**Notes on Revelation 6**

* Vv. 1-2
  + “And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. 2 And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.”
    - After the worship of the Lamb, He opens the first seal, for He is the only One worthy. One of the four beast around God’s throne says with a voice like thunder, “Come and see.” Can you picture all of heaven (John included) gathering around the scroll as Jesus opened the first section? What was God’s plan for the end of time? How would He fulfill all His promises? What John saw seems to be something like a living storybook—not just words on a page, but moving images that he could see with his eyes.
    - The scroll revealed to John a rider atop a white horse. Some have equated this individual with Jesus Christ since He is described as riding a white horse in Revelation 19. However, there are good reasons why I (and many others) disagree. First, the timing is wrong. The Bible clearly states that Jesus will return to this earth at the end of the tribulation/ Day of the LORD (Zechariah 14:1‑9, Daniel 9:27). Second, the victory described here in Revelation 4 is temporary. Both riding a white horse and wearing a *stephanos* (a victor’s crown) point to victory—but it’s not hard to see that this victory and peace are short-lived. War, famine, death, and martyrdom follow soon after it. When Jesus wins the victory, it will begin His 1000‑year reign on this earth (Rev. 20:1-7). Instead of pointing to Christ, most conservative Christians believe that this individual is Satan’s counterfeit—the Antichrist. The Bible does describe a counterfeit Christ. In Daniel 9:25, “Messiah the Prince” is promised, but in the very next verse, another “prince” is described. He is the opposite of the Messiah. This “prince” will destroy Jerusalem and the Temple. V. 27 describes this “prince” making a 7 year covenant with the Jewish people which will be broken after 3 and ½ years. Another example of this counterfeit Christ can be found in Zechariah 11. At the beginning of the chapter, Jesus is described as a Good Shepherd of the Jews. He fed and provided for them, yet they only valued Him at thirty pieces of silver. However, at the end of the chapter (vv. 15-17), a “foolish shepherd” is described. Instead of providing for the flock, this shepherd will neglect it and even try to destroy it. V. 17 describes him as “the idol shepherd.” Unlike the True Shepherd, this false shepherd of the Jews is destined to be destroyed. The third reason that I believe this rider isn’t Jesus is because the methods of this rider’s victory is different from Jesus’. The passage says that this individual has a bow. Yet, he does not have any arrows. He goes forth “conquering, and to conquer” without any weapon. Some have described this as “bloodless victory,” or victory through diplomacy. This matches what Daniel 9 says about the Antichrist. At least initially, he will advance himself through diplomacy. Compare that to Jesus’ victory described in Revelation 19. Rev. 19:11-21 says, “And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness **he doth judge and make war**. 12 His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. 13 And he was clothed with **a vesture dipped in blood**: and his name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. 15 And out of his mouth goeth **a sharp sword**, that with it he should **smite the nations:** and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and **he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God**. 16 And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King Of Kings, And Lord Of Lords. 17 And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; 18 That ye may **eat the flesh of kings**, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great. 19 And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, **and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse**, and against his army. 20 And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. 21 And **the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse**, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.” As you can see, Jesus’ victory comes as the result of His undeniable demonstration of power. He will tread out God’s wrath. Jesus will not win through diplomacy. He will crush all those who have chosen to oppose Him. Fourth, the crown on the top of the rider in Revelation 6 is described as a *stephanos* (a victor’s crown). On the other hand, the crowns on Jesus’ head in Revelation 19 are called *diadema* (a king’s crown). When you look at these four reasons together, I believe it’s clear that this rider in Revelation 6 isn’t Jesus. He is the Antichrist—the person who will commence the tribulation with promises of peace and harmony.
* Vv. 3-4
  + “And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see. 4 And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.”
    - As Jesus broke the second seal and unrolled the scroll further, John saw a red horse with a rider atop it. This represents war and bloodshed. Whatever peace that the Antichrist has established up until this point in the tribulation will be destroyed. War will break out across the world. From every corner of the globe, peace will be taken away. As you can see, this is a description of a world war. Although it’s not explicitly stated in this passage, it seems as if this world war will be greater than any which has come before it.
* Vv. 5-6
  + “And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. 6 And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.”
    - Another seal was broken, and John saw a black horse with a rider atop it. What follows is a description of famine and hyperinflation (the natural result of a devastating war). A “penny” refers to a denarius (a day’s wage in the first century). In the first century, a denarius would have purchased roughly ten quarts of wheat. However, after the world war during the tribulation, one day’s wage will only be able to purchase just under one quart of wheat. That’s about enough food for one person to have one good meal. Do you see the problem here? If one man has to work all day in order to provide one meal for himself, what will he do for his family? What will he do on the days he can’t work? Food will be scarce, and the value of currency will be significantly decreased. This will result in famine and death.
    - The final comment (“and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine”) has been interpreted countless different ways by different people. The idea of “hurt” is to damage. In other words, the instruction is “don’t damage the oil and the wine,”—but who is this instruction given to? Because the command is singular, we can conclude that this command is to one person. Since I can’t imagine that this is a command to one specific person on earth, it seems as though it is a command to the rider on the horse (the personification of famine itself). Therefore, this is a command to leave olive oil and wine unscathed during this famine (food will be damaged, but God will leave olive oil and wine unaffected). What could this mean? Although olive oil was used for numerous purposes in the first century, the context of this passage is food/lack of food. Therefore, it seems logical that its use in cooking is in view. Both olive oil and wine were closely associated with meals in the first century. However, they were both nonessential items (a luxury rather than a necessity). They were almost always present for meals, yet they did not provide any substance themselves. To me, this seems significant. How ironic would it be to have the trappings of an excellent meal, but without any real substance to go with them? Other interpretations of this command are certainly possible, but this seems to be the most likely one to me—that God will destroy their food, yet leave behind the trimmings of “the good old days” before His judgment arrived.
