.12-17- **“sixth seal”**... **“earthquake”** ... often a sign of God’s special presence and activity (Ex. 19:18; Isa. 2:19, Hag. 2:6)... **“moon turned blood red”**... see Joel 2:31 & Acts 2:20... **“stars... fell”**... sign preceding the return of Christ (Mk.13:25)... **“sky receded like a scroll”**... words from Isaiah concerning the judgment of the nations (Isa. 34:4)... **“Fall on us”**... from the **“kings of the earth”**... a prayer of despair--in the wrong direction (to the mountains and rocks, inanimate parts of creation!) and for the wrong thing (death, to be hidden from God and the Lamb). They absolutely don’t get it. They don’t know the Lamb and why He is “The Lamb”... **“who can stand?”**... This question will be answered in the coming interlude section (chapter 7, esp. v.9), but the earthbound kings won’t hear it...

vv. 8:1-5 - **“the seventh seal”**... the last seal opening serves as an introduction to the “seven trumpets” section which many see as a reworking of the same events as those described with the seven seals only from more of a heavenly perspective... **“silence in heaven”**... dramatic moment... Why? In order to hear the **“prayers of all the saints”** (THE CRY THAT MOVES HISTORY!)