* Vv. 7-8
  + “And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see. 8 And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.”
    - Once Jesus opened the fourth seal, John saw a pale horse. The word translated as “pale” describes a sickening green color. Probably the best illustration of this color is our fictional zombies. They are almost always portrayed with this washed-out green color. Atop the pale horse sat the personification of death. John said that Hell followed behind Death. God gave them the power to take ¼ of the earth’s population through war, starvation, and wild animals.
    - To put this percentage into perspective, let’s reflect on World War II. It is considered to be the most deadly war in human history. Over six years, roughly 75 million people died (including civilians). Considering the fact that there were roughly 2.3 billion people alive at the time, that means that WWII was responsible for the death of about 3% of the world’s population at the time. The amount of death and destruction during this one portion of the tribulation will be more than eight times deadlier than WWII.
    - To use a more modern comparison, COVID has killed about 0.06 % of the world’s population (as of November 2021). Roughly 5 million people have died from COVID. If the “pale horse” was released in today’s world, about 1.9 billion people would die. That death toll is nearly 400 times worse than COVID. Death and destruction on this scale is simply beyond our comprehension—and this is just the beginning.
    - Since God gives *both* Death *and* Hell power over one fourth of the world’s population, it seems to me that those who are saved after the rapture of the church will somehow be exempted from this judgement. How could God give Hell power over anyone who has placed their faith in Him? I don’t want to push the words of this passage further than the point they are there to make, but it does seem to me that tribulations saints (those who are saved after the church has been raptured) will not be part of the ¼ that dies as a result of this judgment.
* Vv. 9-11
  + “And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: 10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? 11 And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.”
    - Just because I believe that tribulation saints will be exempted from the judgement of the “pale horse” (death *and* eternal damnation by means of war, starvation, or wild animals) doesn’t mean that I believe they will be unscathed during this time. Many will die. However, their deaths will not come at the hand of God.
    - As Jesus opened the fifth seal of the scroll, John saw the evidence of unprecedented persecution. The souls of martyred saints were at the foot of the altar of God. The significance of this position is probably the fact that they were beseeching God for something (an activity associated with the altar). They begged God to avenge their deaths. It’s important to understand that this cry wasn’t a hateful call for revenge. It was a plea for God to do what was right and just. They appealed to God’s holiness, truth, and justice. In response to their plea, God gave them white robes (a symbol of their righteousness in Christ) and assured them that justice would be administered at the proper time.
    - There are several facts that this short sections reveals to us. First, the people on earth will fully deserve the judgements described previously. When we read of ¼ of the world’s population dying from war, starvation, and wild animals, that judgement may seem overly harsh—but this section shows the justification for such a punishment. The people on the earth during the tribulation will hunt believers like wild animals. It will be their goal to destroy every memory of Jesus from the face of the earth. Revelation 20:4 reveals that the common mode of execution will be beheading. The word itself describes cleaving a person’s head off with an axe. I include this grisly detail simply to make the point—God’s heavy judgement of the people on earth will be justified.
    - Second, this sections gives us a glimpse into the afterlife. Some have imagined souls to be disembodied spirits (without any physical body). However, this passage clearly describes souls as having the ability to wear robes. They have a physical body, even before the resurrection of their physical body (Rev. 20:4). Also, they remember their life on earth. These martyrs beseech God to administer justice on the ones who killed them. In other words, they know who killed them and the circumstances of their own death. Some have suggested that, once we pass on, we won’t remember our life on earth. Biblically speaking, that simply isn’t true.
    - If you want to learn a little bit more about these martyrs, you can flip over to the next chapter. Vv. 9-17 describe them and the special care that Jesus will provide for them once they arrive “out of great tribulation.” He “shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”
* Vv. 12-17
  + “And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; 13 And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. 14 And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. 15 And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; 16 And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: 17 For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?”
    - Once Jesus broke the sixth seal, John saw unprecedented natural disasters. This has been described as “the most dramatic judgement thus far,” (Walvoord, BKC on Rev. 6:12-14). This doesn’t mean that this judgement will necessarily result in the most deaths, but that it will be the most vivid demonstration of supernatural judgment so far. Up until this point, excessive war, famine, and hyperinflation will have taken place. Whether the people of the world will have recognized God’s divine hand at work is unclear. However, what follows will be unmistakably recognized as divine judgment. A worldwide earthquake will occur. “Every mountain and island” will be affected by it. John describes something that looked like stars falling from the sky. The most likely interpretation of this is asteroids breaking through our atmosphere and striking the earth. You can easily imagine the result of such catastrophic events. Billows of dust and debris will roll across the sky. John describes the sky disappearing “as a scroll when it is rolled together.” During the day, the light of the sun will appear as if it is being filtered through a coarse, black cloth. At night, the debris will cause the color of the moon to resemble blood (a deep, red color). During this sixth seal, the earth will see natural disasters as they have never seen before—and they will know Who is responsible for them.
    - Vv. 15-17 tells us that every person on earth will recognize that God is behind these judgements. They will recognize that Jesus in particular is the One judging them. But instead of repenting of their wickedness and accepting the sacrifice of the Lamb, they will try to hide from Him. They want nothing to do with Him. They would rather die than to come face to face with Him.